Dancing With Maple Leaves: Labour Market Experience of Immigrant Women Professionals

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
Department of Adult Education and Counseling Psychology
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

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Abstract

This study presents an account of experiences of recent immigrant women professionals in negotiating labour market opportunities after arriving in Canada. The purpose of this research is to bring in immigrant women’s perspectives on immigration and employment study. Six immigrant women professionals from different cultural backgrounds were interviewed within the framework of qualitative research. Informed by feminist theories, this study intended to make women’s experience in post-arrival integration and settlement more visible and prominent. Research findings indicate both labour market and household factors contributed to shape the labour market experience of immigrant women professionals of recent years. Their experiences reveal the complicated social relations of their doubly burdened and triply oppressed location.
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1.1 Background

With Canada’s shifted focus on skilled immigrants in its immigration, the education level of immigrants became an important aspect of evaluation for immigration under the classification of the economic class.¹ Throughout the 1990s, there was an increased flow of skilled workers into Canada (Statistics Canada, 2001), which demonstrates Canada’s determination to recruit skilled workers to benefit its economic development. When the new Canadian Immigration and Refugee Act of 2002 replaced the Immigration Act of 1976, this emphasis on skilled immigrants has been further strengthened. Based on the new points system², people with higher education are more likely to have the opportunity to immigrate to Canada as skilled workers. As the instructions for intended applicants to immigrate to Canada on the Citizenship and Immigration Canada website (www.cic.gc.ca) indicate, among the six selection criteria, education ranks first with the maximum marks of 25 points out of a total of 100 points, while language and work experiences respectively are given 24 and 21 points. The fact that such a large number of points are given for education in the immigration evaluation indicates that it is easier for prospective immigrants with university degrees to immigrate to Canada. According to Statistics Canada (2003), 87% of skilled immigrants aged 25 to 44 have a university degree compared with 25% of all Canadians in that age group (p, 8). Even in the 1990s, Canada could boast of having the most highly

¹ Canadian immigration is classified into three categories: family class (for sponsored spouse, children and relatives), economic class (for skilled workers) and humanitarian immigration (for refugees).
² The points system was first introduced in 1967 to evaluate skilled migrants to Canada. Immigration was seen by the policy makers as an economic policy tool rather than a population expansion policy.
educated labour force in the world, as the study of CERIS\(^3\) (1999b) on the changing labour market in Canada indicates that by 1995, 46% of men and 48% of women in the labor force had a post-secondary certificate/diploma or a university degree.

However, the Canadian labour market seems not quite ready to absorb all those immigrant professionals who benefited from the points system to come into Canada as skilled workers. Ironically, a great number of skilled immigrants with impressive education and skills find after arrival that their credentials are not recognized, their foreign work experience does not count and their English is seen as not good enough to find a job. They find they lack what the Canadian employers are looking for, that is, Canadian degrees and Canadian work experience. For some people in the regulated professions (e.g. law, medicine, teaching…), it is even harder to re-certify in their professions, as some of those professions require Canadian re-training. Then, all of a sudden, sad stories about the employment status and living condition of recent immigrant professionals were heard in the news.

On October 9, 2004, *The Toronto Star* reported that an immigrant couple from Colombia wanted to sue the federal government of Canada, as they found that “their move to Canada was a disaster” (Thompson, p. L11). Having spent almost all their money and not being able to find a decent job, the engineering couple, Claudia Quiroga and Leo Ospina, felt frustrated and disillusioned, they could not understand why the Canadian labour market did not embrace their years of experience and qualifications. With “a degree in industrial engineering, two graduate degrees, 15 years of managerial

\(^3\) Joint Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement (at University of Toronto).
experience and a working knowledge of four languages,” the husband only managed to find “a low-wage job doing customer service for a software company” after ten-month stay in Canada. The Star reporter, Allan Thompson, comments, “theirs is a cautionary tale and one Canadians should hear about because so many immigrants find themselves in the same boat” (ibid.). It is true that many skilled immigrants are facing the same kind of predicament when trying to re-enter their professions in Canada.

Earlier in the same year, the London Free Press (January 17, 2004) reported about a medical doctor, Mohommed Farhad Bayat, driving a cab on the street of London. The reporter Jennifer O’Brien points out, Bayat’s is also not a single case, as “hundreds of professionals like Bayat” are driving London's streets, “hundreds more deliver pizza. More clean buildings” (ibid.). The employment status of those hundreds of immigrants who were not working in their professions has been reported in an early survey conducted by Statistics Canada (2003), which shows that immigrants aged 25-44 (working age) have a 30 percentage points lower employment rate than the Canadians of the same age range 26 weeks after their arrival, and 23 percentage points lower than the national rate at 52 weeks after arrival. The survey also indicates that 58% of immigrant professionals did not find employment in their intended occupation (Statistics Canada, 2003).

There is a widespread warning from communities and media about the general condition of immigrant professionals as master’s degree holders got to drive cabs and Ph.D. holders might be working in restaurants. The impact of this dire situation of unemployment or underemployment of skilled immigrants is enormous, as it does not
only affect the application number of new immigrants, it also impacts on the landed immigrants’ decisions on future plan. Many landed immigrants left Canada to go back to their home country, or went down to United States where the employment opportunities are believed to be bigger. Therefore, the whole immigrant business became a time wasting and less beneficial endeavor. Canada managed to attract a lot of skilled immigrants with its open policy of immigration and its reputation as the most suitable place for human living; however, it has failed in keeping all of those skilled people. As a matter of fact, the unemployment and underemployment status of skilled immigrants not only impacts on the economy of the host country, it also costs Canada its great image as a country for immigrants.

Criticism has come from all levels of the society. When referring to the phenomenon of “skilled immigrants spending years of doing dead-end jobs,” Naeem "Nick" Noorani, the Publisher of Canada Immigrant Magazine, comments, “immigrants are in fact penalized for migrating to Canada"(2007, April 1). The immigration penalty is seen in the form of devaluation of foreign credentials, discrimination based on lack of Canadian experience, and the exclusion from proper jobs. Mary Janigan, a columnist with Maclean's, regards keeping skilled immigrants from working in their profession “a scandalous waste” (Maclean's, 2003, July 21). CTV Forums⁴ - W-Five reporter, Marleen Trotter (2005, November 21), accuses the Canadian government responsible for its “broken promises” made to hundreds and thousands skilled immigrants. Some others even accuse the “points system” as the root of the problem, as remarked by Noorani

⁴ Online news programs of CTV, a Canadian television network.
(2007, April 1), “How can you give a doctor more points to migrate when his chances of being able to practice medicine here is about the same as winning the Lotto 6/49?”

Therefore, the employment status of immigrant professionals has become a big issue of concern, not only to the government, but also to the public. Investigation on the difficulties new immigrants are facing in finding a suitable job has taken place in different forms (government survey, academic research and community discussion) and has involved different levels of government. For the government, the focus is on policy study and providing resolution and strategies through enhancing intervention programs, like the language programs (ESL, LINC) ⁵ and employment training programs. Among immigrants themselves, reflection on immigration decisions and directions are concurrently emerging topics and discussions, as seen on newspapers and TV. For scholars and researchers, the urgency is to study what contributes to the barriers to employment for immigrant professionals.

However, there is very limited scholarship that focuses specifically on immigrant women professionals’ responses towards such employment difficulties. Immigrant women professionals’ perception and interpretations of the barriers they encountered in their workplace relocation has not been made visible. For this reason, my research is geared towards investigating how immigrant women professionals are located within the big context of underemployment and unemployment of immigrant professionals in Canada. There are two other rationales behind my research choice: my own experience

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⁵ ESL (English as Second Language) and LINC (Language Instruction for Newcomers) are language programs funded by the Government of Canada, in collaboration with local school boards, community colleges, and immigrant and community organizations in offering English language training across Canada.
as an immigrant woman, which gives me an insider location in this research; and my special concern about how women’s roles in the family might impact on their labour market integration after immigration. For example, how do women’s family responsibilities impact on their employment in a changed context, or how do the women’s gender roles in the family affect their employment category? According to Statistics Canada 2003 survey, compared to the principal male applicants (of whom 90% found employment during the initial two-year period), only 78% immigrants in the family category (mainly women) found employment (Statistics Canada, 2003).

Therefore, this study looks into immigrant women professionals’ responses towards the requirements and difficulties of Canadian labour market. It is their interpretation and conceptualization of those difficulties and their responses towards the predicament situations that are of great importance and worth of investigation. So it is not the focus of this study to simply discover what are the barriers to employment, but rather how those barriers are viewed, conceptualized and responded to by some immigrant women professionals. The purpose of this research is then to bring in the views and perspectives of immigrant women into the study of immigration and employment.

1.2. Personal Perspective

My own long journey of professional relocation and my experience of job search

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6 This percentage only indicates employment found, not the status of employment; therefore, it does not indicate part-time or contract positions, which are important features to look into as most immigrants can only work in those insecure and low income jobs.
are worth mentioning here, as this inquiry was also impelled by my own reflection on my own life as an immigrant woman, experiencing hardship of professional re-entry in Canada.

Leaving behind a past of seven years university teaching and seven years academic research, I came to Canada as a landed immigrant in 2000 with my husband and an eight-year old daughter. My husband was the principal applicant as he has an engineering degree. As an English and Comparative Literature graduate, I could not apply for immigration as the principal applicant as my profession was not on the CIC (Citizenship and Immigration Canada) list of the sought professions.

Our immigration decision was based mostly on our hope to provide our daughter a better education and living environment, as we were not satisfied with the heavy political orientation of Chinese education. Before leaving China, finding a job was never a big concern for us. Our anticipation of Canadian life was colored by the almost romantic perception of living in the West: the big and spacious land, peaceful society, strong sense of security and excellent educational system for the children. The reality of immigrant life never came into our mind even though there was certain concern about how we were going to start in a strange land. Therefore, our preparation for coming to Canada was more towards considering what to bring, for example, type of clothes and other needed living items, rather than how to find a suitable job as there was really not much information about job search or employment available. What we could get a hold of were those fiction books about immigrants’ life in Canada. In those books, the hardship of immigration life in Canada is depicted more as a result of being away from
one’s culture or land rather than unemployment or underemployment. Difficulties were conceptual at that stage; they were not real and tangible.

The reality was a big shock. As soon as we landed, we started to realize how difficult it was to find a suitable job. Relatives and friends informed us about the impossibility of working in our fields. The strongest message we got was we should take any job that was available. Informed with that type of direction, my husband directly went to work in a supermarket; he was totally convinced that his English ability and geophysical engineering background could not lead him to a professional job. He even did not try to send one resume out or thought about options. The raison d'etre was: if you know that you are going to fail why do you waste your time and money. I was more persistent, as it was too hard for me to give up. I believed that my Ph.D. from the British education system would help. Though I also did not see any hope of finding a job right away, I persisted in believing I should have ended better than my husband as I have better English and higher degree, plus I understand western culture and had previous experience living in the West.

My first job proved to be a disaster and it only lasted one week. It was a job that I found on a local Chinese newspaper. I could not keep the job, not because I did not like the pay- 10 dollars per hour for an editing and translation job, but because I could not function in that kind of work environment. Besides sitting in front of the computer for an entire day, it was also really hard to work for a small private business, totally different from my previous workplace setting that encourages intellectual stimulation. Then, it took me quite a while to go back into job search. I attended a four-week
government funded job search program and started to understand the complex process of job search in Canada. Through this program, I got a contact name to call, and then started my long journey of professional relocation. I started off as a part-time English tutor at a community college only due to the kindness of that sympathetic director towards a foreign trained Ph.D. However, it was also the start of a long journey of frustration. Getting paid $13 per hour for less than 24 hours per week was hard to make a living, but it had to be part of the necessary process to prove myself and make contacts. I had to start from the simplest entry-jobs, to act as the front-desk person. After the birth of my second daughter, I had to restart again from the front-desk, got paid only a little more than ten dollars. At one time I had to question myself whether I have the skills or qualifications to work for a better position. Those contract and part-time jobs lasted for almost seven years before I finally landed on a full-time job with the College. As there was no job stability and all jobs were contract ones, the seven years was really a long and stressful period for me.

Besides the common difficulties that immigrant professionals are experiencing, I found myself also going through other difficulties. First, as the spouse of a skilled immigrant, I did not have my skills or qualifications assessed before immigration. That means my skills, experience and qualifications were not evaluated according to the need of a Canadian labour market. Therefore, my former training and degrees were not doing me any good. I found I do not have a useful major, a speciality. I was an English teacher, but it would really be a laugh to a lot of people to know somebody with accent would like to teach English in an English speaking country; it is a kind of embarrassment even
to mention my previous profession. I did get certain kind of mocking tone from people when that piece of information was released. Therefore, I gradually developed reluctance towards talking about my former qualifications and degrees that I was once proud of. I devaluated my own foreign credentials as I could easily tell the doubts in people’s eyes when they were told that I have a Ph.D. from an English speaking university. If I say I have experience and skills, they would ask where those experience and skills happened. For example, they would ask, “where did you get your degree?” Obviously, there is much less credibility if the degree was obtained outside Canada.

Secondly, there are a lot of doubts among the public regarding new immigrants’ ability to function well at the workplace. English language of immigrants is usually considered as not good enough due to the accent. If I was praised for my “good” English in Britain, I could not have the same luck in Canada as people define good English as one that is free of accent. Thirdly, my role as wife and mother compelled me to take time away from pursuing my career. I quit my first part-time job with the college in order to give birth to my younger daughter, and had to stay at home for one year and half to take care of my baby daughter, as I could not afford daycare and babysitter as a new immigrant. As there was no existing family support system (help from relatives or seniors in the family), I realized I had to cope with all the household responsibilities and was forced to focus on family responsibilities first during the first few years.

This research was also compelled by my experience working with internationally trained professionals. While I was working as a part-time employment consultant, I came across a lot of immigrant professionals and witnessed their hardship and struggle
in finding a suitable job. Those women who came into Canada with a professional background (I use “professional” to refer to those who have a higher education or university degree) especially drew my attention. As a common phenomenon, many immigrant women professionals are having difficulties in finding employment in their professional fields. Many of them share the experience of lowering their career expectation, having to start with all sorts of jobs that are available to them, and accepting jobs that do not require professional training or experience. Some of them have to change career or re-enter post-secondary education to make things happen.

Listening to their stories, I also found there are other aspects that have not been paid attention to by previous research and studies. Their interpretation and understanding of their predicament might differ from the public interpretation. This is also my motivation to do a research to see what is really happening in those women’s lives.

Therefore, this study was prompted by my reflection on my own experience as an immigrant woman professional in Canada and my concern and observation of the experiences of those immigrant women professionals with whom I came into contact on job or in training/study programs. As a way of self-reflection and academic inquiry, I chose to look at immigrant women professionals’ experiences and lives in terms of the strategies employed to negotiate employment opportunities. I see employment as a central location where integration, social relations and identity intermingle and where immigrant women professionals’ experiences become most explicit.
1.3. Research Questions

The difficulties that immigrant women professionals encountered in their efforts to reenter into their professions in Canada have been identified by a lot of researchers and scholars (Boyd, 1984; Fong, 1999; Man, 2004; Mojab, 1999; Preston & Man, 1999). Their reentry attempts were usually blocked by their lack of Canadian experience, insufficient language ability and the absence of a local education (Li, 2001; Preston & Man, 1999; Preston & Murnaghan, 2005, Wanner & Ambrose, 2003). Barriers to employment for immigrant women professionals have also been identified as the result of institutional restraints, such as the devaluation of foreign credentials and certifications (Basran, & Zong, 1998; Li, 2001). Racial discrimination is regarded as another important factor that impacts on the employment of immigrant women, especially minority immigrant women, in forms of access to employment, occupational distribution and payment (Boyd, 1984; Henry & Ginzberg, 1984; James, et al. 1999; Ng, 1987,1998; Wanner and Amrose, 2003). Women’s gender-specific roles in family and in society are also what constraint them from pursuing professional goals (Man, 1997, 2004; Ng, 1982, 1999; Preston, Tastsoglou & Ray, 2005; Salaff & Greve, 2003). Immigrant women professionals are experiencing a general hardship after immigrating to Canada, and meanwhile they also need to cope with gender-specific predicament. It is a common knowledge that immigrant professionals need to go through all kinds of acculturation, adjustment and change in order to find a suitable job. As women’s roles in the family usually change with their immigration, their efforts to overcome employment barriers might be very different from their male counterparts, as besides the need to deal
with the common obstacles, immigrant women have to deal with their gender-specific barriers (Pessar, 1999; Preston & Tastsoglou, 2005).

However, few scholars have looked into this aspect in depth and limited studies have considered immigrant women professionals’ reaction towards employment hindrances (except a couple of studies on women’s failure or success to adopt to a new life in Canada)(Matsuoka & Sorenson, 1999; Mohamed, 1999). This study, then, fills this research gap. It is the focus of this study to investigate the responses of immigrant women professionals towards the requirements of a Canadian labour market during the process of their social and economic status shift.

