New Home, New Learning: Chinese Immigrants, Unpaid Household Work, and Lifelong Learning

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
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Abstract

Literature on lifelong learning indicates that major life transitions lead to significant learning. However, compared to learning in paid jobs, learning in and through household work has received little attention, given the unpaid nature and the private sphere where the learning occurs. The current study examined the changes and the learning involved in three aspects of household work: food work, childcare/parenting, and emotion work among recent Chinese immigrants in Canada.

This study draws on data from a Canadian Survey on Work and Lifelong Learning (WALL), 20 individual interviews, a focus group, and a discussion group with new Chinese professional immigrants in the Greater Toronto Area. The results indicate that food work and childcare increased dramatically after immigration due to a sudden decline of economic resources and the lack of social support network for childcare. Emotion work intensified due to the challenges in paid jobs and the absence of extended families in the new homeland.

To adapt to the changes in their social and economic situations, and to integrate into the Canadian society, Chinese immigrants learned new beliefs and practices about food and
childrearing, developed new knowledge and skills in cooking and grocery shopping, in childcare and disciplining, in solving conflicts with children and spouses, and in transnational kin maintenance. In addition, the Chinese immigrants also developed new views about family, paid and unpaid work, meaning of life, and new gender and ethnic identities.

However, these dramatic changes did not shatter the gendered division of household work. Both the qualitative and the quantitative data suggest that women not only do more but also different types of household tasks. As a result, it is not surprising that both the content and the ways of learning associated with household work varied by gender, class, and ethnicity. By exploring learning involved in the four dimensions of household work: physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual, this dissertation demonstrates that learning is both lifelong and lifewide. By making household work visible, this research helps make visible the value of the unpaid work and the learning involved in it.
Acknowledgements

When I decided to write a doctoral thesis on household work and lifelong learning among new Chinese immigrants about six years ago, I had no idea how I would proceed with this topic, although I was new in Canada, do household work every day, and considered myself a lifelong learner. Yet I knew so little about the vast literatures on household work, lifelong learning, and Chinese immigrants.

I was fortunate to have Dr. Margrit Eichler as my supervisor and benefited profoundly by working with her in her research project on Household Work and Lifelong Learning. During the past 6-plus years, Margrit not only witnessed me struggle, develop, and grow as my thesis work slowly progressed, she also supported me tirelessly and in a timely manner at every step that led to the final completion of my thesis. She was there to nudge me when I felt stuck with my research, to hug me when I felt low and frustrated, to cheer for me when I won awards or made little achievements in my work, and to encourage me when I got tired and bored with the seemingly endless work of writing, revising, and re-revising. Thank you, Margrit, for your ongoing and unfailing support. You were and will continue to be my role model in both work and life.

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I owe my sincerest thanks to Dr. Doug Hart for his meticulous work in helping me with data from the WALL survey after the WALL project ended, and for his incredible patience in explaining to me how the WALL database works, in showing me how to use SPSS to analyse quantitative data, in working with me in revising my research questions on the WALL data, and in exploring with me possible explanations for my findings.

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Finally but not the least, I owe my deepest gratitude to my family. My daughter, Lan Jiang, was an invaluable companion to me during the long, lonely period of my doctoral study. She comforted me when I felt frustrated and stressed, and learned to do many of the household tasks, which she had never done in China, such as cleaning up after meals, doing laundry, cleaning the house, and doing grocery shopping. We chatted over dinner every day and took a daily walk together. We shared our sorrows as well as our happy moments. My sister, Linying Liu, provided both emotional and financial support for me and my daughter during our studies in Canada. Chatting with my little niece, Yang You, over the phone gave me great joy, which would last several days afterwards. In particular, my parents, Liu Xinmin and Zhang Chengxiu, showed great concerned for my health and well-being, and would ask about my thesis work every time we talked on the phone. Over the years, my mother, who believes in girls’ education and independence, has always been my source of strength, and an inspiration to me in my pursuit of knowledge and learning. I am dedicating this dissertation to my mother and all the women in my research.
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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 A “Doctorate” in Household Work