Underlining the process of adjustment, this research will investigate four main questions: How did immigrant women professionals envision Canada in terms of employment opportunities before immigration? What were their experiences in the Canadian labour market? What were their strategies to initiate change, adjustment or opportunities? How were their strategies shaped by their responsibilities within the family? While exploring the barriers to employment, this study centers on immigrant women professionals’ explanation and responses towards those barriers. Two important aspects of their responses will be addressed: first, what has propelled them to make certain choices in dealing with employment barriers; and to what extent were these choices affected by their gender roles? The major aim of this study is to provide a better understanding of the constraints immigrant women professionals are facing.

I wanted to extend my inquiry beyond ethnic boundaries to include immigrant women of different origins and backgrounds in order to see a bigger picture of what was
I wanted to look at immigrant women’s labour market experience in Canada, and to understand how their experiences were influenced by gender, ethnicity and class, and in what way they were regulated around the rules and norms that immigrants need to follow to be accepted or integrated. My research goal is rather exploratory than definitive, as I believe my research findings will lead to new areas of research interests and directions on immigrant women and employment.

1.4. Overview of Chapters

This thesis is divided into two parts and seven chapters. Part I is about research design and methodology. Part II focuses on research findings and discussions.

Chapter 1 has provided the context and background information of this research. It traced where my research idea came from and explains what my study rationales are. Chapter 2 analyzes the existing literature in relation to the topic of immigrant women professionals and employment. Chapter 3 explains the methods involved in conducting this research and my use of in-depth interview in generating the data.

Chapter 4 provides a profile of the six immigrant women professionals in terms of their education level before immigration, work experience, reasons of immigration and post-arrival experience.

Chapter 5 discusses the research findings of how the six immigrant women professionals responded to the requirements to locate a professional job in Canada and what their responses imply. The discussion is divided into two parts. In the first part, the
hurdles that impeded the six immigrant women professionals from getting a suitable job commensurate with their former training and experience are examined. In the second part, the responses of the six immigrant women towards those barriers to employment are analyzed. Chapter 6 investigates how immigrant women’s responses towards the demand to survive and to find a job were mediated by their gendered roles as wife or mother in the family. Their social location in the Canadian society and their position in the family were contributing factors that led to some of their career decision.

In conclusion I argue that although most research attention on immigrant women professionals has been directed towards the employment aspect of immigrant women’s settlement and integration, my research findings indicate that many non-labour market factors affect immigrant women’s career decision and life expectation, and employment is the beginning rather than the end of their integration and settlement.
Chapter 2   Literature Review

“Immigration research has traditionally focused on men” (Hondagneu-sotelo, 1999, p. 565). In the Canadian context, for example, there were few studies that have taken immigrant women into serious consideration before the 1980s although women came into Canada as immigrants since the early years of Canadian immigration (Boyd & Vickers, 2000, p. 2). The neglect of female experience in the study and research on immigration is referred by scholars and researchers in the Canadian academy as a serious omission (Boyd, 1986; Preston, et al. 2005; Wanner & Ambrose, 2003). Monica Boyd defines this overlooking of female experience as “an intellectual problem” (1986, p.45), while Preston, Tastsoglou and Ray believe that research that does not recognize differences of women’s experience in immigration from men are “fundamentally flawed” as it leads to fragmented understanding of migration and settlement (Preston et al, 2005, p.91). Caroline Brettell and Rita Simon in their study of international migration point out the limitation of leaving women out of theoretical thinking about migration (1986), which has led to the inadequate treatment of immigrant women’s experience in migration study; for example, women were either “invisible” or “stereotyped” (Boyd, 1986; Brettell & Simon; Preston, et al. 2005). As a consequence, there was either not enough representation of women’s experience (Wanner & Ambrose, 2003, p.357), or if women have ever been taken into consideration, they were not

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7 This is not only a Canadian but also a worldwide phenomenon, as Pamela Sharpe points out that only until “mid-1980s the circumstances of female migration were little discussed by anthropologists, sociologists or policy makers” (c2001). In the Canadian context, Roxana Ng’s study of the garment workers in the early 1980s marked the start of taking immigrant women seriously into academic research.
treated as migrants or immigrants, they were considered as dependents on male immigrants, and their roles as wage earners were excluded (Boyd, 1986, p.45). Therefore, women’s role in the immigration process has been regarded as less important than men. This resulted in what Mirjana Morokvasic calls the treatment of female experiences as economically unproductive (1983, p.13). This intellectual problem was a result of treating migrants as male, whose capability to migrate and move for economic advantages stabilized their roles within the family and decided their relation to women (Pessar, 1999, p.578).

Since the 1980s, there was a call for treating immigrant women as gendered subjects in immigration study (Boyd, 1986; Ng, 1982; Preston, et al. 2005; Wanner & Ambrose, 2003). There are traceable efforts among contemporary researchers and scholars to take immigrant women into research consideration and use gender as an analytical tool to examine immigration experiences of men and women. The emergence of “feminist consciousness” has promoted such an approach (Brettell, 1986, p.5). As the personal became political, the “microscopic” approach of gender analysis of female experience became “macroscopic” (ibid. at 4). As Brettell puts it: “it becomes apparent that gender is indeed a valid category for analysis, although one among many” (ibid.). Preston et al. believe that the research on immigrants should “take into account gender and immigrant women’s experience,” because “migration, settlement, and integration processes are dynamic and highly differentiated between groups and deeply gendered” (2005, p. 91, 94).

In the Canadian context, Roxana Ng pioneered in bringing on immigrant women
as an analytical category in immigration research. As one of the earliest researchers of immigrant women in the Canadian academy, she helped promote giving women full representation in immigration study and making immigrant women a great research topic. Ng’s study on immigrant women (especially, garment workers) in Canada has revealed the complicated social and labour market relations immigrant women become involved after immigration, and has given women’s doubled burden as paid and unpaid workers full representation (1980, 1982, 1987, 1998, 1999).

Recent research on immigrant women has shown a shift of focus from refugee women and non-skilled female workers to the highly professional group (Boyd, 2002; Fong, 1999; Lee, 1999; Mojab, 1999; Preston & Man, 1999; Salaff & Greve, 2003; Wanner. & Ambrose, 2003). Another shift of focus was found on minority immigrant women’s experiences, as shown by Han (2007), Preston and Man (1999), Salaff (2003) and Shan’s (2005) study on Chinese women, James, Plaza and Jansen (1999), Matsuoka and Sorenson (1999), and Mohamed’s (1999) study on immigrant women of African origin and Khan’s (2005) study of south Asian immigrant women.

The call for contextualizing immigrant women research was found with Boyd (1986) and Preston and Murnaghan (2005). There are a lot of reasons for this contextualization. The existing studies on European immigration are dealing with a different social, political and economic context. Even the American studies on immigration are dealing with varied social relations (Boyd, 1989). Immigrant women’s experience differs within those different socioeconomic locations, as Preston and Murnaghan argue, “The exclusion and marginalization that visible minority immigrants
experiencing in Canada should be studied in respect to a unique Canadian social and political context” (2005, p.74). This advocating has really encouraged more serious and profound scholarship in the immigration and anti-discrimination study that respects the social, political and historical context. The suggestion for paying attention to the specific features of Canadian settlement and the changing challenges and circumstances that immigrants are facing is a valuable reference to my study.

2.1. Immigrant Women: A Canadian Labour Market Phenomenon

Most immigrant women need to work after their arrival in Canada due to the need of making ends meet (Man, 1999, Salaff & Greve, 2003). As an earlier study indicates, immigrant women have a higher ratio of labour market participation than their Canadian counterparts (Arnopoulos, 1979). Several immigration changes helped shape the characteristics of the female immigrant work force.

According to Boyd, gender ratio shift in immigration is one of the biggest changes that resulted from immigration policy change in the late 1970s (Boyd, 1992b). As family immigration increased, the huge contrast between male and female immigrants has been reduced to a more even and balanced gender ratio; women even came to represent more than half of the immigrants (Statistic Canada, 2001). This change has contributed to the emergence of a female immigrant work force in Canada. Not only did women compose half or even more than half of the immigrant population these days, their participation in the labour force is a public phenomenon (Boyd & Vickers, 2000; Wanner & Ambrose, 2003). The significance of this
participation lies in the number of immigrant women involved. According to Arnopoulos, even early in the 1970s, nearly half of married immigrant women work compared to one third of married Canadian women (1979, p.1). The greater ratio of immigrant women’s labour market participation might indicate the greater pressure for survival that immigrant women face compared with their Canadian counterparts, it might also suggest the doubly burdened roles of immigrant women in a new social context.

Canada’s shift from agricultural to knowledge-based economy has impacted on the government’s changed recruitment of immigrant labour, from non-skilled and semi-skilled immigrants to more skilled-immigrants who are believed to benefit the hosting country (Statistics Canada, 2001). Although family immigration is still the main form that helps bring women into Canada, the introduction of points system (Immigration Act, 1976-77) has also contributed to certain number of female immigrant professionals to Canada. Women immigrants might not only be composed of housewives or dependents of male immigrants; they might also be skilled professionals.

There was one more noticeable shift in immigration to Canada that has affected the composition of immigrant women. Since the 1960s, a greater ratio of immigrants came from Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean rather than from the traditional source countries as UK and US (Badets, 1994; Boyd, 2000; Wanner & Ambrose, 2003). As Boyd indicates, around 7 in 10 visible minorities are immigrants (Boyd, 2000, p.9). This change in sending countries brought more
immigrant women from the third world or developing countries into Canada and thus changed the demographic composition of the immigrant work force. This change is profound, as it has brought about changes in social relations and labour market relations.

2.2. Immigrant Women Reconsidered

With the change of immigrant compositions in recent years, feminist scholars and researchers have redefined the category of “immigrant women” to denote its social and economic connotation in relation to class, race and gender.

Literally, the term “immigrant women” refers to women who engage in the migrating process from their land of birth or country of origin to a new land or country to restart their life. While this new place usually becomes their permanent home, it might be socially, politically and culturally different. However, the process of migration alone does not necessarily define the category of immigrant women, since as Ng argues, the concept of “immigrant women” is a socially constructed category denoting social and labour market relations (1999b, p.16). As the connotation of immigrant women has changed over the time, it also indicates other categorization in the Canadian context. The contemporary implication of this term is much loaded with racialization and ethnical classification. Who are considered as immigrant women in the Canadian context depends a lot on some other social categories such as race and class (Ng, 1999; Preston & Man, 1999). As Ng points out, in the reality of social life, a white, educated, English-speaking woman might not be
considered as an immigrant woman although she did migrate from other part of the world into Canada (1999b, 16). Sherene Razack has also observed that for some groups of immigrants, the identity of “immigrant” defines ethnic boundaries. Despite the years they spent in the hosting country, for example United States or Canada, and their citizenship, some groups of immigrants will continually be regarded as immigrant (1995, p.68). This immigrant identity implies more exclusion than inclusion. “Immigrant” in this sense denotes racial differences, foreignness and not belonging (ibid.). The category of immigrant women, then, includes the process of racialization, which is an inevitable process for immigrants to encounter in their everyday experience, as W. Omi and H. Winant remark “at the level of experience, of everyday life, race is an almost indissoluble part of our identities” (Omi and Winant, 1993, p. 5). Women then became immigrant women after they encountered the process of identification by others and came into contact with the labour market (Ng, 1999b, p.16).

Recent immigrant women professionals fit into this socially constructed definition of immigrant women as most of them came from third world countries and speak English with accent. Their higher education background and former social status did not necessarily entitle them a better class status after immigration. As Preston and Man have pointed out, despite the human capital that those immigrant women brought into Canada, they still experience the triple burden inflicted by their immigrant, gender and visible minority status (1999, p.117). Therefore, immigrant women’s gender and race location determines their class status, as also put
by Ng, “the construction of immigrant women as a labour market category shows, gender and ethnicity/race are essential constituents in the organization of people’s class location” (1999, p.10).

This recognition of immigrant women as a social construct acknowledges the socioeconomic location of immigrant women in relation to gender, race and class. Migrating into Canada then is not a simple transfer of geographic location that is only marked by the change of weather and landscape; it rather implies entering into a new set of social relations and encountering new challenges. Therefore, how the identification by others impact on immigrant women’s re-entry efforts into the labour market should be worth of consideration. For immigrant women professionals, for example, what are recognized and what are not recognized, by whom and why, are questions that they have to deal with after their arrival in Canada.

2.3. The Oddity of the Canadian Labour Market

The discussion of immigrant women’s participation in the Canadian labour market requires an exploration of the social, economic and political changes that were taking place at the same time. Globalization and economic transition are important factors that have influenced the female immigrant work force, especially in terms of occupational attainment and labour market participation (Lee, 1999; Man 2004; Ng, 1998). In her study on how the restructuring of the garment industry led to the massive displacement of workers and manufacturers, Ng highlights the link between globalization and the forms of labour market participation of immigrant
women. Immigrant women were no longer getting full-time and stable jobs with benefits; instead they were forced to take limited jobs such as contract jobs, piecework, part-time jobs and seasonal jobs without any benefits or union protection (Ng, 1999a). Those garment homeworkers were composed mostly of minority women. They had to suffer low wage, long hour, stress and health problems. Thus, Ng has argued that globalization has “differential and differentiating effects on groups of people by virtue of their gender, race, and class locations in society” (1998, p. 24). Ng’s most astonishing discovery on how “globalization has created third world enclaves within the geographic boundaries of the first world” (ibid. at 28) illustrates the impact that a globalized economy may have on immigrant women’s labour market participation and how women would face oppression in their hosting country where they migrated for a better life. Obviously, immigrant women’s chance to enter the job market became limited and fragmented due to globalization. Shahrzad Mojab’s research has also illustrated the change of job patterns for immigrant women under the impact of globalization from full-time work to multiple pathways, as the changing economy did not necessarily require highly skilled labour but rather combining skilling with de-skilling⁸ (1999, p.124). The changing Canadian economy from production-based to knowledge-based, in Mojab’s view, has not guaranteed those immigrant women professionals a smooth re-entry into the skilled jobs; as a matter of fact, those immigrant women experienced different levels of de-skilling after immigration (ibid.). This controversy between the requirement of Canadian

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⁸ De-skilling, in Mojab’s usage, refers to underutilization of immigrant professionals’ skills.
government for professional and skilled immigrants and the ongoing deskilling of immigrant professionals after arriving indicates the effect of economic restructuring on the immigrant work force, it also implies the obstacles that immigrant women professionals need to face when encountering a Canadian labour market and it social relations.

2.4. Labour Market Discrimination

An individual’s migrating and settlement into a hosting society will definitely conjure up acceptance or exclusion from the established power and social relations that testify, in the Canadian context, certain kinds of labour market exclusion. Immigration as a transnational movement of labours does bear the mark of unequal power relations. Immigrant women, from the third world countries, representing the visible minority groups, speaking English with accent or not “properly” are sure to encounter certain kind of hurdles in their labour market adventures.

When asking, “Who gets the work?” Henry and Ginzberg find “there is very substantial racial discrimination affecting the ability of members of racial minority groups to find employment”(1984, p.54). Wanner and Ambrose identified the discrimination against immigrants in the labour market as exclusionary and economic discrimination. Refusing to hire members from the minority group is “exclusionary discrimination,” while “economic discrimination” takes the form of paying lower wages to minority employees or not giving promotion opportunity to them despite their competence in terms of training, skills, or experience (2003, p.359).
Referring to the discrimination immigrants usually face in a Canadian labour market, Milly Charon comments, “Doors somehow seemed to slam more often on immigrants than on established Canadians of second and third generations” (Charon, 1989, p.11). Immigrants’ experience of labour market integration in Canada, especially immigrants of visible minorities, is usually an experience of encountering hierarchy, discrimination and exclusion. As Charon has further pointed out, “even putting a foot into a slightly open door” means a huge struggle for the immigrants, especially for the visible immigrants, as “visible minorities suffered most” among the immigrant groups (ibid.). Therefore, the process of labour market integration is a process of fighting for inclusion and participation, which is not easily achieved with obstacles and ordeals blocking the way. In the Canadian context, those ordeals that new immigrants encounter in their efforts to find employment are usually identified as failing to meet the requirements of the Canadian employers, for example, the requirement for Canadian experience, or sometimes, a license.

It is important to note that perspectives of gender, class and race have been introduced in literature examining ordeals that immigrant women come across in their search for employment. This race, class and gender perspective was used to analyze how the cultural and racial background of immigrant women impacts on their experience in the Canadian labour market. In addressing those factors that influence immigrant women’s labour market relocation in Canada, Boyd analyzes the variations among women’s experience due to the difference in birthplace and language ability. Boyd holds the view that “being foreign born operates to the disadvantage of some
birthplace groups, but not other” (1986, p. 46). This segregated workplace differentiates in regard to occupation, payment and benefits (Boyd, 1984). As shown by one Statistics Canada research, most managerial or professional positions held by immigrant women were held by immigrant women from United States (49%) and from Northern and Western Europe (40%) (Chui & Devereaux, 1995, p. 22). Visible minority groups were found more likely to work in the service and production sectors in Canada and earn less than the Canadian born (Wanner & Ambrose, 2003, p. 356).