Five years ago, when I left China to start my PhD studies at the University of Toronto, I was greatly admired by my colleagues at a university where I taught. Over the past few years, I have heard similar admiration from friends, acquaintances, and strangers, most of whom were new and recent immigrants from Mainland China. They showed great respect to me when they learned what I was doing—pursuing a PhD at a renowned university here in Canada but they were a bit surprised when I told them that my major was in Sociology and Women’s Studies, fields of scholarship that sound fresh to many of these new Chinese immigrants, who value educational attainments but only in what is considered “good specialties” in Chinese eyes—science, engineering, medicine, or commerce. They were further disappointed and their admiration faded when I told them that my research focuses on unpaid household work and informal learning among the new immigrants in Canada. Many times I was asked to explain what it is all about. Often, after hearing my brief explanation, some would say, “Um, it sounds interesting.” Others simply said, “Ah, I see,” and then switched the topic of the conversation. Similar questions and responses were also expressed by some of the new immigrants I interviewed. When invited to participate in my doctoral research, many of the people I contacted showed great interest when they learned it was about new Chinese immigrants. However, their interest dropped immediately when they learned that my research focus was on their unpaid household work. “I don’t do much housework,” some told me. Others added, “You don’t need to learn to do housework,” or “I don’t think I’ve learned anything from housework.” In many cases, I had to go to great lengths to explain what the research was about and how I was going to do it. Often, I had to convince them of the importance of my research by emphasizing the larger project that my research was affiliated to, the big grant that the project had received from the government, and the reputation and fame of my supervisor in this field of research. But even so, I remember that after one interview, I overheard the female respondent telling a friend who was waiting for her outside in the hallway, “I don’t understand why she asked me so many questions about my housework. There are so many other urgent issues concerning the new immigrants. I think she should pay more attention to our job-related issues and barriers.”
She was not alone in her apprehension. Indeed, several respondents in my interviews showed similar concerns. Although I explained before and at the beginning of each interview that the focus of my research was on unpaid work, and nearly all my questions revolved on their experiences in doing and learning unpaid household work, still quite a number of them kept going off topic to talk about the challenges and barriers they encountered in the Canadian labour market, and the formal and informal learning/education they had to undertake to get professional jobs. Many compared the changes in their paid work before and after immigration and mentioned how a lack of a professional job led to a downward mobility in their social and economic status, and increased their workload of housework and childcare. This is different from most of the housework literature which suggests women’s domestic responsibilities affect their paid employment, especially among white, middle-class women. However, when initially asked about the changes in their household work after immigration, some women responded, “I don’t see any change in my housework,” or “I enjoy doing housework, although I don’t do much now,” which, quite often, did not turn out to be true when probing questions were asked during the interview.

1.2 Transformation in My Own Views on Household Work

Like many Mainland Chinese women in my interviews, I have experienced great changes in my work, both inside and outside the household, paid or unpaid. There have also been changes in my identity as a woman, a mother, and a student who is new to the Canadian culture. More importantly, my own views on unpaid housework and carework were transformed, thanks to my involvement in doing and researching on household work and lifelong learning.

As a woman and as a PhD student in the Collaborative Women’s Studies Program at the University of Toronto, I am interested in women’s issues that I can relate to. However, when I was first suggested the thesis topic on household work and lifelong learning, I hesitated, not only because this was a totally new area to me, but also because I had never enjoyed doing housework, and did not want to learn how to do it, as I initially thought little about what was involved (lifelong learning to do housework? No way!). Growing up in Mainland China, I was taught since I was a child, by the State, my teachers, and my parents (my mother, especially) the value of work (paid work, of course!), and the importance of economic independence for women’s liberation. As a professional woman, I was always told that I could work and compete like a man, with men, and very often I had men as my role models for career goals and for my academic achievements. Like many women of my generation who grew up under Mao’s
communist China, I believed that “Women can hold up half of the sky” and benefited from the State’s employment policy of “equal job, equal pay.” I took pride in my academic achievements and viewed my career success as the goal of my life and as an important part of my identity as a woman. To a large extent, I was more identified with my work role as a dedicated teacher than with my family role as a wife and mother. Although I had helped my mother with housework when I was a young girl, and then I was responsible for most of the routine household tasks (e.g., cooking, cleaning, laundry, taking care of my daughter) in my own family after marriage, I viewed housework as a burden and my household responsibilities as a barrier to my career success. Like many professional women in Mainland China, I tried to avoid housework as much as I could either by hiring people to do the cleaning and childcare (when my daughter was very young) or by turning to the grandparents for help in cooking and babysitting. I felt that doing housework was a waste of my time.

Dramatic changes occurred after I came to Canada. In the first year of my doctoral studies, I had to do all the cooking, cleaning, and grocery shopping (a big challenge for me in winter), in addition to my busy course work and meeting deadlines one after another. Things got worse when my daughter joined me the following year. Instead of cooking food for a whole week, I had to cook every day, and to serve the meals relatively on time. I had to do grocery shopping more frequently and buy more as well. There was also more cleaning and washing. I found myself constantly juggling my academic work and my domestic responsibilities, and felt frustrated about not being able to devote all my time to my academic study. Still, I remember hearing my daughter complaining about late meals and tasteless food on the phone to her grandma in China, with whom she used to have lunch when she entered elementary school, and later dinner as well when she went on to junior high school.