As also clearly stated by Ng, gender, race and class are the “primary determinant” of immigrant women’s experience. As concrete and intermingled social relations, gender, race and class work together to shape people’s everyday life (1998, p. 28). Ng’s view is echoed by Preston and Man in their analysis of the employment experiences of Chinese immigrant women in Toronto. Preston and Man held the view that “Migration does not occur in abstract space” and immigrant women have experienced “the triple burden imposed by gender, immigrant status, and visible minority status” (1999, p.127). By migrating to Canada, those women became immigrant women and suffered lose of status due to their sex, birthplace, and/or class status. Therefore, discrimination in the labour market certainly contributes to immigrant women’s opportunity and form of labour market participation (Boyd,1986; Calliste, 2000; Fong, 1999; Lee, 1999). “As a result, most non-English speaking immigrant women, if they enter the labour force, become members of the most exploited sectors of the working population” (Ng, 1999, p.18). The exploitation that immigrant women are experiencing is manifested in their limited opportunities in finding suitable jobs, lower wages received and ghettoized
employment areas.

When concretized in the experience of immigrant women professionals, the labour market discrimination can take the form of accusing them of certain kind of lack or insufficiency in their skills or abilities (George et al., 2004; Leung, 2000; Li, 2001). When immigrant women cannot obtain a professional job, they might face a discriminative assessment regarding their credentials and abilities; they might be also regarded as “not fit in,” referring to their inabilities to function at a Canadian workplace or lack of social skills (George et al., 2004; Li, 2001; Preston & Man, 1999; Salaff & Greve, 2004). “Not fit in” as a gloss term serves seamlessly to exclude immigrant professionals from labour market participation. Then, barriers to employment that immigrant women professionals facing in their job search are viewed not as their insufficiency or lack, but rather within a network of social relations, as research showed that most immigrants’ skills and qualifications are not recognized in front of a western/Canadian standard due to racial origin or other features (Li, 2003, p. 25). Peter Li’s analysis (based on the 1996 Canadian Census) indicates, “gender and racial characteristics of holders of credentials cannot be separated from the credentials themselves, since they produce complicated interaction effects” (ibid. at 33). These complicated interaction effects are identified by several researchers showing that immigrants’ racial and gender features not only impact on the ways their credentials are evaluated, but also affect their employment opportunities and earnings as well (Henry & Ginzberg, 1984; Li, 2001; Reitz & Breton, 1994). Researchers found that even when immigrant women have the chance to enter the Canadian labour market, they have to
accept lower paid positions (Boyd 1984; Lee, 1999; Salaff & Greve, 2003a; Wanner & Ambrose, 2003), or come across job segregation (Arnopoulos, 1979; Boyd, 2002; Lee, 1999; Ng, 1999b) that is not only race-based but also gender-based. Most of the time, Immigrant women are forced to take limited jobs such as contract jobs, piecework, part-time jobs and seasonal jobs without any benefits or union protection (Lee, 1999; Ng, 1998). The fact that job segregation and lower wage happened to “recent immigrant women” (Boyd, 2000) clearly indicates there is a connection between race and class to employment. As minority immigrant women often only hold lower-paid, part-time or volunteering jobs, their experiences in the labour market are surely a kind of isolation and marginalization (Lee, 1999). In her study of the segregated nature of the settlement workplace, Jo-Anne Lee links the working conditions of racialized minority women workers in the immigration and settlement sector to a larger institutional network that oppresses immigrant women. Immigrant women are still working within the “racial hierarchy” that exists in the bigger society” (ibid.).

This analysis of gender, class and race is usually supported by empirical studies or statistics that indicate the differences between immigrant women and their Canadian counterparts in terms of job ranking, income and promotion opportunities (Chui & Devereaux, 1995). As most of recent immigrant women came from third world countries and brought with low economic capital, they usually fit into this type of analysis. The contribution of my research is to supplement this type of statistical analysis with studies of individual experience.
2.5. Female Experience in Immigration

Many researchers point out that migration/immigration experience may be different for men than for women (Boyd, 1986; Preston et al. 2005; Preston & man, 1999; Salaff & Greve, 2003). These differences may not only be reflected in their pre-immigration involvement in immigration decision and application (as the principal applicants, or the dependent/sponsored immigrants), but also in their responsibilities and roles within the family after immigration. The difference in men’s and women’s experiences in migration/immigration is supported by using gender as an analytic tool that examines the inequity of men and women’s position within the family and the oppression women suffer within and outside the household. As pointed out by Preston and Man, “Due to inequitable gender relations in contemporary Canadian society, women occupy a subordinate political and economic position relative to their male counterparts. As a result, the lived realities of women’s lives are different from those of men” (1999, p. 127).

The calling for using gender lens to examine migration, settlement and integration, besides the recognition that women and men may experience migration differently, is also supported by the belief that gender is “a social relation that shapes the form and function of many institutions—the family, the workplace and labour markets, …” (Tastsoglou & Preston, 2005, p.93). Tastsoglou & Preston regard gender as a structure or “gendered structures” that reveal unequal relations between men and women (ibid.). In those explorations, the household also became a category of gender analysis. Accordingly, several aspects of women’s immigration experience have been highlighted:
women’s doubly disadvantaged roles within the household, the linkage between women’s employment and family responsibilities.

One of the research findings on women’s immigration experience is women’s doubly disadvantaged position after immigration (Boyd, 1986; Man, 1999; Ng, 1999). Boyd holds the view that immigrant women usually have “multiple burdens of wife, mother, and worker roles” (1986, p. 48) after immigration. In her case study of the homeworking garment workers, Ng indicates that “women carry a double burden, taking almost total responsibility for waged and unwaged work” (Ng, 1999, p.117).

Another key research focus for my purposes is on the linkage between women’s employment and their household responsibilities. When immigrant women need to fulfill their family responsibilities due to their compelling gender roles, their opportunities for employment got further jeopardized and affected. In Man and Preston’s study on Chinese women, findings indicate that childcare and housework were primarily the responsibilities of women; therefore women’s efforts to obtain suitable jobs were jeopardized by their domestic responsibilities (Preston & Man, 1999). Although some researchers suggest that “household members” actions may be guided by norms of solidarity” after immigration, women still have to face “hierarchies of power along gender and generational lines” (Pessar, 1999).

As “migration and settlement bring changes in traditional patriarchal arrangements” (Pessar, 1999, p.578), migration could have “emancipatory” functions for some women while contribute to inequality within the household for others (Preston et al. 2005, p.92). On the emancipatory aspect, the possibility of liberating women from
oppression is supported by the belief that migration tends to reduce the “material and social foundations for gender inequities” (Pessar, 1999, p.578). However, whether women’s status has been improved by migration is in dispute. In the Canadian context, migration, in most cases, is found to reinforce women’s subordinate roles (Man, 1997; Ng, 1982, 1999a), women tend to face more predicament due to their social and economic status change (Man, 1997).

One of the noticeable developments in migration research is the adoption of a “more sophisticated understanding of gender and patriarchy” (Pessar, 1999, p.577). This understanding avoids equating gender to women and challenges feminists who only focus on “the primacy of gender, thereby marginalizing racism and other structures of oppression” (ibid. at 578). It rather advocates the recognition of race, gender, class and ethnic exploitation simultaneously. This perspective definitely informed this study on immigrant women professionals.

Therefore, this study was informed by the concept that immigration experience differs for men and women. Women’s experience in the labour market is definitely gendered and segregated from men. Due to the gender-specific changes in family structures after immigration, immigrant women may need to face new household responsibilities that subordinate them into traditional patriarchal oppression and impinge on their professional relocation.

This conceptual framework can by supported by Sharon Stichter’s discussions on household/employment linkages in relation to women’s labour market participation (1990, p.39). Stichter has argued, “many factors deriving from the household can affect
the levels and patterns of women’s employment and women’s wage levels” (ibid. at 29). Stichter believes that the aspects of household “production and reproduction” can have an impact on women’s labour market participation: the reproductive work aspect as it allocates the childbirth and child rearing responsibilities; the productive work aspect that decides women’s involvement in housework; household income; decision-making and power relations in the household. Stichter indicates that women’s labour market participation is inevitably decided by these factors as they not only decide their family responsibilities but also their position in the family. When women have to invest a great portion of their time and energy in childcare and other household work, “they may be constrained in choice of jobs” (ibid. at 27).

Therefore, in this research I have taken the view that both labour market factors and household factors affect immigrant women professionals’ occupational relocation in Canada, which I will substantially discuss in Part II.
Chapter 3    Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This research is a qualitative study on immigrant women professionals’ labour market experience in Canada. With its focus on bringing in women’s perspectives in the examination of women’s experience in the labour market, this study treats immigrant women as gendered subjects. As the “gender/immigrant women domain represents a different way of approaching what can be known and is a research paradigm that cuts across disciplines” (Preston et al., 2005, p.96), this research involves both gender-based analysis as well as other analyses that are appropriate for this research. Six immigrant women professionals were chosen for in-depth interviews. This number is adequate for an exploratory qualitative study. In-depth interviews enable immigrant women to give their voices on immigration issues and to reflect on their experiences in a personal environment that enables a more egalitarian relationship between the researcher and the researched.

Deciding on a certain method of research, the researcher already indicates her/his way of seeing and constructing the subject, as Sandra Kirby and Kate Mckenna declare “choosing a method for a piece of research is a political choice” (1989, p. 64). The political choice of this study is “making visible” women’s experience and the reality of their lives, which have traditionally been marginalized and neglected in immigration study (Boyd, 1986; Hondagneu-sotelo, 1999; Tatsoglou & Preston, 2005; Wanner & Ambrose, 2003). With this purpose, this research was informed by feminist and
anti-racist methodologies.

3.2. Data Collection

My recruitment of interviewees targeted at immigrant women professionals who had immigrated to Canada less than ten years (between 1995 and 2005). This criterion was set to focus on the most recent immigrant population with an awareness of the somewhat shifting social and political context within the ten years. Interviewees need to be foreign-trained professionals (by “professional,” I use the commonplace reference for those who have a college/university education). Recruitment of interview respondents was based on voluntary participation through my putting up a poster/flyer on the walls/boards (community service centers, library, etc…) where free public ads were allowed; I left my email and phone number for those who were interested to contact me (Appendix A). When there were not enough respondents recruited from public notice boards, additional methods were used, such as advertising in community newspapers; advertising in free websites; asking respondents to refer other potential respondents (i.e., snowballing); by word-of-mouth through my own professional and community networks.

Six respondents were selected over several months. They came from three different continents and four different racial/ethnic communities. Their years in Canada ranged from 9 to 1, average 4 years in Canada. Their average age is 30-40. Only one of them applied for immigration as the principal applicant, while four of them immigrated as the dependent applicant under the economic class category. One immigrated under
the family class category. By the time of their immigration, all of them have university
education. Four of them had bachelor’s degree, one had master’s degree and one had
doctoral degree. They were all married at the time of their immigration. One divorced at
the time of interview. Three of them had children. Two of them were employed at the
time of interview. Two of them were full-time students; one was part-time student. Two
of them did not work at the time of our interview. The following chart gives an
overview of their background information.

### Summary Chart of the Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Cathy⁹</th>
<th>Terri</th>
<th>Janice</th>
<th>Eva</th>
<th>Mary</th>
<th>Yvonne</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current Age</td>
<td>35-40</td>
<td>30-35</td>
<td>30-35</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>35-40</td>
<td>40-45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country of Origin</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration Class</td>
<td>Economic (dependent)</td>
<td>Economic (dependent)</td>
<td>Economic (dependent)</td>
<td>Family class</td>
<td>Economic (dependent)</td>
<td>Economic (principal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years in Canada</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>8 months</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>9 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Level Upon Arrival</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Marital Status</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Children</td>
<td>One</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>One</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of English Upon Arrival</td>
<td>Very little English</td>
<td>Reasonable English</td>
<td>Good English</td>
<td>Very little English</td>
<td>Very little English</td>
<td>Good English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Level of English</td>
<td>Fluent</td>
<td>Fluent</td>
<td>Good English</td>
<td>Near fluent</td>
<td>Near fluent</td>
<td>Good English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former Occupation</td>
<td>Secondary school teacher</td>
<td>Government Officer</td>
<td>University administrator</td>
<td>Bank Clerk</td>
<td>Civil Engineer</td>
<td>University Lecturer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Employment Status</td>
<td>College student</td>
<td>Resource specialist</td>
<td>Graduate student</td>
<td>Not employed</td>
<td>Not employed</td>
<td>ESL instructor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

⁹ Pseudonyms are used for all respondents to protect their identity.
Interviews were conducted between July 2005 and March 2006. Interview times were set up by consulting with the respondents. Each interview lasted around two hours. Usually the respondents chose the time and location for interview. As some of them were constrained by time, sometimes there was a need to break an interview into two parts, for example, as in the case of Janice, the interview happened on different days at two different times. The locations could also be different even for one interview as in the interview with Mary: the first part of the interview took place in the office room where she was volunteering and the second part was in her home. These variations of the interview arrangement sometimes provided a chance to see the different aspects of the respondents’ life. There was also a second interview with Terri when I realized that I did not have enough information regarding her work experience. The second interview proved to be very informative as there was new information about Terri’s family life and marital status that was not revealed at the first interview. All interviews were conducted in English. The three respondents from China did use Mandarin at certain point when they could not express themselves in English.

The general procedure of in-depth interview was carried out by explaining the research purpose and objectives to the respondents, asking for their consent to audiotape the interview and informing them of their rights to access the transcripts and written words. They were also informed that all data generated during this study would remain confidential. Neither their names nor their identities would be evident in the transcripts, thesis or publication; they would be free to raise questions or concerns with the researcher throughout the study, and may withdraw at any time if they choose.
3.3 Interviewing Process

The interviews were designed in semi-structured and open-ended format. This enabled the respondents to reflect on their situation and experience in fully open-ended conversation. While knowing that “an interview is a way of finding out about people,” (Oakley, 1981, p.32) I was also aware that it did not simply involve data gathering; interviewing women should be geared “towards the validation of women’s subjective experiences as women and as people” (ibid at 30). Interviews in this study should provide a chance for immigrant women professionals to reflect on their immigrant life and their experiences. Therefore, the focus of my interviews with immigrant women was not on how data could be collected, or on how long the interview should take and how many questions should be asked. Rather I attended to the relationship between the interviewer and the respondents, the quality of the interaction, the feelings of the respondents about being interviewed and their questions and concerns at the moment of the interview. For this emphasis, the traditional concern of the textbook code of ethics seems inadequate as its requirements for “proper interview” tend to exclude emotional support and exchange between the interviewer and the interviewee, and tend to treat the interviewee as “the objects of study and the sources of data” in order to achieve “objectivity and detachment” (ibid at 33).

Rather than treating my interviewees as passive individuals who provided the “data” and regarding myself, the interviewer, as the tool of research, I was looking for what Oakley called “non-exploitive interviews” in which the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewed is non-hierarchal and egalitarian, and the interview took
the form of an informal conversation and interaction. I constantly reminded myself that the women I interviewed were respondents who gave information; they were also living human beings who required different interaction with their interviewer. Therefore, I only used a preliminary question or questions to initiate the conversation, such as “What’s your employment experience?” “How did you find your first job?” “Is there any adjustment you made regarding your job expectation?” “Do you have any difficulty finding job?” Most of the time, the respondents’ stories of immigration decision, search for a professional settlement, struggle to locate a job and their process of re-socialization and integration would come out naturally.

I also did not purposefully to obtain the “emotional detachment” required by traditional interview paradigm. As pointed out by Oakley, “the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship” (Oakley, 1981, p. 41). Interview, in this sense, is “a discussion or guided conversation” (Kirby and Mckenna, 1989). I was there to listen to what they said about their life, to share and to respond to their stories while not being judgmental and imposing.

My way of interviewing was then interactive and oriented towards generating “a collaborative approach to the research that engage both the interviewer and the interviewee in a joint enterprise” (Oakley, 1981, p. 44).
3.4. Analytical Strategy and Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed and analyzed. Transcripts were reviewed with the respondents to see whether anything should be added or excluded. I conducted a content analysis of my data to generate findings that allowed me to treat my data as a thematic whole. In that way I did not need to break my conversation with my respondents into small units. I agree with Campbell and Gregor, “the meaning of the data is in their setting of use as they arise there. That is why suggestions to cut up and sort one’s data are likewise unhelpful, if not downright dangerous” (2002, p. 85).

My analysis of the data started right after my interviews. After each interview, I would immediately write down my reflections on the process and the most outstanding subjects and themes that stood out from each interview. A summary about the content as well as the process would be written up when everything was still fresh. I also paid special attention to those parts of the conversation with my respondents that already struck me and filled my mind with questions and left me thinking and wondering during the interview. Those parts that struck my intuitive awareness as a researcher, as Terri’s remarks about her tiredness, her desire to return to her own community and her disappointment with social life around her; Janice’s strong belief in having a Canadian higher education, her plan and strategy to choose opportunities; Cathy’s complaint about community services and government programs that exclude people of her age and language background; Mary’s depression due to her inability to get into her profession; Eva’s reflection on her roles in the family compared with her husband’s and Yvonne’s confinement to a job for nine years. These early analytical notes became an important
integrating part of the later analysis.