Furthermore, I also had to learn or re-learn some of the skills in household work, either because I had never done those activities before or not as frequently as I do now, such as making steamed bread, a staple Chinese food which I had learned to make when I was a young girl, but had stopped doing and started buying long since. I also had to learn to do some of the household work differently, such as planning the meals before the weekly grocery shopping, learning to make new, fast food for my daughter and me to take for lunch, and learning to use new detergents for house-cleaning and laundry. No longer having the salary of an associate professor, I had to learn to live and support my daughter on a tight budget as a student. I also had to learn to
push my daughter gently to share some of the housework, such as cleaning, washing the dishes, doing the laundry, which she had never done in China and was reluctant to learn at the beginning, as she had always been encouraged from a very young age to focus on her schoolwork, just like many other children in China are asked to do.

Increased household responsibilities and the constant learning I was involved in, both voluntarily and involuntarily, have brought remarkable changes in the quality and variety of the food I eat, the way I cook, and the food I purchase, as well as in my views and attitude toward paid and unpaid work, in the ways I see myself and the meaning of life. I became more understanding and more considerate of people around me. I learned to control my negative emotions, such as frustration and anxiety, so that they won’t have too much of an effect on my life and work. I learned new ways of kin maintenance, of providing emotional support to families and friends, near and afar. Living alone here with my daughter, I also learned to accept and be thankful for any support I received from friends, neighbours and even strangers.

More importantly, for the first time in my life I began to think about household work in more depth and to see it in a different perspective. Overall, I still don’t like housework, especially some of the household drudgeries, but I no longer view it a waste of my time. Through my research work, I began to see the social value in what I do and how it contributes to the well-being of my family and to the whole society, which I would have never been able to see otherwise. I now have a good conscience and peace of mind when I need to take time away from my academic work to care for my family.

Meanwhile, I am also interested in learning what changes other new professional immigrants from Mainland China experienced in their family life, and how they learned to cope with the challenges they encountered in their household and childcare responsibilities in Canada. It was with those thoughts in mind that I decided to make unpaid household work and the related learning the focus of my doctoral research.

1.3 Making Visible the Value of Household Work and the Related Learning

Household work, especially routine housework such as feeding and caring for both children and adults is crucial to the social reproduction of labour and the maintenance of society. Some studies estimate that the total amount of time spent in unpaid household work is about equal to
the time spent in paid labour (Robinson & Godbey, 1997). A Canadian study estimated the gross value of unpaid housework in Canada as either 46.3 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) if calculating the opportunity cost, or as 41.4 percent of the GDP if calculating the replacement cost (Chandler, 1994: 3.5). Similarly, a national survey (Statistics Canada, 1995) indicated that Canadians performed at least 25-billion hours of unpaid work—an equivalent of almost 13 million full-time jobs in 1992. Furthermore, 95 percent of the household labour was devoted to home maintaining and childcare (Nelson & Robinson, 2002: 247). Indeed, as Waring (1988) argues, without women’s unpaid household work, there would be no paid labour force, as the money economy rests squarely on the basis of unpaid household labour.

However, household work tends to be trivialized and made invisible in the public discourse on work partly because it is unpaid and performed in the private home, and partly because it is not considered as “real” work but “a labour of love” that women do willingly and selflessly for their families (Luxton, 1980).

With a population of over 1.3 million, the Chinese community is one of the largest ethnic minorities in Canada. As Mainland China continues to be the leading source country of newcomers to Canada, the number of Chinese immigrants increased dramatically in the past decade, especially in the Greater Toronto Area. According to the 2006 Census, fully 14 percent (155,105) of recent immigrants who arrived between 2001 and 2006 came from the People's Republic of China, and 41.2 percent (63,900) of them settled in the GTA (Statistics Canada, 2007a).

Making visible the value of household work is of special significance for the new immigrants from Mainland China because many of them held negative views on unpaid household work largely due to the communist State’s long-time propaganda for paid work as the sole means to achieve gender equality (see Chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion of gender and work in China). Thus, understanding the unpaid work helps make visible its value and worth to the new Chinese immigrants, especially women, who perform such work on a daily basis without pay.

As one of the fastest growing subfields in adult education, lifelong learning has been promoted enthusiastically by many governments in the world, including the Canadian government, to enhance the competitiveness of their labour force in the globalized economy (Field & Leicester, 2000; Schuetze & Slowey, 2000) and to promote equality (Leathwood & Francis, 2006).
However, the homeplace and unpaid work, especially housework and carework, were often left out in this dominant discourse of lifelong learning (Eichler & Matthews, 2007; Gouthro, 1998, 2005), as most of the learning is informal and not directly related to the labour market, thus, remaining largely invisible and unexplored.