Reading and re-reading my data, looking for recurring activities and events and figuring out what the relationships between them was the next step of analysis. This always involved many times of assiduous reading and pattern finding of the transcribed data. Grouping and making interconnection helped to make recurring themes and patterns evident. Refocusing those recurring events and activities in relation to my research questions (what are immigrant women professionals’ perceptions of their labor market experience, what are their responses?) yielded several themes. These themes include: the persistent pursuit of Canadian higher education; the conflicting roles of work and family for women; language proficiency and the problems of speaking “proper” English; sense of belonging and sense of loss; transitional strategies and survival jobs. Those activities and events that are important to my respondents’ life formed a kind of map—a map of social relations, which led to the examination of the social reality “within which people exist and out of which they are functioning” (Kirby, 1989, p.19). My critical reflection of the social context that my respondents were located enabled an analysis of the lived reality of my respondents.

In the chapters that follow I will turn to presenting my data and analysis. In Chapter Four, I present the profiles of the six immigrant women professionals interviewed. In Chapter Five, I will discuss those immigrant women’s strategies in coping with labour market difficulties while in Chapter Six, I will explore what other factors beyond the labour market that impacted on those women’s labour market experience.
Chapter 4 Profiles of My Respondents

4.1. The Stories of Six Immigrant Women

The six women interviewed came from three different regions, South America, East Asia and Africa, and four different ethnic groups. They came to Canada between the time of late 1990s and the early 2000s when a shift continually took place in immigration to Canada, demonstrated in the changing demographics of the immigrants. All of them came with a university education, four have bachelor’s degrees, one is a master’s degree holder and one has a doctoral degree before immigration. Despite their different background and reasons of immigration, they had to face similar challenges in their post-arrival settlement and integration. Due to their different motivation for immigration, economic condition and family responsibilities, their work experience, job search strategies and career decisions did vary.

Cathy

Cathy immigrated to Canada with her husband and son from China in 2001. She had been in Canada four years at the time of our interview.

Before immigration Cathy was a secondary school Chinese language teacher. She has a bachelor’s degree in Chinese language and has worked in her field for several years. Unsatisfied with her life in a small town where the economy was poor, she intended to look for changes in her life and career. Cathy believed that her family had to leave her small town to find better opportunities, and moving to Canada was considered
a better option than moving to big cities in China as the Canadian social system was impressive to them. Cathy was happy that she made the decision to immigrate despite the hardship she encountered. She was glad that she accomplished something that she could not think of achieving in her home country, such as learning English, changing her career and choosing her residential location. She was enjoying the freedom of making her own decisions regarding a lot of things in her life.

Cathy chose to become a social worker after arrival in Canada, as she could not find a job in her previous profession-teaching Chinese. Cathy showed strong determination regarding choosing a career she was interested in. She did not choose accounting although everybody told her it was easy to find a job. She would rather consider a direction of her interest. Even her husband did not think she chose the right profession, but she was happy with her choice.

Unable to find a job that utilized her skills and former experience and pressed by the need to survive, Cathy’s strategy for transition was to take some survival jobs. She worked more than one year as a sewing machine operator in a garment factory where Cantonese and Mandarin were the languages spoken. After her English improved, she worked at a pizza hut that gave her more chance to speak English.

Referring to her survival jobs, Cathy indicated that she had no choice when she first came. She did not know how to find a job, did not know enough English (upon
arrival, her English level was assessed as LINC level two\textsuperscript{10}, and she had to take care of her young son so her husband could go out to work. The piecework at the garment factory gave her certain kind of flexibility in terms of dividing her time between work and family. Cathy was very positive towards her experience of doing survival jobs; she considered them as the necessary transition that she had to go through. And she even regarded them as providing her with a learning experience that could be used for her future career as she was making connection between her experience of her survival job and her future social work profession.

By the time of the interview, Cathy was a social work student at a community college and was currently doing her co-op placement with a non-profit organization.

\textbf{Terri}

Terri had been in Canada for six years at the time of interview. A part-time graduate student of counselling psychology and a full-time employee with a well-known mainstream non-profit organization, Terri was intent on achieving her goal in life-- to open her own business in counseling psychology.

Before immigration, Terri worked for four years as an architecture engineer in a metropolitan city planning bureau in China. It was, according to Terri, a very privileged

\textsuperscript{10} In LINC, students are assessed for their language proficiency in terms of reading, writing, speaking and listening abilities into benchmark level 1 to 12. Level 5-6 is regarded as lower intermediate level.
and well-paid job for an architecture graduate with a bachelor’s degree. For Terri, there were so many reasons to immigrate. She was looking for a change in career and in lifestyle, and immigration seemed to be the solution. Dissatisfied with her previous bureaucratic job and looked forward to seeing the world, Terri decided to come to Canada. With her architecture engineer husband as the principle applicant, Terri and her husband landed in Toronto in March 2000. Terri’s immigration was a well-planned one. She prepared with immense efforts for this transition and spent a great amount of time polishing her English and preparing for university admission. Before Terri landed in Canada, she already received admission to study in a university in Toronto.

Terri planned to change her career even before she came to Canada. She did not like her former job and profession. She first chose to study computer science in Canada. Then she quickly realized that she did not like computing shortly after being in the program. Convinced by the experience of the people she met and her interest in working with people, Terri switched her area to psychology. She was planning to become a counseling psychologist who helps people understand their problems.

Financially self sufficient, Terri’s first two years in Canada were quite enjoyable. Due to her multilingual abilities (she speaks Cantonese, English and Mandarin), Terri got her first job from the Chinese community as a paralegal assistant. Terri liked this first job as she was involved in a lot of responsibilities and decision making. She enjoyed the outreach part of this job as she was widely exposed to people from all kinds of levels, for example lawyers and clients. After getting her B.A. in psychology, Terri
worked for one year at the Career Centre of the university she attended. Never content with what she already had, Terri continued to upgrade her skills and qualifications. That was why she started to work for a master’s degree in psycho-counselling on a part-time basis immediately after obtaining her B.A. Studying and working at the same time was Terri’s strategy of gaining both working experience and higher qualifications. At the time of interview, Terri was planning to quit her job with the non-profit organization in order to focus on her study. The desire and ability to face new challenges and to get exposed to different things opened up career opportunities for Terri. She was always looking for change and something better and more suitable. Commenting on her employment experience, Terri said she might struggle a longer time, but she was happy that she was working towards her goal.

Terri did not want to take the traditional family obligations that a woman was expected to accomplish in her community, for example, giving birth. She admitted that immigration to Canada did empower her to get rid of those obligations since there was not so much shame related to divorce in Canada. Terri divorced her husband three years after immigration because she felt pressured by his family to have a son.

**Janice**

Janice was in her mid-30s and had been in Canada one year and a half at the time of interview. She was finishing her graduate study and just received a full-time job offer from the university she was attending.
Janice came from Kenya as a graduate student in the summer of 2003. One month after her arrival, Janice got her immigration paper, as her family applied for immigration at the same time when she applied for her graduate study. Before immigration, Janice was a senior administrator at an academic institution in Kenya. According to Janice, she and her husband made the decision to immigrate together. She wanted to pursue her Ph.D. in the West, because there weren’t equivalent programs in her home country. Immigration was also a necessary step for her husband to obtain a professional job, because her Russian educated husband couldn’t find a job as a food process engineer in Kenya. Immigration was also the plan for her two sons’ future.

Although well prepared, Janice still encountered some cultural shock and hardship. As soon as she came, she had to deal with her overburdened roles as the mother of two young children and as a full-time student. People’s underestimation of her English abilities and qualifications really bothered her. Although the holder of a master’s degree in religious education, Janice had to be enrolled in a master’s program in order to apply for her Ph.D. in Canada.

Janice’s strategy for obtaining a professional job was to start as a graduate student. With several years work experience and a master’s degree, she had a special sense of affinity with educational institutions. Thus, she wanted to stay within the university system, not only to study, but also to find employment. Janice’s goal was to move into a managerial position in five years’ time.

Reflecting on her immigration life, Janice was clearly aware that she was going through a transformation from somebody with status, title and position to nobody. This
strong sense of loss and dislocation, however, did not depress her; rather, it motivated her to regain her previous professional position, even if that meant she had to start from scratch.

**Eva**

Eva was in her late 20s. She was attending a government-sponsored one-month job search workshop at the time of interview. Eva was trying to understand how to conduct herself in an interview and to polish her English.

Eva first came to Canada to study English in a five-month English program two years ago. At that time, she only wanted to stay as a visitor and a student. However, she met her husband in her class and this encounter changed her life. Her husband convinced her to marry him and to immigrate to Canada from Mexico. Referring to her immigration decision, Eva admitted that she did not plan to immigrate; it was all due to her husband’s persuasion. Eva eventually immigrated to Canada in August 2005 to join her newly wed husband. Back in Mexico, Eva obtained her bachelor’s degree in Business and Administration and worked for HSBC\(^{11}\) for two years.

Eva was still at the stage of getting to know the new environment and her new feminine role as a wife. She was experiencing a lot of changes in her life, not only adjusting to her newly acquired family responsibilities, but also to understand the Canadian labour market. As a newly wed, she realized that there were so many things

\(^{11}\) Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank of Canada.
for her to learn, from how to keep her apartment clean, how to cook a meal, to taking care of her husband. Eva found this was a big change for her. What is more, unlike her experience as a student, Eva was feeling the pressure to speak better English and to find a job. Since her husband worked in the bank, Eva could afford to take time to study and plan. However, her unemployment status still concerned her as it undermined her confidence, led to certain periods of depression. From time to time, Eva wanted to go back to Mexico. She found things were much easier for her back home. She could quickly find a job after she finished university. In Canada, she found it was hard for her to find a job in the bank as she did not have sufficient English.

After a few months of confusion, Eva was now taking action. She searched the web and found government-sponsored job-search workshops. She was trying to be optimistic and to adapt. She was also thinking about alternatives. She was planning to attend language classes to improve her English. By making herself more open and more optimistic, Eva was hoping to be reconnected to her professional job.

Referring to her settlement experience, Eva admitted that there were pros and cons. She valued the Canadian social system but disapproved of the hiring process in the labour market, especially the requirement of Canadian experience by employers.

*Mary*

Mary was in her mid-30s. Still not working in her profession after three years in Canada, Mary was volunteering at an employment resource center to gain
understanding of the process and steps of getting a professional job.

Before leaving Brazil, Mary was a senior civil engineer with eight years’ work experience. She came to Canada as the spouse of her foreign-student husband in May 2003. The couple applied for immigration by the end of 2003 and got their landing paper after seven months. Talking about their decision to immigrate, Mary admitted that she did not have a plan. She only agreed to immigrate as her husband persuaded her to marry him and immigrate. As coming to Canada and immigration happened too quickly for her, she had no time to think or plan for this change.

In order to make ends meet, Mary had to work after receiving her landed immigrant status. As she couldn’t speak any English when she first came, the only job that was available to her was kitchen helper in a fast food restaurant and a bakery. She had to choose working night shift and weekend in order to give herself sometime to study English. At one point, she was studying English full-time from Monday to Friday and working Saturday to Sunday without any day off. This highly demanding schedule was detrimental to her health; as a result, she suffered two miscarriages and bad health.

After more than two years’ hard work, Mary did improve her English. At the time of our interview, Mary was pretty fluent with her English. However, her confidence in finding a professional job did not grow with her improved English because there was a certain fear in Mary’s mind. She was afraid of the demand for license, certification and Canadian experience by the employer. Armed with two resumes for both administration and civil engineering positions, Mary never sent the civil engineering resumé out.
Furthermore, although Mary understood how things were done in Canada, it was very hard for her to conform to the Canadian process. She did go to a lot of workshops and had knowledge of the job search process, but she was not willing to follow the steps she learned, she felt uncomfortable to “brag” about herself in front of other people. She held the view that employers should hire somebody based on his/her ability not on how she/he talked about herself/himself.

Mary was willing to adjust, but only within her comfort zone. She wouldn’t mind doing any job relating to her profession, but there was nobody to “let her into the door first.” She was still struggling between her love for her profession and going through the difficult process to have a license.

Mary identified very closely with her profession. The sense of loss due to not working at her occupation depressed and confused her. She admitted that she had a big disappointment regarding her immigration life. The prospect of not being able to work in her profession depressed her. And there were other things that also contributed to her depression. Mary was worrying about eventually becoming an old mother as she was in her mid-30s and still no children.

Going back to school in Mary’s view was a possible option for her to reconnect with her profession. She saw opportunities arising through schooling as her husband’s successful professional relocation proved to her. Talking about her life in Canada, Mary made it clear that there were two sides, the good side and the bad side. Mary liked the Canadian social system, but was depressed for not being able to work in her profession. She did not see hope out of this unemployment confinement.
Yvonne

Yvonne was an ESL instructor for the Catholic School Board. At the time of our interview, she had just lost her full-time position due to the restructuring within the Board. A woman in her mid or late 40s, Yvonne has been in Canada for almost 9 years.

Immigrated to Canada in January 1997 with her husband and son, Yvonne was the principle applicant. Before immigration, Yvonne was a Ph.D. student in an American university. For Yvonne, immigration to Canada was the quickest way to bring her husband and son over for a reunion, which she failed to do during her six years’ stay in the United States.

Although Yvonne was told by the immigration officer that it was hard to find a job in Canada, she didn’t expect finding a job in Canada would be that hard since she had a doctoral degree from the United States and a good command of English. It took her six months to find a job. The job search process was strange and unfamiliar to her; she found that she could not simply send out resumés to the employers like people in the United States and China do. She lacked networks and information about the Canadian labour market. To understand the different process of job search, Yvonne went to some workshops. One workshop really helped her understand the Canadian educational system and taught her Canadian job search skills. After the workshop, she volunteered for two months at the Catholic School Board. Afterwards, she found an ESL instructor position quickly. After working both full-time and part-time for the Board for nine years, Yvonne lost her full-time position in 2006.
Referring to this change, Yvonne regretted that she did not make preparation in time to change her job. She said that she thought a lot about changing jobs all these years, but she never took any serious action. Firstly, she enjoyed her job as she enjoyed teaching and working with people. Then, there were the family responsibilities. With full-time employment, she became the main breadwinner of her family. This breadwinning role and responsibility had restricted her from looking for professional development or change. She felt she had to stay with her job in the past nine years to be financially stable for the family, as her husband was working at a lower-paid factory job. There were also constraints of time and energy. Finally, there was also the fear for change. It wasn’t until she was laid off that she realized that she had stayed in her job for too long.

Yvonne said she might consider going to the US to work if there was a better job offer. The ideal job Yvonne envisioned was as a college teacher, but she was also clearly aware how competitive a college teaching position could be in Canada. Commenting on her immigrant life, Yvonne was proud of living a life that required her full engagement and efforts.

4.2. Summary

It is not hard to find that there are some similarities as well as differences in these women’s experiences. It seems that all women experienced the difficulties that newcomers encounter in Canada, for example, language problems, loss of social status and lack of networking. Two things stand out to distinguish their experiences, especially
employment experience: their English proficiency and immigration decision.

Immigration Decision

The stories of the women interviewed indicate there are two kinds of decision-making processes involved regarding their immigration. They were either self-motivated, as in the case of Yvonne, Cathy, Janice and Terri, or passively accepting what has been decided by their husband/spouse, as in the case of Mary and Eva. It is interesting to note that for those who were the decision-makers or involved in the decision-making process regarding their immigration, they usually came with a plan and preparation. They had pictured what they would like to become or wanted to be and prepared or planned for it. Therefore, their relocation process was more goal-driven albeit not necessarily easier or less challenging. On the other hand, those women who were pushed into immigration mainly by their husband/spouse were not prepared in terms of career plan.

But even for those women who had the preparation, there was certainly a gap between their expectation and the reality. No matter whether they were prepared or not, they usually found starting a new life in Canada harder than they had expected. The difficulties and challenges were beyond their anticipation, as all of them identified certain barriers to employment, either in the form of language sufficiency, lack of experience, lack of networking or lack of a license.
Pre-migration Circumstances

It is also worth noting that all of the women interviewed were working in their professions before immigration. Some of them were happy with their jobs while others were looking for change. In general, employment was not a concern for them before immigration as they all had the proper qualifications to get a good job. Mary, Yvonne, Janice and even Eva were really enjoying their work while Terri and Cathy were looking for changes.

Work Experience

On the whole, the respondents’ employment experience for the first two years in Canada was decided to a large extent by their economic or financial status. When there was a survival need, they had to take jobs that provided them certain financial means to make a living no matter whether it required their former training or not, as in the case of Mary, Janice and Cathy. To obtain paid employment at the early stage of immigration was an obligation for them, as they needed to provide financial means for survival. Their choices of those survival jobs were facilitated also by their level of language fluency, networking and different levels of financial need. For Mary and Cathy, with the prioritized need and responsibility of making a living, there was not much choice or career plan involved. Making the ends meet came first before other planning. Eva and Terri could put career plan into consideration as their husband were working. Yvonne had to support her family by working at the same job. Mary, however, took the unpaid work in the household.
Family Responsibilities

As all of the respondents were married at the time of immigration, their family responsibilities did play a role in their re-settlement experience. Between family and work, Mary, Cathy and Janice attended to family responsibilities first. Eva had to learn to do household chores while Janice, for the first time in life, had to take care of the kids by herself. Yvonne’s career development or plan was also impeded by her confined role as the “bread winner” of the family. Terri, on the other hand, did break away from family obligations with the rights she was entitled to immigration.