This dissertation intends to bring together research on Chinese immigrants, household work, and lifelong learning, which have so far seemed to follow their own paths, and rarely cross each other’s research focuses. In addition, this study expands its focus to include housework, carework, and emotion work, three separate, but interrelated aspects of household work. It expands on the much needed literature on Chinese immigrants and family work by combining housework with carework and emotion work as they are inseparable parts of household work.

This study on Chinese immigrants, household work, and lifelong learning focuses on three aspects of household work: a. food work, including food preparation, cooking and grocery shopping; b. childcare and parenting; c. emotion work, including emotional care and support for the elderly and other family members, and emotion management in conflict resolution. A gender, lifelong learning approach is employed to understand the division of labour between women and men and the learning involved in the household work mentioned above. This study intends to document an important, but often neglected, aspect of immigrants’ settlement experience in their new homeland—informal learning involved in unpaid household work, especially food work, childcare and parenting, and emotion work. By making the learning visible, this study bridges the gaps in the existing literature on immigrants, household work, and lifelong learning.

1.3.1 The Research Network on Work and Lifelong Learning

My doctoral research is part of a large research network on The Changing Nature of Work and Lifelong Learning (WALL). Funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) from 2003 through 2007 as a Major Collaborative Research Initiative on the New Economy (Project No. 512-2002-1011), the WALL research network was among the first of its kind in North America to explore paid employment, household work, and community volunteer work as well as formal schooling, adult education courses and informal learning.
activities, and the interrelations of all of these forms of learning and work. ¹ Built on the pioneering studies of the prior SSHRC network on New Approaches to Lifelong Learning (NALL), the WALL research consisted of a large-scale national survey (2004), and 12 closely related case studies, which provided unprecedented documentation of lifelong learning and work relations in Canada. Based in the Centre for the Study of Education and Work (CSEW) at OISE/UT, the WALL research commissioned the Institute for Social Research at York University to conduct the national survey on Work and Lifelong Learning in 2004 (see Chapter 4 for more details about the WALL Survey). Led by researchers from different universities across Canada, the 12 case studies had five interrelated foci: 1. industrial sectors; 2. at-risk workers; 3. unpaid work; 4. learning-work transitions; and 5. labour education. Among the 12 WALL sub-projects, two of them focused on unpaid work: a. housework and carework; b. volunteer work (Livingstone & Scholtz, 2006).

1.3.2 The Project of Household Work and Lifelong Learning

As one of the 12 case studies in the WALL research network, the project on Household Work and Lifelong Learning examined housework and carework, unpaid and paid. Conducted in four phases, the Household Work Project involved (1) a mailed-in survey on housework and carework among members of women’s groups (n=254); (2) focus groups on housework and carework among women and men of different social and racial/ethnic backgrounds (n=11); (3) in-depth interviews with people who did housework without pay (n=75); and (4) interviews with house cleaners and nannies who did housework and carework for pay (n=20). Conducted between 2003 and 2006, each of the four phases of the Project had its own research focus and each phase was built on the information collected from the phase(s) preceding it (see Chapter 4 for detailed information about the Household Work Project).

With the support of a dissemination grant from SSHRC (2006), the Household Work Project disseminated its findings from its four phases of research by collaborating with Skyworks, a non-profit production company, in producing a documentary film Household Work: More Than It Seems (2007). As part of this documentary film, five on-camera discussion groups were

¹ For detailed information about the WALL research network and its sub-projects, see the WALL website at: www.wallnetwork.ca. Detailed information on the prior NALL survey may also be found through this site or www.nall.ca.
conducted, including one discussion group with the Chinese immigrants who were selected from prior interviews and the focus group.

1.3.3 My Research and Involvement in the Household Work Project

I joined the research team of the Household Project as a research assistant in 2004, and was involved in every phase of the research: assisted in analysing survey data from Phase 1, co-facilitated a focus group in Phase 2, conducted interviews with the Chinese immigrants in Phase 3, and coordinated research work in Phase 4. In addition, I facilitated and interpreted in the discussion group with the Chinese immigrants, which was used in the documentary film.