Evaluation of Immigration Experience

It was noticeable that most women used their pre-immigration experience as a comparative reference to comment on their post-immigration experience. Pre-immigration experience was usually used as the important reference to reflect on their circumstances after immigration. It seems that there is no connection between their length of years in Canada to their social and economic condition. Longer or shorter years in Canada do not serve as good indicator of their employment or life success. On the whole, all the women found their settlement experience harder than they had expected. Although most of them appreciated the Canadian social system and living condition, there was a general anxiety and sense of not belonging among those women. Going back to their home country was still an option of life plan for some of them.
Chapter 5  Responding to the Canadian Job Market

Starting a new life in the host country for immigrants is usually very challenging in all aspects. In the Canadian context, the challenges that recent immigrant professionals come across are usually centered on finding a proper employment that utilizes their former training and skills. The job search process proved to be very difficult for most of the women in this study as they quickly found that they were seen as not having “sufficient” skills or qualifications to land on a suitable job after arrival despite their years of experience and university degrees. As a result, in spite of their different experiences, professions, preparation for immigration and levels of English, most women in this study usually could not find a job after arrival that employed their existing skills or qualifications. Among them, Yvonne was the only exception who did find a job somewhat related to her training within six months time. Most of them had to go through a transitional process that either involved retraining themselves or changing career, the common strategies found with these women in negotiating employment opportunities.

Two processes were found in those women’s responses towards the demand of a Canadian labour market. The first process was the stage of them recognizing that they were seen by employers as having a “lack” of skills and qualifications; the second stage involved their action and strategies to respond and overcome these perceived “lacks.” It is useful to examine how and in what area their perceived “lack” and “insufficiency” was identified and how those women responded to them in order to understand their
labour market experience in Canada.

5.1. Identifying Barriers to Employment

In our interview, all women in this study spoke about the difficulties they came across in finding a suitable job after their arrival in Canada. None of them found the job search process easy. Even Yvonne who did find a professional job within the first year mentioned about the unexpected hardness of job search. They might not get any reply after sending out a lot of resumés, or not be offered a job after going to interviews. They either found that they did not have the Canadian experience that the employers asked, or lacked the language proficiency that the Canadian labour market expects.

It is important to notice that their identified “insufficiency” in skills and qualifications could be real as well as perceived. They might really have gaps to fill in terms of their skills and qualifications in order to work in their professions. For example, some respondents’ English language ability was below the level necessary for finding a professional job, so they might really face a language difficulty. But their barriers to employment can also be constructed. In the English language case, their stories also showed that even if they spoke fluent English, they were still conceived as having a problem as they spoke with accent or they looked different. Therefore, in examining the barriers to employment that these women faced, we need to be aware of the two different processes of identifying barriers: the realization of real gaps between these women’s skills and the job requirements, and barriers that were constructed and perceived based on misconception and discriminative ideology.
Due to the nature of language as the means of interaction and communication, language skills or abilities were usually where my respondents identified their lack of proficiency or perceived as having problems upon arrival.

Although most skilled immigrants under the economic class need to have certain level of the official language ability (English or French) to be able to immigrate, most immigrant women professionals in this study immigrated as the dependent /or sponsored applicants. Therefore, their language ability had not been assessed according to the immigration selection standard (as to pass IELTS\textsuperscript{12} test.) --Cathy, Eva and Mary fit into this explanation. Yvonne was an exception as she was the principal applicant for immigration. Also as an English language graduate, her English level was far more advanced compared to the other women. Even if they did meet the requirement and immigrated to Canada with considerable English skills (like in the case of Janice and Terri), the Canadian labour market expectations of language ability may still reject them as they speak most probably with an accent. In our interview, five out of six women mentioned their frustration upon arrival with how their English language ability was perceived--either because of their real incompetence or how they were harshly judged by others for their perceived ineffectiveness in communicating. Eva, Mary and Cathy admitted that they did not have the language ability when they first came; while Terri and Janice encountered biased or stereotyped judgement in terms of their language ability. This language disadvantage of my respondents can be viewed, on one hand, in

\textsuperscript{12} The IELTS is the English test most popularly used for language assessment for immigration to Canada. All the major cities in the world have IELTS test centres.
relation to their immigration category, and on the other hand, to more complex social relations when the language problems that my respondents came across were also perceived and constructed, which did not necessarily mean lack of English fluency. The different kind of frustration in terms of language proficiency that Janice and Terri encountered illustrates the other process of identifying language problems of immigrants. Janice came across stereotyping and prejudice due to her accent, while Terri felt being left out and isolated due to her difference.

Unlike Eva and Mary who could not work at jobs that utilized their former experience and training due to their lack of English proficiency, Janice and Terri were belittled by people’s underestimating of their language abilities. English was the official language for Janice back in her home country; therefore, her language ability was above the general population of immigrants. As a second language speaker, Terri’s English level was also far more advanced as she spent a lot of time polishing her English for university admission before immigration. Encountering language problems for Janice and Terri was really unexpected because their language problems were beyond the fluency category yet were perceived and constructed as deficiencies.

Janice observed that people assessed her English by responding to her as if she did not speak much English. She reflected: “If someone tells you something, repeating it and trying to say it very simply, you know, you see the expectation.” Janice felt really belittled and humiliated when people spoke to her in an especially slow way and asked about where she came from. She understood what kind of connection people were trying to make in this kind of language approach:
You know, people depend so much on the immediate Media, what they have seen. So like, when I came and speak English, people started to ask me if I came from Jamaica. I guess because they think a black person speaks English can only come from Jamaica. When I told them I came from Africa, they said immediately, “you must not have enough English. You said you came three months ago? You learnt English in the last three months?” You know, because they think, their assumption, I came from Africa I cannot speak English. If I am a black person and I speak English, I must come from Jamaica. I got this very bad kind of expectation. None of them expected me to know English. If I do, they expected I speak that kind of English.

Janice understood that she was stereotyped and discriminated against through language, as there is a certain kind of Canadian attitude towards immigrants’ language ability and their foreign accent. Few of the people that Janice encountered estimated her English ability properly because of her physical appearance that displayed her otherness.

Therefore, besides the proficiency scale, there are other standards regarding language ability of immigrants, for example, the accents they spoke with. Janice’s above experience provides a good example of how immigrants’ language is perceived in Canada. People first assumed that Janice could not speak English just by looking at her; when they found that she did speak English, they assumed that she came from Jamaica. Janice’s experience of encountering biased judgment and assumptions regarding her language ability and origin testifies what Boyd has argued that immigrants’ birthplace as well as their ethnic background sometimes do contribute to certain kind of reassessment of their language ability (Boyd, 1986).

Therefore, not only can language act as a barrier to employment, it can also be a contributor to social isolation (Li, 2001; Miedema and Nason-Clark, 1989). Terri’s experience of encountering language problem serves as another example. For Terri, the
frustration with language was also not related entirely to her English proficiency. It was
the experience of difference and being excluded. Terri described her experience of
frustration when she tried to make friends and to be accepted:

I asked my friend why he did not approach me [at the beginning]
and why he did not talk to me like [the way] I talked to him. He just said
because he did not know when he talked to me whether I understood
him…I think this is a common, pretty common perception in most
Canadians.

By assuming that immigrants are unable to understand, Canadians refuse to accept them
and keep them outside their social life. In this sense, the Canadian definition of
sufficient English ability in relation to immigrants does not necessarily mean the ability
to speak English fluently or to write correctly. It involves more than the right words
chosen or correct sentences composed. So there are two aspects of the language barriers
that my respondents came across.

On the one hand, their lack of English proficiency had real consequences for them
in their employment search. They could not regain their former professional status
because they couldn’t function in English at the level that the jobs required. This lack of
English proficiency did impact on their job search strategies. For example, Mary, Eva
and Cathy had to put a lot of time and efforts into English study before having any
meaningful career planning or proper job search. The only jobs they could work at were
those that did not require higher level of English skills. For instance, Cathy went to a
garment factory where Chinese was spoken, while Mary’s first job was a bakery helper
that did not require much English. There is another aspect of the language proficiency
regarding my respondents. It is the biased attitude of Canadians towards immigrants’ language ability based on their accents. For instance, even if they were absolutely fluent but due to their accent or other differences, their accent actually became a barrier. So even if an immigrant woman has the proficiency, it is assumed that she doesn’t as in the case of Janice. Here, the concept of “standard language ideology” can be used to explain this kind of judgment on immigrants’ language abilities. In her study of immigrants’ English language learning process, Huaimei Han has pointed out:

While standard language ideology entails the dominance of the standard language variety and its speakers over other language varieties and their speakers, the ideology of native-like English means defining non-native English and the speakers as qualitatively different, which warrants setting up a separate, and subordinate, linguistic hierarchy for them (2007, p. 25).

In the Canadian context, within its hierarchy of the standard language--“standard English” in the case of immigrant women discussed in this study, the accented immigrant speakers, together with their language varieties, are placed at the subordinate and lower position. As “language ideology is an important psychological tool that mediates everyday judgments and actions” (ibid.), the judgment on immigrants’ language abilities is surely a process of differentiation and exclusion. Therefore, it is not the lack of sufficient English ability itself alone and the impact of this lack on my respondents’ employment opportunity that presents a problem, as shown by Mary’s story that her improved English could not enable her to overcome the perception that she lacked language skills, or to help her escape the view that her accented English is
deficient; it is how the language ability of those who spoke fluent English became a barrier and impacted on their perception of themselves and their sense of acceptance that requires further attention. “Language barriers” as constructed contribute to locate immigrants in the host country’s social-economic structure and within its social relations. Boyd links the language abilities of immigrant women to their socioeconomic stratification. According to Boyd, the language abilities of immigrant women have a deciding role in their position in the labour Market (Boyd, 1986), as explained by Boyd, “these linkages between language, job skills, and position in the labour market reinforce the already-existent socioeconomic stratification that exists by nationality among immigrant women” (Boyd, 1986, pp. 50-51). Therefore, my respondents’ language barriers, besides indicating their lack of English proficiency, can also refer to their new social and economic location, which can be very disadvantaged.

Lack of Canadian Experience

Another barrier to employment experienced by some women interviewed was their “lack of Canadian experience.” Although all the women in my study had higher education and came with many years of experience in their fields, their former experience usually did not count when they applied for their first jobs in Canada, as employers usually required local experience. This unique demand was usually stated clearly in job postings and during job interviews. It is a unique requirement, as it does not simply refer to working experience. Defined by the word “Canadian,” it denotes a lot of things and can really be flexible in its reference depending on the situation. More often than not, when asked, different people, including the employers, give different
explanations. It may suggest some kind of working experience inside Canada or the ability to fit into the Canadian workplace.

According to Lionel Laroche, a cross-cultural training provider, “lack of Canadian experience” is used by employers to express their concerns about the qualifications or skills of immigrants (2006). Laroche explains that employers ask for Canadian experience because they do not understand what immigrants have done in the past or their credentials; they are concerned whether immigrants have good communication skills, or whether their behaviors are adequate or their attire are appropriate; whether they have the right technical terms; or even whether they can engage people into appropriate “small talk.” All their doubts and questions are expressed in this gloss term “lack of Canadian experience” (Laroche, 2006). Laroche’s explanation represents the popular understanding of what “lack of Canadian experience” implies, which has been used as a kind of guideline by settlement and employment service sectors to prepare new immigrants for job search and integration. Laroche’s explanation, however, does not reveal the other implication of “lack of Canadian experience,” its function as the tool of exclusion.

The requirement for Canadian experience can act as a difficult barrier for new immigrant professionals, as a lot of them do not have local work experience, local communication patterns or the knowledge of the Canadian cultural norms when they first arrived. They might also lack local knowledge of industry trends. As a matter of fact, the employers’ demand for Canadian experience impacts on the career decision and employment opportunity of many immigrant professionals.
Mary’s story demonstrates exactly how the “lack of Canadian experience” had excluded her from working in her profession. A senior civil engineer with eight years construction site experience and three years experience as a manager of a civil engineering department, Mary felt blocked even from looking for an entry-level opportunity to prove her ability to work in her profession. Prepared with her resumé for civil engineering positions, Mary never dared to send one resumé out, not even for the entry-level jobs, as she was intimidated by the employers’ demand for Canadian experience. She explained this fear: “if you do not have Canadian experience, they never hire you, it is very difficult.” For Mary, the requirement of Canadian experience was devastating in her situation, as she was not willing to change career due to her love of her previous occupation. In order to work as a civil engineer, Mary needed to be re-certified; but in order to apply for a certification, Mary needed to have at least one year’s Canadian work experience in her profession. Without a license, Mary could not work as an engineer; without local work experience, she could not apply for a license. As a consequence, Mary was placed into a deadly knot. Eva pointed out the ridiculous paradox implied in this requirement for Canadian experience: “they are asking for Canadian experience, and how can you have it if they don’t give you any chance?”

Terri’s story of changing career illustrates another example of the profound impact that the requirement for Canadian experience has on immigrant professionals. Realizing that her experience in China would not be recognized as indicated by many of her friends’ experience, Terri knew that she could not work as an architectural engineer when she first arrived. She knew that the only possibility for her to find a job in her
field was to start off as a draftsperson as many of her friends did. Her observation of other people’s experience indicated that only a small portion of the group could finally move up from draftsperson, while a lot of them would stay as draftsperson for a life time. This career prospect really did not impress Terri. To avoid the same kind of fate as her friends, Terri chose to change her career, to do something different. Even for an experienced administrator like Janice, who worked within the British education system for years, the lack of Canadian experience was something that she had to make up to find a good job. Janice had to start from the “clerical job, the menial job” that did not fully engage her intellectual ability and experience in order to gain the local experience through the form of an “apprenticeship.”

It has been well documented that employers manipulate this notion of “lack of Canadian experience.” With this term, employers can safely express their distrust with foreign credentials and experience, and also legitimize their biased decision on hiring foreign trained professionals. It is worth noticing that not everybody needs Canadian experience to get his/her first job in Canada. Americans usually do not need Canadian experience when they enter the Canadian labour market. Therefore, the use of “lack of Canadian experience” to keep immigrant professionals outside of the professional employment also indicates more intricate social and political relations, as Mojab has pointed out, “While the lack of Canadian experience is a technical problem, it has, at the same time, racial, ethnic, and class dimensions” (Mojab, 1999, p. 132).

In this research, “lack of Canadian experience” did set up a barrier to block immigrant professionals from entering their professions in Canada and led to my
respondents’ unemployment, underemployment and career change. Terri, Janice, Mary and Eva all had been impacted by this “lack.” After four years of immigration, Mary was still left out of her civil engineering profession. Terri kept changing her career in order to avoid being considered inadequate. The only woman who got her first professional job within six months time was Yvonne, who had an American degree and work experience before immigration to Canada. But she experienced underemployment. Cathy was not impacted by this “lack” at the beginning as she went into survival jobs and changed her direction right from the start. However, Cathy had experienced the exclusion as a new comer in terms of gaining work experience as she was not within the age range of the group who were entitled for the program of gaining work experience. Cathy complained:

I had bad experience with the government. They founded a program, a summer job for youth. The youth need the experience, but we also need. We have no experience in the field; we also need experience, right. I have applied more than twenty, even a hundred jobs, [but] because the job applicant must be 15-24 [years old] …I cannot get the job.

Cathy’s experience indicates that there was really no assistance available for new immigrants like her to acquire local experience, as they were most probably not entitled to those government programs or services. Hence, immigrants’ disadvantaged position in the Canadian society is fully illustrated through their inability to meet this requirement by employers for Canadian experience.

Devaluation of Foreign Credentials

In spite of the belief that immigrants’ educational attainment correlates to their
employment opportunities as suggested by a Statistics Canada study (Chui & Devereau, 1995, p. 19), a lot of immigrant professionals would find their credentials and educational experiences discounted after arrival. Although all came with university degrees, my participants found their previous qualifications and education were not really appreciated by the Canadian labour market. As pointed out by Peter Li, “despite academic and policy interests in immigrants’ credentials, their precise market worth is unclear” (Li, 2001, p. 23). Their credentials and degrees were treated as non-existent or discounted as in the case of Janice, Cathy, Mary and Terri. In order to make up for this devaluation, my respondents had to go back to school or change their career.

Janice remembered how she could not use her former master’s degree to apply for her Ph.D. study as her foreign degree was not recognized by the university. As a consequence, she had to do another master’s degree in order to apply for her Ph.D. study. Janice said, “when you came into Canada, some work was not recognized. So they chose not to recognize my master’s degree and asked me to do another master’s degree.” For Janice, the devaluation of her foreign credentials meant two more years’ full-time schooling. Janice’s story definitely illustrates how immigrant professionals’ career plan and employment can be hampered by this devaluation of foreign credentials in Canada.

Cathy’s experience is another example of this impact. Cathy had to complete a whole three-year study in a Canadian college, as she could not transfer any credits from her former bachelor’s degree. She said bitterly “Chinese degree was not being included” in the assessment of her qualifications.
Mary’s experience is one more example of this unequal treatment of foreign credentials. As Mary was not willing to change her career and moving into other directions, this devaluation directly blocked her from entering her profession. After more than two years hard work, Mary did improve her level of English and was pretty fluent to express herself; however, her confidence to find a professional job had not grown with her improved English because there was a clear fear in Mary’s mind. She was scared by the labour market demand for a license, Mary said bitterly, “I do not have an evaluation and a license…every job posting I saw they asked people for PEO\textsuperscript{13}. And I do not have these certifications.” Mary’s many years of experience and bachelor’s degree did not give her credit for qualifications and skills that employers asked, so she had to start from scratch. Even such a humble start, for example, an entry-level job, was hard to find in her case. Sadly enough, Mary ended with doing a lot of menial jobs, as she said, “not the kind of job I wanted for myself.” There was no way for Mary to have a license. She needed Canadian work experience and some training to apply for that paper.

The barriers of re-credentialing, re-licensing and re-certification definitely intimidated new immigrants. Immigrant professionals are profoundly impacted by this rigid ruling regulatory system. The devaluation of foreign credentials kept the women in this study out of employment and drove them to changing career and going back to school.

\textsuperscript{13} Professional Engineering of Ontario
5.2. Strategies to Negotiate Professional Employment

To tackle their “insufficiency” and “readiness gap,” my respondents did take great efforts in making changes and adjustments. The major strategies found with them are: studying English to improve their English proficiency, going back to school to provide evidence of local credentials, changing career as a solution to adjust to the “lack of Canadian experience” and accommodating to the need of the Canadian labour market, and changing views and attitudes to adjust to the host society and its requirements. I will discuss each of these below.

Learning English

As a way to confront their lack of English proficiency, some of the respondents in this study made a great effort to study English in the government funded English programs, for example, LINC and ESL. Cathy, Mary and Eva all engaged in English study after their arrival in Canada. Considering the demand and time commitment required to study English amongst their need to survive, learning English is definitely not an easy task to accomplish without persistent efforts and hard work.

For those immigrant women professionals who were coping with survival needs and family responsibilities, English study also meant double burden and overloaded responsibilities. Cathy had to work eight hours in a garment factory while she studied in the LINC program. In order to study English full-time while making a living, Mary had to work the whole week, had not even one day to rest. With strenuous survival jobs and English study, Mary’s health degraded and she lost two babies due to miscarriage.
There were other obstacles in studying English efficiently. Immigrant professionals might not be able to find proper government-funded English programs for professionals as LINC and ESL are designed only for the general purpose of everyday communication. Those free programs are not aimed at immigrant professionals’ English for employment purposes, as several reports and research have shown (George, et al., 2004; Han, 2007; Shan, 2005; Tory, 2006). Then studying English in a lot of situations means that immigrant women need to either pay the tuition to go to more focused and oriented programs, like what Mary did with her college programs, or to fight a losing battle wasting their time and money.

Considering the requirements of the Canadian labour market for higher standard communication skills (spoken and written English skills) to do certain jobs, for example, technical jobs, management, social services and education jobs, immigrant women’s efforts to polish their English might still not be able to lead them to an accomplished level within a short time. In addition, there are always expectations they cannot meet, for example, speaking without accent or like Canadians. The acquisition of English fluency also did not necessarily render one the confidence to get a professional job as in the case of Mary. As a result, Mary became depressed and scared.

In analyzing the English language learning process of immigrants, Han discovered that “language learning entails a long and slow socialization process in

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14 In one of conservative party’s report, John Tory has pointed out that ESL kind of training although well-intentioned and generally with good quality, “is often at a basic, daily survival level and does little to prepare the skilled immigrant for an actual career” as they do not provide “career-appropriate language and or the broader area of cultural communication skills and cues” (Tory, 2006, p.25).
which one learns the language, among other things, both consciously and unconsciously” (Han, 2007, p. 8). Most women in my study could not afford this slow socialization process of language learning as they had urgent need for employment, limited budget for educational and training investment and other responsibilities to accommodate. Therefore, their strategies of improving English were seen as conditioned and limited approaches to increasing employment opportunities.

Going Back to School

Immigrant professionals are often told that they do not need a local education or credentials to get a job, as those government-funded job search programs usually inform their participants, But after receiving no replies for their job application or informed through friends or other resources of the uselessness of their foreign credentials, a lot of them came to believe there was a need to have a local stamp on their credentials. My respondents’ experience showed that the pursuit of a local education was a common activity for most of them; five out of six women engaged themselves or were planning to engage themselves in training or further education (mostly higher education). Janice and Terri went to university right after they landed; Cathy went to LINC and Adult High School first and then went to college; Mary was planning to get a degree or diploma from a local university, while Eva was considering of doing some serious English program at college.

There is a need to see the reasons behind my respondents’ persistent pursuit of a local higher education. Is it a strategy to meeting the requirements of the Canadian
labour market and their special way to make up for their “lack”? There are two
questions that we need to ask here. Why is going back to school or getting a local higher
education a popular choice for most women in this study? What does this choice imply?

First, let us examine what are the reasons for those immigrant women to obtain a
local higher education. When asked why she needed to go to university, Cathy replied,
“Because I changed my field, right? I cannot teach Chinese here. So I think I need
further education. Education can improve my English, right? I may know a lot about the
Canadian Culture.” Cathy’s view of the function of a local higher education is practical
and pragmatic, closely related to meeting the need of her settlement life and to
successfully navigating the uneven water of a new environment. She definitely found in
education some kind of promise and guarantee for the future, as she further remarked, “I
do not know anything about job market, and I don’t have any friends here. I just started
by myself. So I think I am already in the school system will help me, I can get co-op
placement from the teacher, from students.” There are several agendas behind her
pursuit of a local education. At the practical level, a local education would definitely
provide her the necessary preparation and qualifications for a career change. Secondly,
Cathy also used going into the education system as an effective way to get exposure to
the mainstream culture. Thirdly, she did regard getting into the education system would
open up networking and job opportunities for her.

Other respondents also viewed the same function of education as Cathy did. With
no hope of returning to her civil engineering field, Mary also saw going back to school
as a possible way to reconnect with her profession. Through the example of her
husband’s successful professional relocation, she saw the same potential result for herself: going back to school first and then getting a good job.

Even for Terri who was somewhat resistant to the process of integration by claiming that she did not want to be 100% Canadian, local education was still a very positive experience for her. It was a way to help her move into the mainstream society, a tool for her to find meaning in life, a label she could use to open a market for herself in her own community and something with which she could even open a business back in her home country. Terri started her re-schooling right after her arrival and got her bachelor’s degree from a local university. Now she was enrolled at another university for her master’s degree. Looking at the experience of Terri, it is easy to see what promises that my respondents saw in going back to school. At the time of our interview, Terri was planning to quit her job with that non-profit organization in order to focus on her study. When asked why she chose to stay in school all the time, Terri said: “because I like university” and summed up her praise for local higher education in one word-- “enlightening.”

It is worth noticing the reasons my respondents gave in terms of their pursuit of a local education and the ways they conceptualized this strategy. The notion of individual empowerment through western higher education was so strongly ingrained in my respondents’ minds that even their decision for immigration was based on this belief. Janice disclosed the reason for her immigration as to “take the advantage of the highest level of education here, because that’s one of the things we miss in our country.” Janice found in higher education the same kind of power to help her quickly move up and
regain her status, in her own words it can “quickly transfer my status to something from nothing.” A senior administrator in an academic institution before immigration, Janice seemed totally aware of the benefit and advantage of “being in” the system. After one and half year in Canada, she already had a full-time job offer in university administration. She perceived her rather successful experience as:

If you think I am successful, [it is] the strength of being in school, …, coming to school …at York or whatever. I think school is a very nice place to start. Because at school you get people who have certain way of thinking, a certain way of doing things that’s really close to you rather than being out there.

Janice’s usage of “in” and “out” definitely revealed how some immigrant professionals view higher education in the West. It is definitely related to empowerment. Therefore, being in the system of education was regarded as one necessary step towards being included. While the other forms of acceptance and inclusion (social acceptance and labour market participation) were hard to obtain, education, comparatively speaking, functions as a kind of acceptance and recognition for those immigrant professionals. As long as one pays the tuition fee and meets the entrance requirements, one is accepted and admitted, and has the chance to participate. While other forms of participation were hard to get, this educational participation was easier to obtain for my respondents.

Therefore, compared with being “out there”, schooling in Janice’s view was definitely closer to something that could empower her. This empowerment could even extend to giving her a valid passport to travel to any opportunity in academic institutions in the world. Janice credited local higher education in the same way as
Cathy did—for its empowerment function.

This logic also explains why Janice, Cathy and Terri planned to have more years in school after they got a job. After LINC, Adult High School and college, Cathy was planning to get a bachelor’s degree in Social Service from a local university. Janice was attending her Ph.D. courses while working full-time. Terri seemed to be enjoying the environment of university so much that she was planning to quit her full-time job to go back to school.

However, one thing that these immigrant women professionals might not realize regarding attending college or university is the globalization and market function of education. With the time and money spent, immigrant women's educational attainments might not guarantee them employment, as pointed out by Badets and Howatson-Lee: “unemployment rates for recent immigrant women do not decline significantly with higher education, unlike the rates for Canadian-born women” (1999, p.16). Therefore, my participants’ choice of schooling & education was not totally a personal choice for knowledge or improvement; there was an external system that shaped their choice beyond their knowledge. The pursuit of higher education was more than just to increase employability skills and to open up opportunities. Their choice of going back to school has also indicated how limited their choice could be as indicated by Terri: “so what else I can do? Like other than…this is the only way.” Going back to school as the only way for immigrant women to tackle their unemployment or underemployment problems surely indicates immigrant women’s powerless position in their new social environment. It demonstrates another conditioned and limited strategy of theirs.
Besides the above-mentioned efforts, changing career was also one of the measures used by those immigrant women to tackle employment barriers. Unable to find jobs in professions that utilized their previous experience or skills, the immigrant women interviewed also tended to change or re-plan their career. Terri and Cathy totally changed to other fields; Janice stooped down from her administrator’s position to accept what she described as “clerical or menial jobs”; Yvonne did use what her former experience and trainings prepared her for, teaching English; but as a Ph.D. degree holder, she would definitely do a little bit more than just teaching entry-level ESL English if she was not an immigrant. Yvonne could also be regarded as switching her focus and direction in her career. Mary was torn between the idea of changing her profession pressured by the reality of not being able to find a job in her previous profession and her love for what she did before immigration. Due to lack of Canadian experience and local credentials, all she could work at during her three years in Canada were survival jobs, such as a helper in the kitchen of the fast food industry or a cashier at the front counter of the Bakery. Thus, Mary also changed her career, if not voluntarily; it was a forced change.

Although not being able to find a professional job in their previous fields was the biggest reason for most of them to change or redirect their career, there were also some other factors that facilitated this change. For example, when Terri realized that she could only start as a draftperson in the field of architecture design, she made up her mind to move into something else. For Cathy, change of career was an inevitable choice as the
possibility of teaching Chinese language in Canada was slim. Cathy actually planned for this change before she left China. Even though other women in my study did not plan to change their career before immigration, once they landed in Canada, to make adjustment was almost a necessary part of their job search plan. Janice, the former Dean of Student Services, did regard redirecting her career as a necessary strategy to get back to her previous position as she admitted: “I think I was really prepared to come to start over, …to be humble, to be ready to start…to transfer my status to something from nothing.” For Terri and Cathy, changing careers, although forced by circumstances also incorporated their interests. When immigrants have to change their occupations, there are always two kinds of reasons behind their choices, it is either too hard to find their jobs in Canada due to the unbalanced demand and supply in the labour market or because they are excluded from their professions. So there is a general trend among immigrants to change their occupations to those fields that are usually less interesting to local Canadians, as discovered by Terri: “everybody [Chinese immigrants] chose accounting and computer science because they thought it’s easy to find a job.” However, there was a different element involved in my participants’ occupation change, which was seen as both enabling seeking better opportunities in the Canadian labour market as well as finding something that interested them. Considering the constraints they faced in terms of their professional relocation due to employment barriers, my participants’ consideration of something that interested them in their career change has showed tremendous strength and endurance. Terri was aware of the hard efforts she needed for her career change:
I am glad I did not stay in computer science or accounting, like the two things most Chinese newcomers chose. I am glad I took a different path, maybe harder because I did it all by myself but really rewarding; it’s hard for sure, like much, much harder to realize.

Surely, it is a hard path to change career, to give up all the trainings and experience and to start from scratch. Not everyone could afford to take this path. Terri and Cathy’s career choice cannot be viewed separately from other factors that affected their career decision. Terri did admit that she had certain advantages that enabled her to take this hard path. Terri commented on her ability to change career as: “I am much younger. I have the time, I am lucky,” and “I had a kind of financial support.” For Terri, her comparatively “well-off” economic condition and the fact that her husband found a good job after arrival did exert some influence on how much time she could afford to plan and to pursue what she wanted to do. With the average age of the group around 35-40, not everyone could afford to take this hard path, to invest many years and a lot of money to make a change.

Cathy’s story demonstrates a harder experience regarding career change. In order to improve her English ability and meet the college entrance requirement, Cathy had to study English for more than two years. The first year she had to work 8 hours in the garment factory while going to English class in the evening. The second year she studied English full-time in order to raise her English level. Not everyone could successfully manage this heavy load of work and study. Mary’s experience illustrates the consequence of accommodating a heavy load of work and study: dealing with both survival needs and job search requirements. For Mary whose husband started as a student there was no luck of using her time to make her choice. Mary got to work at
some menial jobs to cover the living expenses and to support her husband to finish his study. As a result of dealing with the heavy load of work and study, Mary lost her mental as well as physical health. Therefore, changing career was not only regulated by the labour market demand, it was also mediated by the social class location of those women.

**Changing Views and Attitudes**

In addition to changing career, there were some other changes that those women went through, for example, changing their views and attitudes. Those changes could be self-initiated; they could also be imposed. Those changes involved changing expectations, changing their views towards a low rank job and being practical.

Janice’s story of lowering herself demonstrates the ambivalent nature of these kind of changes. Coming with a title, a status and a name, Janice started her first job in Canada in an office to arrange files, which she referred to as “not using your brain.” Even she knew clearly that her entry-level job was clerical and manual and too simplistic to involve intellectual activities, Janice took it as the first brick to build her career in Canada. She knew how to reconcile the discrepancy between her expectation and the reality.

Cathy worked at all kinds of jobs totally unrelated to her profession and made use of this kind of experience for her future career preparation as she thought: “I can know the different level of the society …now I choose the community worker program, I should know …I might work with the textile worker or some individuals.”

Immigrant women’s ability to make adjustment was also demonstrated in how
they understood their situation and tried to improve it as shown by Janice’s remarks: “I knew it was not worthy of my time, the work was very simplistic, of course it was not challenging; but who is going to give you a challenging job to start with?”

Nobody is going to give a new immigrant a job that is compatible to their experience and skills. Working with this constraint, my respondents came up with strategies to change their views and expectations. Referring to her job search experience, Terri told me how she was really trying to lower herself down: “I even tried to apply for restaurant job too.” Though only in Canada for less than a year, Eva started to make changes. Talking about her experience of adjustment, Eva said: “yeah… I changed my life and I see things differently now. I’m more patient. I have to be more organized. I’m thinking differently about how to get a job.”

Cathy had never complained about all those hard survival jobs, as she firmly believed that they were just a part of the transitional process that she had to go through. She clearly knew the gap between what she had and what was required by the Canadian labour market. Her attitude towards her survival jobs demonstrates her strength in coping with the reality as shown by her remarks:

I know it was a temporary work. I cannot do it for my whole life, right? I just do it now for money. I have confidence I will change, so I never thought that way, even I have to do some pizza maker job, I think I can practice my English at Pizza Hut, right? Yeah. I think things in a positive way.

Changing views and attitude can be regarded also as a necessary and inevitable process for those women to start their lives in Canada. But whether those changes were
self-initiated or imposed, then, is a question. As the stories of these women showed, there was another change that was accompanying their adjusting and adaptation process. Three out of six women felt depressed and frustrated. Half of the women I interviewed also reported feeling frustrated. Therefore, when the Canadian society is expecting immigrants to make changes to adjust to the new social environment, we need to consider how those changes and adjustments would also change those women’s motivation in life, views towards themselves and their immigration life. I will address this question in the next chapter.

5.3. Summary

The settlement experience proved to be challenging and frustrating for most immigrant women professionals in this study. During their process of negotiating professional employment, these women tried hard to respond to the requirements of the Canadian labour market. Due to their different background and economic status, their approaches and strategies were found different. Some of them were found engaging more strategies while others were found encountering more difficulties.