My research on Chinese immigrants, household work, and lifelong learning was part of the Household Work Project in the WALL research network. I used both qualitative and quantitative data in my research. Qualitative data, which involved 20 interviews, one focus group, and one discussion group with the Chinese immigrants in the GTA, were collected through the Household Work Project. I conducted all the interviews and co-facilitated the focus group and the discussion group with the Chinese immigrants. I used a new definition of household work developed by the research team to guide my research. In addition, I supplemented my research with quantitative data from the 2004 national survey on Work and Lifelong Learning. Thus, this study can be viewed as part of a group effort to make visible household work and the learning involved in it.

1.4 Research Questions and Mixed Research Methods

1.4.1 Research Questions

As part of the Household Work Project, my research questions were informed by the questionnaire developed and used in the Phase 3 interviews. In this dissertation, I explored the following three research questions: 1. How has household work changed after immigration among the recent immigrants from Mainland China? 2. What did the Chinese immigrants learn and how did they learn to cope with the changes in household work? 3. How does immigration interact with gender and ethnicity in influencing the gender division of household work, the content of learning, as well as the ways of learning involved in household work?

In my interviews, I focused on the new Chinese immigrants of five years or less of residence in Canada because the five year criterion was preset by the WALL project and was adopted by its
sub-project on Household Work and Lifelong Learning in selecting participants for its Phase 3 interviews. I chose food work, carework, and emotion work as my main focus of research because these three aspects of household work loomed large in the individual and small group interviews with the Chinese immigrants. During the interviews, the participants talked in great length about how changes in these three areas affected their life, especially during the initial stage of immigration to Canada, and what they had to learn to cope with the changes.

In the chapter on food-related household work, I examined the changes by comparing the similarities and differences between women and men in what they do and learn in food preparation, cooking, and grocery shopping. In childcare and parenting, I first examined the challenges the new immigrant parents encountered in their new home country, the causes and the consequences of the challenges, and how they affect women and men differently. Then, I explored the knowledge and skills they learned, as well as the various kinds of ways they used to acquire the learning. I divided emotion work into two types: emotional care and support, and emotion management. I examined who did what in emotion work, and what they have learned through emotional care and support for other people and themselves, and how that learning has influenced the gender relations between women and men, immigrants’ views and attitudes towards family and work, paid and unpaid, their gender identity, and their understanding of themselves and the meaning of life.

1.4.2 Mixed Research Methods

Researchers on housework have suggested that combined methods of both qualitative and quantitative research be used in order to get a more comprehensive understanding of the complexity of household work (Luxton & Corman, 2001; Peters, 1997). This is because mixed methods have several strengths over any traditional mono-method in conducting research. Mixed methods examine the research questions from multiple perspectives, and thus can neutralize weaknesses inherent in any single method (Creswell, 2005: 53). Data collected through mixed methods can enhance interpretability by complementing and informing each other (Qiu, 2010).

This study used mixed research methods, both qualitative and quantitative, because they complement each other in broadening our understanding of the nature of the unpaid work and the related informal learning. While the quantitative method via the large-scale survey on Work and Lifelong Learning permits comparisons of large numbers of people among different subgroups,
the qualitative method via in-depth interviews and focus groups is effective in eliciting considerable depth and complexity of the issues under discussion.

Quantitative data were drawn from the 2004 National Survey on Work and Lifelong Learning (WALL) and qualitative data were collected through individual interviews, a focus group, and a discussion group with recent Mainland Chinese immigrants in the Greater Toronto Area. The purpose of the Survey analysis was to provide an overview of household work performance and related learning in Canada, and to situate my qualitative data on Chinese immigrants in the larger Canadian context. The purpose of the qualitative research was to provide an in-depth explanation of the issues concerning the new immigrants, such as the changes and challenges in food work, childcare/parenting, and emotion work after immigration, the process in which they acquired knowledge and skills, as well as the ways and the strategies they used to acquire the learning.

1.5 Analytical Framework
1.5.1 Social Construction of Gender Theory

In this study, I employ a social construction of gender theory to explain the unequal gender division of labour between women and men, the power relations embedded in household work, the construction of gender roles and identities among the Chinese professional immigrant women. A gender-based analysis will be performed in examining both the WALL Survey data and the data from the interviews, focus group and discussion group. In doing so, I pay special attention, where data are available, to the interaction of gender, class, ethnicity, marital status, the age of children, and the level of English in influencing women and men differently in household work.

1.5.2 A Lifelong Learning Approach to Learning Involved in Household Work

In this study, I used lifelong learning as a framework to analyse the content, results as well as ways of learning involved in household work because it best explains the various forms and dimensions of learning involved in unpaid household work.