Their experiences indicate that the logic of superiority and inferiority has been institutionalized in the form of “standard ideology of language,” devaluation of foreign credentials, the requirement for “Canadian experience.” Immigrants are encountering a structural discrimination and racism. Not only immigrants’ skills and qualifications are not recognized by a western/Canadian standard, their failure to obtain professional jobs is referred to as their lack of social skills. They need to change everything possible in
order to integrate and to be included, from language, social behavior to customs.

Therefore, in analyzing the difficulties that these immigrant women encountered in locating professional employment that engaged their trainings and skills, this study distinguished the real lack in their skills and competence from constructs that resulted from prejudice and discrimination. The publicly recognized language barriers of immigrants, for example, were found as both real incompetence as well as prejudiced judgments on immigrants’ language skills. Those constructed barriers were what really impinged immigrant women from locating a suitable employment, as they did not only affect their job opportunities; they also functioned as conceptual blocks that discouraged women from labour market participation. It was proved by the stories of the women interviewed that real barriers to employment could be removed through hard efforts of learning and working, as shown by the improved language proficiency of the respondents, but the constructed blocks tended to doom these women forever as they could not come up with effective strategies towards changing people’s perceptions on immigrants’ skills and competence. Those perceptions were deeply rooted in a social context of discrimination and prejudice that contribute to certain kind of views and attitudes towards immigrants based on their race, gender and class.

In order to negotiate opportunities of professional employment, women in this research had to adopt some strategies including studying English, changing career, going back to school and changing views. These strategies, as employed within the social context that constrained and disadvantaged immigrant women, could not empower these women to finally move out from their unemployment and
underemployment confinement. Their strategies were found conditioned and limited. Going back to school to tackle the lack of Canadian experience, lack of license and certification indicates they could not change the existing system no matter how unjust and unfair they might be to immigrants. They could only change themselves. But their changes were constrained by their socioeconomic status and location, and even by their roles in the family. In this sense, their strategies might not work all the time.
There is a publicly believed assumption that once immigrants have jobs, they will be ok. This perception ignores the other aspects of immigration life and the factors that impact on immigrants’ experience of integration and settlement. The following findings will argue that employment alone would not grant immigrant women a complete settling down, as shown by my respondents’ stories, besides labour market factors, there are other factors that affected these women’s decision making, their expectations of immigration life and their strategies for settlement.

6.1. Traditional Gender Roles in a New Social Context

Although most of these women came from countries where patriarchal structure is still the norm, their former social and economic class did free them from some of the burden of domestic labour. Before immigration, with their social status supported by their economic condition, these professional women in my study found help in raising their children or with domestic chores through hiring domestic helpers or using their family support system\(^{15}\). After immigration, with the huge drop in family income and job status, they mostly could not afford to hire a domestic helper in their early years of settlement. Their former family support system or network was not available, as none of them had their senior family members with them. Their responsibilities and duties within the family did change. Janice described this change here:

\(^{15}\) In many non-western countries, senior members of the family tend to help take care of their grand children.
…in Kenya, you have house helpers, your family help you. And suddenly I was just alone and had my children; my children were two years when I first came. My son was two years; another one was three years… So I was like, oh, my God, how do I start? And then my husband was not home; he has a full-time job. …So I took the whole responsibilities. So I couldn’t work, my children and my study were enough jobs for me.

This change in family support system affected these immigrant women in terms of their family responsibilities. The change in terms of their family responsibilities might involve added work and duties in the new social context. They and their spouse most probably had to take on all the housework by themselves without any help from outside, to do everything with their own hands. There was also another change for these women within the family. As some of them came as the spouse of their already established husband, as in the case of Eva, they had to live on the earnings of the man. Even if they came at the same time with their husband, if they came as the dependent immigrant rather than the principal applicant, their husband usually had better qualifications to find a job, as in the case of Terri, Janice and Cathy. In some cases men took the time to find the job first, as in the case of Mary.

These changes within the family have a huge impact on these women’s career planning and sense of themselves as it meant more work in the family. As their position in the family was not the same as their husband due to the different financial situation and experience of immigration for the wife and the husband, when there was a choice and priority involved, domestic responsibilities usually needed to be considered first by these women, taking time and energy away from their professional relocation. This
disadvantaged position of women was on the one hand due to their newly diminished economic status, on the other hand, due to the fact that they had to live on their husband’s income. Their newly increased dependency on their husband or spouse to make a living really left them with fewer options. When men became the master at home, their interest came first.

Mary and Eva’s stories illustrate this kind of economic status shift as well as family role change after immigration. Both women were working professionals before immigration, and Mary was even a manager in her field. Post-immigration economic status change forced Eva to accept the traditional gender role in the family. So for the first time in her life, Eva had to learn how to cook and clean the house and how to attend to her husband, as Eva recalled, “it was a huge, huge change…I didn’t cook before and I had to do it and I did not know how to…”

This change meant even greater sacrifice for Mary. When Mary’s husband came to Canada as a graduate student, Mary had to give up her department manager position in Brazil and accompanied him to his university. Mary had to work for two years in survival jobs to support her husband to complete his study. She reasoned. “My husband was studying, someone needed to work to pay the bills.” When she wanted to study English, she had to use her weekend and evening hours, which left not a single day for her to rest. For Mary, professional considerations then should give way to her responsibility to support her student husband by working in survival jobs. This hard experience impeded her in job search and even damaged her health (both mental and physical). After two years immigration life, Mary was depressed as well as lost her
The changed roles within the family contributed to a newly formed inequity between men and women. As Mary’s story about what happened to her and her husband after two years immigration illustrates: “When he finished his MBA, it was easy to get a good job. But for me, I continued as the same. I only learnt English, and I am two years outside my profession. This is very frustrating.” Mary’s story clearly displayed the different experience for men and women in the immigration process. Men were the ones who took time to study and to find their professional jobs, as also in the case of Cathy, Janice and Eva. Men’s career was more important compared to women’s.

As this inequity was taken for granted or ignored in most cases because of the special union between men and women after immigration in settling in a new country, women’s experience of oppression was not identified. Although severely depressed after losing two babies in miscarriages due to her overwork in her first two years in Canada, Mary still did not realize the oppression she had experienced. She was accepting her new role in the family and incorporating the need of taking care of her husband into her job search. Talking about her future job search plan during the interview, Mary admitted that the focus in her life at present stage was her domestic responsibilities. She said, “I’d like to have weekends free to take care of my husband, my home and everything.” She would never think that now it was her husband’s turn to take care of her and give her the time to strive for getting back into her field. Mary’s newly acquired dependence on her husband had already changed her, a former independent career woman, and repositioned her within the family. Mary did recognize the change in her, although she
might not relate it to her changed socioeconomic condition and her changed position in
the domestic space as she had already internalized her role as the domestic service
provider and her subordinate relation to her husband. Without recognizing the cause of
her change, Mary blamed it to the weather: “I am lazy [passive rather than active] here,
I do not know why. …I know I have a lot of problems in my life here, but I do not know
why; it is different. I don’t know if the weather made me.” Mary would not recognize
the oppression she faced in the family. She took her changed position in the family for
granted. At the end of our interview, Mary came to the conclusion that her marriage was
good. Her problem and depression was caused by her unemployment, her loss of job
related responsibilities. She tended to regard her confusion, her problem and her
depression as the result of her loss of job responsibilities:

I like to have responsibilities. Here I do not have responsibilities,
because I do not have a job. I do not have something to study. I do
not have responsibilities. I am flying, I do not have my feet on the
floor. And I miss that, I miss to have everything to do…I can do a
lot of things, but I do not know the way.

Mary’s explanation of her changed life surely did not take her gendered role in the
family into consideration, and thus did not take gender into account in recognizing her
source of oppression.

There was another type of response to this inequality between men and women in
terms of their roles in the family and in marital relationship. Eva and Terri’s responses
to this inequity between men and women demonstrate that women’s newly ascribed
gender role after immigration was not welcomed by all women interviewed. Feeling
entrapped within her situation and unable to change her dependent role in the family,

Eva reported her discontent, saying to her husband:

You are happy here because you go to work, you come back, you have seen your wife who cleans the place, who cooks, who packs your lunch for the next day, so to sleep with this woman. But what about me? I don’t feel happy. I miss my family, I miss my job, I don’t have friends, and it’s a big difference.

Financially secured with her husband working in the bank and being told by her husband to take time for her job search, this newly married Eva admitted that she was once very depressed about her situation as she declared:

I feel alone. I miss my family, and sometimes I got desperate and told my husband I wanted to go back. This is not for me and I had a nice job there, and so I tried to convince him to go back there. And he said “take it easy.” It’s easy for him here.

Eva fully understood the different experience for men and women in their immigration and settlement life. She was aware of the different feeling of her husband and her towards their immigrant life, which was based on their different position within the family. As the subordinated wife, she had to attend to her husband’s need by serving him. This new feminine role displeased Eva as she had her pre-immigration life, her life before the subordination as the comparison. Although discontent with her life in Canada, depending on her husband and unemployed, Eva still had to accept her husband’s arrangement for her life. Her situation was that of discontent and compromise. Terri’s story, however, demonstrates the possibility of not compromising towards oppression. With a more successful career, Terri could walk out of her marriage that required her to
give up her career plan and take on traditional gender roles. When asked why she
divorced her husband, Terri replied: “reasons? His parents came, they wanted us to have
baby right away. And they need to have a boy, no matter what, they need to have a boy,
so I am kind of sticking to what I think. …So it is a kind of conflict.” With her
employment and newly acquired freedom, Terri could stick to what she believed.

Facing inequalities outside and at home, women did show both compromise and
resistance. Terri rebelled against her traditional feminine role defined by her patriarchal
parents-in-law “to have a boy.” In order to pursue her own goals in life, Terri had to
divorce her husband, “a nice guy,” to avoid taking the responsibilities of a mother and a
wife. Ironically, immigration became a kind of liberation for Terri. She found that the
new environment allowed her to have her own will.

Those changed roles and responsibilities of my respondents did not only
reposition them in the family, but also contributed to how they were located in the
labour market. Even Yvonne, the only woman who could find a job relating to her
training right after immigration, had to stick to her job for nine years in order to
maintain a stable income for her family, to fulfill her motherly responsibilities as she
declared that she needed to support her son even if this meant confinement to an
underemployment. When she finally realized her insecure employment status, it was too
late. She was laid off and had to struggle again as new immigrants in finding a job.
Yvonne’s experience testifies women’s lack of labour mobility as the result of the effect
of household patterns on women’s employment behaviors.
6.2. Sense of Belonging

There was an overall sense of anxiety among the women interviewed. This sense of anxiety was the expression of a combination of unsettling feelings: not feeling accepted and appreciated by the host country, a strong sense of difference and dislocation, and anxiety and worry due to uncertainty about where they would be finally located in the Canadian society. There was also a constant comparison and contrast going on around this sense of anxiety, in most cases, pre-immigration experience was the evident reference to their life in Canada in this comparison/contrast.

After successfully integrating herself into the Canadian labour market, Terri still did not feel a sense of belonging. Her sense of lack of belonging was a result of her experience of not having been accepted. Terri admitted: “I haven’t had any friends in my workplace.” She found that her efforts to emerge into the social life of Canadians failed help her break in:

So it is a kind of distance here. Even I tried hard once to get in, sometimes I forced myself. Now I came to that stage I do not need to do that anymore like when I just came here, I tried to do, tried different things and tried to please them, tried to be open…

After all those years’ hard efforts to plug herself in, Terri lost her motivation and interest as she admitted: “I have been working and studying in the mainstream for a long time, I am tired. I tried hard to fit in.” Terri realized that there was a gap that she might never be able to bridge; she came to the conclusion that “I do not see I belong here. We are different.”

It was interesting to see how Terri started with great expectation and then ended
with disillusion. There was a sharp contrast between her experience upon arrival and after as she described:

I feel it is harder now. Actually when I just came here, I felt like here it looked very nice, you know, everything looked great until I really wanted to be close with people here, I found it is very hard. For example, if I wanted to make friends, and approached ten people, one people probably wanted to talk to me. This kind of people rejection…

Terri came to the sad conclusion that immigrants are not welcomed. She remarked:

One thing I can say is you are not them, they do not need us, like Canadians, the general public do not need us coming to their labour market, right? They may be friendly on the surface; they do not need you be their friends…

Among the women interviewed, Terri’s labour market integration can be regarded as a successful one. She did not only find a full-time job, but also worked in the field that she was interested. However, unlike some researchers assumed, successful labour market integration does not equate to successful post immigration integration and settlement, as employment alone does not provide all the elements that contribute to a successful and satisfactory immigrant life.

The sense of not belonging redirected Terri’s career planning, which was very much against the initial immigration decision that she came with. She admitted, “My long term goal is to go back China.” Going back to her community, in Terri’s view, was the only way to fulfill her career goal and utilize her potentials. She saw the meaning of going back as she put it, “…I just can do more in my community with the same
effort. …It is easier for me to reach some kind of achievement.” The transformation that happened to Terri from great expectation to disillusion in her immigration process is really illustrating of some immigration experience of those immigrant professionals. Coming from China to look for her dream, Terri was disheartened that she could never find that dreamed life on the land of maple leaves that she once gave the great expectation as she was constantly felt that she was not needed and appreciated.

This strong sense of not belonging is different from that of not “fitting in.” If “fitting in” refers to being able to function with competent social skills, Terri’s sense of not belonging was definitely not the result of her incapability to socialize and to plug in. Her experience depicted the different efforts of immigrants to integrate and the lack of response on the side of the host country to fully take immigrants in. This reality leads us to question the Canadian need of immigrants, only at the labour market level, to fill the shortage of labour force.

The same kind of feeling not belonging has also been expressed by Janice, Yvonne and Eva. Being in Canada longer does not necessarily mean to have a more settling sense. After being in Canada for nine years and working in a full-time position for eight years, Yvonne still did not feel settled. Her recent experience of being laid off has reinforced her sense of not being settled down. When asked about her future plan, Yvonne did admit that she had the plan to leave Canada, to go down south (United States) to look for a more accommodating job.

This sense of not belonging was also a demonstration of how cultural differences were perceived and conceptualized by the immigrant women professionals. Janice made
a clear statement that she would finally return back to Kenya:

I certainly cannot retire in Canada, I think so, because of my cultural background I am inbred, we do not live in that old people’s home. I can not imagine, I can not bring myself to imagine that, so I am seeing myself getting old back home with my people around me, so doing that, I do not think myself so useless, I do not think I am weak and so useless. Imagining getting old gracefully, getting old in an institution in Kenya, probably with other experience I got here, I do not see I am useless.

With their previous social and economic status, going back to their home country is definitely a career and life option for those immigrant women professionals. In this design of going back, their previous experience, both professional and social, was surely the positive reference that promised them what they could achieve and fulfil “back there.”

6.3. The Social Location of Immigrant Women

The social location of immigrant women is to a large extent, albeit not exclusively, determined by their employment and unemployment status. What kind of job they can get, how they can get and when they can get it did help locate those immigrant women in the Canadian society; however, how they were perceived and treated by other people also indicates their social location as well.

As all the women in this study were professionals who had a career, sometimes a very successful career before immigration, their sense of identity and view of immigrant life was inevitably related to whether they could successfully negotiate a professional
job after arrival. After being given an entry-level job, Janice knew that she changed from “somebody” with “a title, a status” to “nobody.” Unemployed, Mary and Eva all compared themselves as “nothing.” Their difficult experience in finding a suitable job did send them a clear message about their disadvantaged location associated with sense of loss. Mary gave a depiction here:

I am doing it [the job] there, here I am nothing, I am feel nothing here, ok, nothing, because I left everything in my country; and here I know I need to start studying again to do something in my life, I am…I can’t tell you I do not have a job, I had a lot of jobs, I had lots of jobs, but not the kind of job I want for myself.

However, employment status is not the only determinants of those women’s social location. Their social location is also determined by the host society’s level of acceptance of them. How other members of the society view them, expect from them and treat them indicate clearly where they stand and what place they hold in the Canadian society. From the stories of those immigrant women interviewed, it is not hard to see that low expectation and stereotyping views towards them help shape how they perceive their positions in the Canadian society.

Stereotyped views towards immigrants can be caused by cultural and political differences as well as resulted from prejudice, bias and discrimination. Janice’s comments about this kind of stereotyping views are illustrative: “They have a formed opinion just when they look at you.” Janice’s experience of encountering “language problem” definitely illustrates this kind of difficult experience of stereotyping. Terri also experienced this kind of stereotyping remarks at her workplace. Terri was not sure
whether those remarks were positive or not when I asked her about them:

T: My coworkers said to me, “you are not like Chinese.”
H: What did they mean by that?
T: I did not ask them, so like I am not as quiet as them, I am sort of loud.
H: You speak up?
T: sometimes speak up, and outgoing too.
H: So they said it as a kind of compliment, right?
T: No, I do not know. I do not know.