Compared to other adult learning theories, from the classic cognitive to the more recent adult learning theories, such as self-directed, experiential, incidental, or situated learning, or even transformative learning (for a more detailed discussion of adult learning theories, see Jarvis, 2006; Merriam & Caffarella, 1991), lifelong learning represents a more comprehensive view of
adult learning by emphasizing “learning for life” through our lifeworld (Collins, 1998: 21; Welton, 1998; Williamson, 1998), that is, learning is lifelong—from cradle to grave, and lifewide—learning can take place anywhere in our life, including the home (Gouthro, 1998, 2005). Lifelong learning includes diverse forms of learning—informal as well as formal and non-formal (Livingstone, 1999). Furthermore, lifelong learning focuses on major life transitions—changes that lead to learning and changes resulted from learning (Jarvis, 2006). Therefore, I use lifelong learning as my framework to explain the learning resulted in and from changes in household work after immigration.

I understand lifelong learning as both lifelong and lifewide, both a process and the result, that is, what people learn and how they learn, both formally or informally, intentionally or unintentionally, over the course of their lifetime in order to accomplish personal, social, and professional development and to enhance the quality of life of the learners themselves as well as the people around them. My research focuses on the private home, more specifically, on household work as a learning site. However, given the unpaid nature of the work, my focus is mainly on informal learning involved in such work, as most of the household work is carried out in the private domain and most of the knowledge and skills are acquired through informal means and in informal contexts. Through both qualitative and quantitative data, this dissertation intends to unveil the invisible learning which, though the most widespread, is the least studied (Livingstone, 1999). Informed by a new definition of household work, this study explored lifelong learning involved in various dimensions of household work: physical, mental, emotional and spiritual, as well as in the social-cultural dimension (Illeris, 2002).

1.6 A New Definition of Household Work

During the first two phases of research in the Household Work Project, the term “housework” was used. But as we began research in Phase 3, we found that a traditional understanding of “housework” does not capture the full range and scope of the different types of unpaid work that people do both inside and outside their households. A literature review of housework indicates that there is not a universally recognized definition of housework. Very often, researchers tend to view it as self-evident and treat it as a given or understand it as a commonsense concept (Eichler & Albanese, 2007). Worse still, there is no consensus on how to name the unpaid work and what it consists of (Macredie & Sewell, 1999; VanEvery, 1997). Many researchers used different
terms to address it, such as “housework,” “domestic labour,” “household labour,” or “family work” to name just a few.

As the research team adopted the term “household work” for Phase 3 of the Household Work Project, I also switched the term from “housework” to “household work” in my research, as it is more comprehensive in meaning than “housework,” as it allows me to integrate housework, carework, and emotion work into my research. Consequently, a new definition of household work is developed, which integrates all levels and dimensions of activities, as well as all types of unpaid work: housework, and carework within and beyond one’s own households. According to this new definition, household work consists of the sum of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual tasks that are performed for one's own or for someone else's household and that maintains the daily life of those one has responsibility for (Eichler & Albanese, 2007: 248). This dissertation is informed and guided by the new definition of household work in research on food work, childcare/parenting, and emotion work. Unless it is otherwise indicated (e.g., citing other researchers who use different terms), I use the term household work in my discussion and the new definition of household work as a guide in my data analysis.

1.7 An Insider’s View on Chinese Immigrants

I chose new immigrants from Mainland China as the subjects of my research for three reasons. First, international migration is a significant life event for those engaged in the migration. This, according to the literature on lifelong learning, leads to substantial learning (Jarvis, 2006), as the newcomers have to learn to adjust to changes and challenges in everyday life. Second, Chinese immigrants account for the largest proportion of all immigrants to Canada each year, and in the past ten years, Mainland China has continued to be the top source country of immigrants to Canada (1999-2008), and nearly 350,000 Chinese immigrant have landed (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2009) during that period of time and over half of them settled in the Greater Toronto Areas (GTA).

Unlike their early predecessors who were mostly uneducated peasants, the majority of recent Chinese immigrants were well-educated, middle-class professionals before immigration. Despite a relatively voluminous literature on early Chinese immigrants in Canada (Chan, 1983; Li, 1998; 2005), little research has been done on the recent immigrants from Mainland China, whose
social, political, and linguistic backgrounds are quite different from the early immigrants as well as recent Chinese immigrants from other parts of the world, such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, and South East Asia.

Third, being from the Mainland myself, where I was educated and taught at a university for many years before I came to do my PhD in Canada, I spoke the same language—Mandarin Chinese, and shared the same cultural and the educational backgrounds as all the new Chinese immigrants I interviewed. All of these qualities greatly facilitated my data collection and data analysis. As a result, I am able to provide an insider’s view on many of the issues, and relate many of their experiences to my own. In almost every interview, I shared with the respondent my personal experience on some of the questions, making her/him feel that I was “one of them.” My insider’s identity greatly reduced the gaps between the interviewer and the interviewees, which helped to enhance the openness and trust of the respondents in me and increase their willingness to share their stories with me. Some of the respondents even offered me tips for cooking and cleaning during or after the interviews.

While being an insider in my research privileged me with “easy access, the ability to ask more meaningful questions and read non-verbal cues, and most importantly, be able to project a more truthful, authentic understanding of the culture under study” (Merriam, et al., 2001: 411), I am also aware that this “insiderness” may hold me “too close to the culture to be curious enough to raise provocative questions” (Merriam, et al. 2001:411) or to probe some of the issues in depth, and it may also result in inherently biased views in my data analysis. On the other hand, as “one of them,” I may be expected by my respondents to understand what they mean without further explanation on their part.

1.8 Outline of This Dissertation

This dissertation consists of nine chapters. Chapter 2 provides a brief review of three bodies of literature related to my research, that is, literatures on Chinese immigrants, household work, and lifelong learning. At the end of each section I also provide a critique of the existing literature. Chapter 3 focuses on my theoretic framework for data analysis—social construction theory of gender, household work and learning, that is, how gender is constructed and theorized in household work literature and in the dominant discourse of lifelong learning, and if there is a gendered way of knowing and learning. Chapter 4 looks at my research questions, research
methods, a rationale for mixed methods in data collection, and a rationale for a gender-based, lifelong learning approach for my data analysis. Chapter 5 explores quantitative data on unpaid work from the Canadian National Survey on Work and Lifelong Learning (WALL), with my focus on Chinese immigrants. I compare the weekly hours on household work and on informal learning among four Canadian subgroups: Canadian-born, white immigrants, (other) non-white immigrants, and Chinese immigrants, who, for analytical purposes, are not included in the non-white immigrant group. In the three chapters that follow, qualitative data from individual interviews, a focus group, and a discussion group are discussed, with each chapter focusing on one type of household work and the related learning. Chapter 6 looks at food-related household work and the learning involved in food choices, food preparation, and grocery shopping. Chapter 7 examines childcare and parenting, especially the challenges the Chinese immigrant parents encountered in childrearing in their new home country and the various learning they undertook to cope with the challenges and to adapt to the new childrearing practices in Canada. Chapter 8 focuses on emotion work and the related learning. I examine both emotional care and support for one’s own nuclear family, especially for spouses, as well as transnational eldercare or kin maintenance, as much of such work for the new immigrants is more emotional in nature rather than physical. I also explore what the Chinese immigrants learned in emotion management and conflict resolution. Chapter 9 is the conclusion of my dissertation, in which I highlight my major findings, the significance of my research. At the end of the concluding chapter, I also look at the policy implications for my research and new directions for future research.
Chapter 2 Setting the Stage: Chinese Immigrants, Household Work, and Lifelong Learning

2.1 Introduction

Since the late 1960s, a plethora of literature on housework has been published, and the value of housework has been widely researched and debated. In the past two decades, lifelong learning has become one of the fastest growing subfields in adult education, and research on Chinese immigrants in Canada is also growing. However, a quick review of the three bodies of literature shows that each of the literatures has its own specific focuses, and they rarely cross each other’s path. For instance, the literature on housework focuses mainly on the gender division of household labour in various types of households, and the power relations between women and men, especially among married couples. In the past decades, there has been an explosion of research on lifelong learning, but much of the research focuses on formal education and training for paid employment. Learning for non-paid work, especially for unpaid household work, is scarce. There is a growing body of literature on Chinese immigrants in Canada, but much of the focus is still related to paid jobs. Research on unpaid work among the Chinese immigrant women is limited, the research on learning involved in unpaid household work is even more scarce.

In this chapter, I will briefly review the three bodies of literature relevant to my research: Chinese immigrants in Canada, housework, and lifelong learning. Divided into four parts, this chapter first briefly reviews the history of Chinese immigrants in Canada, giving special attention to research on Chinese immigrant women and their domestic life. The second part examines literature on housework, with my focus on the gender division of domestic labour. I also examine how housework is conceptualized in literature. The third part reviews the various conceptualizations as well as the theoretical underpinnings of the mainstream discourse of lifelong learning. At the end of each part of the review, I will provide a critique of the literatures by pointing out the gaps. I conclude this chapter with a brief summary of the literature reviews.