Terri’s employment history in Canada shows that she was pretty successful in her negotiation of professional employment. However, some of her workplace experience has made her aware that she was not totally accepted. First, she was puzzled by her supervisors’ attitude towards her as that supervisor never talked to her about anything outside her job:

I was the only one who has second language, so I was feeling like chit-chat, or whatever so, or I felt that I am not looking that cool to them, so I felt a little bit left out there. Yeah, just, so, my supervisor was really nice as long as talking about the job. In the lunch room she never said anything to me, I was kind of … you know, wow; but when I went to her office, anything job-related, so nice, and smile, but when to the social setting, she even did not look at me. Both of us, sitting there, she never talked to me. Somebody else came in, she would talk to them, so it’s kind of …I don’t know, it’s like so clear cut, so it’s not that comfortable place.

At another workplace, Terri felt that she was not appreciated. Terri’s sense of displacement and rejection was based on her discovery that she was treated differently; she was the alien, the incomprehensible. This discovery led her to question her
belonging and identity. There was an evident anxiety in her to expect being accepted wholly by her host country.

Janice’s experience of being questioned about her English ability made her realize not only that she was different but also that she had lost all her former social status after immigration. Hers was not a mere language comprehension; it was a social and cultural exclusion. This exclusion can be sometimes complicated by all kind of social and political elements, as Janice found: “certainly I think people are afraid, it is too difficult to accept you, because of your uncertainty.” This uncertainty could be their color, their gender and even their home country’s political, social and economic profile. They are individuals, but they are not simply “the individuals” in other’s eyes. They walked with a background from a place that might not be comprehensible.

Those prejudices and bias can really discourage immigrant women from professional relocation and integration. The experience of rejection and not being accepted can also lead to identity and belonging crisis in immigrant women. Being taken as a stranger, Terri reconstructed her identity as “muangliu,” the Chinese word for social outcast and those jobless drifters from the countryside. She came to a somewhat radical but sad conclusion that Canadians do not need these immigrants. The sense of being an outsider was so strong after years of hard efforts to fit in that Terri had finally realized that her successful integration into the Canadian labour market did not

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16 The Chinese word for migrating laborers from the countryside, who are part of the city in terms of the work they contribute but also not part of the city due to their low social status that entitles them nothing in terms of benefits, social welfare and access to a lot of city residents’ rights. They are the second or third citizens of the city.
necessarily grant her an acceptable location in the Canadian society. This realization led her to redefine herself as a “muangliu,” a new identity that she never dreamed of before immigration. As a result, Terri realized that she did not want to try to get accepted anymore. Her strategy towards this kind of rejection is to retreat into her comfort zone within the Chinese community. Terri said: “I do not want to be 100% Canadian.” It is important to notice how Terri approached differences. When there was no hope for her to be accepted into the Canadian society as she hoped, that is, not only working, but really a feeling of belonging, Terri gave up. Her way of responding to her bitter experience of not being fully accepted by the Canadian society is a strong indication of immigrants’ powerless position in the Canadian society and their inability to exert change.

When immigrant women are ready to make an effort to embrace the new world, is the host country ready to take them in whole-heartedly or reject them because of their differences? In the Canadian context, the acceptance might at a large part come from the official level supported by multiculturalism policy, but at the social level, in their everyday life and workplace, immigrant women usually encounter different forms of “not being taken in.” When they were networking and socializing with people, my respondents experienced the complicated mixture of acceptance and rejection that resulted in their identity crisis, belonging crisis and trust crisis.

It is really illuminating here to see how Ng regards immigrant women as a social construct (1999b). In her recognition of immigrant women as a social construct, Ng makes it explicit how gender, class and race contribute together towards this social
construction:

…it is clear that we cannot isolate gender, race, or class as the primary determinant of their experience. Rather, they are concrete relations that are interwoven; they work in complicated ways to give particular shapes and contours to people's everyday life (1998, p. 28).

6.4. Summary

Immigrants’ experiences of integration into the Canadian society, especially immigrants of visible minorities, are often the experiences of encountering hierarchy, discrimination and exclusion. Therefore, the process of integration is a process of fighting for inclusion and participation, which is not easily achieved as there are multi-dimensional obstacles and ordeals blocking the way.

Although Canada does not promote a complete assimilation package like the States does, there are open and undercurrent assimilation requirements not only in the labour market but also in the Canadian social life, in the form of what Leo Driedger calls “modified assimilation” (Driedger, 1989, p. 42), which does not demand for immigrant cultural extinction but rather take a modified pluralist approach. However, even there is no requirement for giving up their culture completely, there is requirement for cultural and behavior adaptation, attitudinal or civic assimilation, especially at a time when there is conflicting difference between these requirements and immigrants’ old beliefs.

Viewing immigrant women professionals’ labour market experience and strategies to negotiate employment opportunities in this study, it is important to notice that their efforts in locating a suitable employment that utilizes their skills and qualifications were
not only affected by the labour market factors but also other factors that situated them in a gender-specific and racialized position. As most women were affected by their post-arrival circumstances to take increased household responsibilities, their career plan and job search were delayed or affected. The experiences of these women indicate, there was a newly acquired inequity in their relationships to their “men” within the household that subordinated these women to their husband/spouse and decided their dependent position in the family.

There are other aspects of their immigration experience that demonstrates their disadvantaged position in the Canadian society as well. Even they might be able to integrate into the Canadian labour market, they might not be able to break into the social life of the Canadian society as they were not getting an expected acceptance by their host society. They were still encountering othering, rejection and exclusion.
“Maple leaf” is the symbol of Canada. It is a very attractive idea to use a maple leaf, the beautiful golden and red tree, to represent the country. The mere association of the country with maple leaf gives one the image of brightness and happiness. How many people have been lured to give up everything, for example, job, social and economic status, friends, relatives and sometimes family, to embrace this strange land of maple leaves of Canada, to encounter an unknown world and an invisible future? Canada is seen as a better country for immigrants and attracts thousands every year to land on its maple leaf-covered vast land, to benefit from its multicultural and democratic environment. Then, after arrival, immigrants start to realize that Canada is not immune from inequity and discrimination although it has a policy of multiculturalism.

As an exploration of female experience of post-arrival settlement and integration, this study discusses two processes of immigrant women professionals’ response towards the requirements of the Canadian labour market. The first process involves identifying their barriers to employment and the second process engages women’s strategies and responses towards those barriers that impinged on their employment. As shown through the image of “dancing with maple leaves,” immigrant women professionals in this study responded and made adjustments after immigration towards the multiple-dimensional expectations and requirements they discovered both within and beyond the labour market.

The research findings from interviews with six immigrant women professionals
revealed the intricate labour market and social relations that immigrant women encountered during their professional relocation process. They not only needed to fill the gap in terms of their real lack in skills and qualifications, they had also to cope with many prejudiced expectations and discriminative judgments from the Canadian society towards immigrants’ competence. The strategies revealed by their responses, although showing their courage, also serve as illustrations of their confined social and economic status, which was shaped by their gender, class and racial location in the Canadian society. The changes and adjustments they made turned out to be quite limited in contributing to the overall improvement of their circumstances and conditions. Therefore, even after a comparatively long period in Canada or successfully integrating into the Canadian labour market, they mostly still did not have the sense of belonging or feel truly settled down. A popular sense of anxiety was found with these women towards their future and their whereabouts.

Recognizing women’s changed gender roles is a key focus within this analysis. These immigrant women professionals were found to be experiencing a huge change in their household responsibilities that reflect their changed gender roles within the family. These women were forced by their changed circumstances to take on many household responsibilities that they were free of before immigration, for example, childcare and attending their husbands. As a result, their career plans and professional integration had been delayed or interrupted. In most cases, these women had to face the double burden of home and work.

While examining these women’s labour market responses and their changed
family roles, their perspectives and conceptualization of their experience were emphasized. These women were found to be both critical and also accommodating of their changed circumstances. Their approaches towards their newly acquired position and inequity with the family were found to be both compromising as well as resistant, depending on their level of dependence on their spouse or husband after immigration. Their social and economic circumstances played a part in their approaches. Their financial independence gained through employment might give them some power for resistance; on the other hand, their dependence on the man to make a living usually confined them to their subordinate position in the family. Employment status of these women, then, was seen to be tightly related to the other aspects of these women’s integration and settlement. Immigration in this sense was seen as having both emancipating as well as subjugating effects on these women.

Much of the present concern about immigrant professionals’ settlement and integration, both from the government and academic circles, centers on labour market issues and the improvement of employment opportunities for immigrant professionals. This suggests that a suitable employment would solve most of the immigrant problems in Canada, depending on the socioeconomic status of immigrants. But my research findings indicate that employment alone can not solve all the problems that immigrants encounter during their settlement and integration process, as employment is not the end but the beginning of integration. “It is also far too facile to presume that settlement in Canada is some kind of migration endpoint” (Preston & Tastoglou, 2005, p. 93).

Starting with examining immigrant women professionals’ labour market experience in
this study, I came to learn that there are a lot of issues “beyond the labour market” that impact on immigrant women’s sense of belonging, career decision and views towards the Canadian society. Even for those women who have successfully integrated into the Canadian labour market, there was a strong sense of anxiety and isolation identified. For most women in this study, the most difficult experience was not necessarily unemployment, language “barriers” or the demanding survival needs. The most difficult part of their experience, as reported by these women, is the prejudice or discrimination they encountered as new immigrants.

**Implications of this Study**

As the immigrant population will surely help shape and change the Canadian society in a long run, immigrants’ issues should definitely take a central position for the government, policy makers, academic researchers and the Canadian public. The integration and settlement process of a lot of immigrants has showed the huge waste of human resources and human capital as immigrants need to take many years to finally integrate into the Canadian professional labour market. They were seen spending a great amount of time in universities and colleges to obtain Canadian training, which many times was just a repetition of what they had been through at their former educational institutions. As an adult educator, I also foresee potential effects of the promotion of formal schooling in reinforcing the hierarchal structure of Canadian society in the name of the protection of professionalism, which is contrary to adult education’s stated emancipatory aims.
The views and experiences of immigrant women in this study reveal the importance of understanding the needs and frustrations of immigrant life. Until the Canadian society gives the immigrants a full embrace, it will not benefit from its policy of drawing the skilled work force from around the world to support its economic and social development.

**Limitations of this Research**

Due to the small size and scope of this thesis, there are several limitations that I want to acknowledge. The research data of this study based on six immigrant women are adequate for such a small and exploratory piece of qualitative research, but these results are not statistically generalizable to a broader population. The findings do suggest issues that appear to have relevance for other immigrants, but further, large scale research would be needed to confirm or disconfirm these ideas.

Also, since most interviewees were recruited through employment and settlement service providers’ networks, the data provides limited coverage of immigrant women in general, because it is restricted to those who were looking for jobs and those who were enrolled in educational programs.

**Areas for Future Research**

Looking at women’s settlement in Canada, it is important to consider how the special features of the division of labour within the family affect immigrant women’s career decisions and employment. The area of child care is perhaps the most clear
example. Women in Canada conventionally take time off from work to take care of their young children and they may either return to work after their children are older, or stay at home and become homemakers. Considering the demand for professional development and skills updating in the professions of the immigrant women professionals, these Canadian home responsibilities of the wife together with the unavailability of a nation-wide daycare system, have a great impact on the immigrant women professionals’ labour market integration. There should be more extensive studies on this impact. If in some cases, children were sent back to the relatives of their home country for childcare, like the popular practice within the Chinese community, the effects on children of separation from their parents as well as the effect on the mothers’ overall well being, including their physical and psychological condition, are all questions worth future research.

As the integration and settlement process is not directed solely towards employment, as demonstrated by the stories of my respondents, the overall well being of immigrant women should really be brought to the attention of policy makers, researchers and settlement workers. Future study regarding women’s changed gendered roles after immigration in a new social context should be undertaken to understand the little-recognized gender-specific predicament of women after immigration. This study suggests the need for more tangible research attention to the emotional and physical impact of immigration on immigrant women and their cross-cultural adjustment.
REFERENCES


Appendix A

You are invited to an interview!

An OISE (University of Toronto) Research Project is looking for

**Foreign-Trained Professional Immigrant Women**

to participate in an interview on strategies of negotiating difficulties and barriers to employment.

If you are an immigrant woman who has been in Canada less than ten years and who is foreign-trained professional (with college/university education), we want to hear from you…

The interview will last 1-2 hours

When?
Please call Holly Wang at 416-858-0713 /or email hwang@oise.utoronto.ca to find a time and a place that is convenient to you.

Round-trip TTC tokens will be provided.

With your participation, we may better understand the challenges that immigrant women are facing in employment.
Appendix B

Sample Interview Questions

(Questions may or may not be asked depending on priorities which emerge and how the interview proceeds)

1. How long have you been in Canada?
2. Did you come alone or with a family?
3. What is your past occupational field before coming to Canada?
4. What are the barriers and difficulties that you have to face in looking for chances in your occupation?
5. Are they the same barriers as the publicly identified ones to employment for immigrants such as transferability of foreign qualifications, lack of contacts and language barriers?
6. What are the barriers that you think impact professional immigrant women’s job search most?
7. Are you disillusioned when you know that you need to start from the bottom?
8. What kind of adjustment did you make in order to find meaningful employment?
9. What is your short-term goal and what is your long-term goal?
10. Do you have confidence to work in your career of choice in Canada?
11. How would you define success?
12. What things in life are important to you?
Information/Consent Letter to Participants

From Researcher, Hui Wang (henceforth, the word “I” refers to the researcher)

Date _________ (to be dated later)

Dear Participant:

Thank you for considering participating in or contributing to my research project. As I noted in our first contact, I am doing this research as part of the requirements for completing the Master of Arts Degree at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information that you will need to understand what I am doing, and to decide whether or not you choose to participate. Participation is completely voluntary, and, should you decide not to participate, there will be no negative consequences. Should you have any concerns about the research, you may at any time contact Prof. Roxana Ng (my thesis advisor) at (416) 923-6641 x 2283 or the researcher Hui Wang at (416) 858-0713.

I have filled in comments, ticked appropriate boxes, and included sections specific to this study. At the end of the letter, you will find a place to indicate that you wish to participate should you decide to do so. Please check the appropriate box, and sign and provide the date. Return one signed copy to me and keep the other for your reference (A copy of consent form will be provided for your records).

Title of Research Project: Dancing With Maple Leaves: Strategies Used By Professional Immigrant Women to Negotiate Employment Opportunities.

The nature and purpose of the research: My proposed research will probe issues related to the re-employment of professional immigrant women in Canada. I will look into the hindrances that professional immigrant women face in getting jobs in their fields. I am looking at the process of how foreign-trained professional immigrant women adjust their value system and concept of “professional” to meet the demands of the job market; The major aim of my proposed research is to provide information for assisting researchers, education professionals and policy makers to better understand the barriers to employment for immigrants who are professionals.

My methods: I am going to interview six foreign-trained professional immigrant women; I will audio-tape their interviews if they consent, translate if other languages are used (translators may be involved) and transcribe the interview tapes; The data collected will be used to complete my MA thesis and related publications.

Your part in the research: If you agree, you will participate in one interview of 1-2 hours; the interview will be audio-taped with your consent; I will review with you to see if anything should be added or excluded once the interview tapes have been transcribed if you wish. Any section which you request to have deleted from the transcript(s) of your interview(s) will be deleted. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and you may skip any question. I will be sharing major aspects of my preliminary analysis with you and you will have the opportunity to provide feedback if you wish.

Areas which I hope to touch on are:
Your work/professional history
Your specific action plan for employment
Your understanding of employability skills
Your expectation of workplace
Your strategies of adjustment
Your reasons for making certain career choices
Your feelings and/or attitudes towards certain difficulties encountered in job search

Potential benefits which you might derive from participating are: although the findings of this study will not benefit you directly, by participating in this study you will be contributing to the production of potentially illuminating knowledge about immigrants and integration, which is becoming increasingly important to the Canadian economy. The information collected may assist researchers, education professionals and policy makers to better understand the barriers to employment for professional immigrants and what may constitute positive responses to those barriers. You will receive a summary of the findings from the study, and may of course access the entire thesis once it is completed if you wish. While I am not providing monetary compensation, I will provide round-trip TTC tokens for you to come to the interview.

Potential harm if any is

I do not anticipate risks to the participants. Information collected is not of highly confidential nature, but some of your difficult experiences obtaining work may cause some distress to you.

If you choose to participate, any quotes used will remain anonymous and your identity will be kept completely confidential. All identifying information (names, locations and any details which may identify you) will be disguised in transcripts to protect your confidentiality. Once the audio tapes of the interview(s) have been transcribed, the original or raw data will be stored under lock and key in the drawer of my office where only Prof. Roxana Ng, Prof. Nancy Jackson, (translators, if applicable) and I will ever have access to this raw data. After the use, the raw data - audiotapes will be destroyed upon the completion of my thesis, approximately by January, 2009).

Thank you.

Sincerely,

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Consent Form

I have read through the attached information sheet. I understand what is being asked and the accompanying conditions and promises. I understand the nature and limitations of the research.
☐ I agree to participate in the ways described. If I am making any exceptions or stipulations, these are

I understand that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time.

__________________________________ (Signature)
__________________________________ (Printed Name)
__________________________________ (Date)
( I agree to audio taping)

If you wish to receive summary of findings, please provide an address below:

_____________________________________________ (Name)
_____________________________________________(Address)
_____________________________________________(Email)

(A copy of consent form will be provided for your record)