2.2 Chinese Immigrants in Canada

Chinese immigrants have been in Canada for over 150 years. According to the 2006 Census, there were over 1.3 million Chinese in Canada, making them the largest visible minority in the
country (Statistics Canada, 2008). However, compared to their large population and relatively long history in Canada, research on the Chinese in Canada is limited and fairly recent. Furthermore, in the history of Canadian immigration, there were few ethnic groups whose life and fate were affected as much as the Chinese by the discriminatory Canadian immigration policies. In this section, I will provide a brief historical account of the Canadian immigration policies and their impact on the Chinese immigrants and their family lives in Canada.

2.2.1 Canadian Immigration Policy and the Chinese Immigrants

As an important component of its national policy, Canadian immigration programs have been designed and changed over the past century with the aim of both directing demographic growth and meeting economic needs and labour market demands. Before 1962, Canadian immigration policies favoured white European groups by systematically creating barriers for non-European immigrants (Taylor, 1991). In contrast to its efforts in encouraging and attracting white immigrants from European countries (e.g., by offering them free dominion land in the West), Canadian immigration policy also created barriers to keep away or restrict the entry of certain groups who were non-white and non-European (Cranford, Gabriel, & Vosko, 2006). One way to keep “undesirable” people from entering Canada was through legal (institutional) discrimination in the selection process that controlled the source countries (Tastsoglou, 2000).

Chinese immigration to Canada started in the middle of the nineteenth century, when gold was found in the Fraser Valley of British Columbia in 1858. About 6,000 Chinese were lured to Gum San—“Gold Mountain” — the Cantonese name for Victoria at the time, as most of the pioneer Chinese came from Canton in Southern China (Chan, 1983). Later, when labour was needed to build the Canadian Pacific Railway, over 15,000 Chinese males were recruited to build the “iron road” between 1881-1885 (Wickberg, 1982). However, as soon as the Canadian Pacific Railway was completed in 1885, policies were enacted to actively discourage Chinese immigration through the imposition of a head tax of $50. This was subsequently raised to $100 in 1900 and then to $500 in 1903 (Con, 1982; Knowles, 1997). In 1923, the federal government passed the Chinese Immigration Act, barring completely the entry of Chinese to Canada. Before it was repealed after the World War II in 1947, no Chinese were allowed to enter Canada, except for merchants, diplomats, and students (Li, 1998). As there were few Chinese women in the country, and Chinese men were not allowed to establish relations with white women, many Chinese men were forced to go back to China to find wives there but they had to return alone to the “Gold
Mountain” within two years for fear of losing their eligibility to enter (Chan, 1983). Many of them had to endure long periods of separation before they were reunited with their families after the Second World War. Due to the severely distorted sex ratio, the Chinese-Canadian community became a predominately male society with many “married bachelors” (Li, 2005: 387). As a consequence, the population of the Chinese in Canada remained tiny compared to other immigrant groups in Canada long after the repeal of the Chinese Immigration Act.

It was only after the adoption of the more equitable point system in Canada in 1967 that Chinese were allowed to immigrate to Canada under the same criteria as others, and that Chinese began to arrive with their families. Consequently, the number of Chinese immigrants in Canada increased substantially, which greatly increased the total population of Chinese in Canada. Between 1968 and 1996, most immigrants were from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Southeast Asia, and the West Indies. Since 1998, immigrants from Mainland China have remained the largest immigrant group to Canada (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2007).

Unlike the early immigrants who were mostly from one province, Guangdong (Canton), China, the recent Chinese immigrants came from more diverse geographical locations and were also better educated, more cosmopolitan, and upwardly mobile, mostly holding professional jobs before immigration (Li, 2005). Unlike the early Chinese labourers who were pushed out by poverty and war in their home country, the recent Chinese immigrants were drawn to Canada by its desirable living environment, more stable political climate, and good education system for children (Wan, 2003: 18). However, like the early immigrants, most of the recent Chinese immigrants settled in big cities in Canada. About two-thirds of all Chinese in Canada now live in Toronto and Vancouver (Li, 2005). According to the 2006 Census, there were 486,330 people of Chinese origin living in the Greater Toronto Area, making them one of the largest ethnic groups in the city (Statistics Canada, 2007b).

2.2.2 Chinese Immigrant Women in Canada

Very little has been written about the early Chinese women in Canada. According to existing records, the first Chinese woman, the wife of a prosperous merchant in Victoria, BC, arrived in Canada on March 1, 1886 (The Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 2001). Actually, most of the early women were married to merchants, who were the only Chinese able to sponsor their
wives to Canada (Li, 1998), as most labourers could not afford to pay for the ocean passage or to support a wife and family.

From the few oral histories of some of the early Chinese women (Nipp, 1986; The Women’s Book Committee, 1992; Wong, 1997), we can have a peek at the lives of Chinese women in the early days in the New World, where they faced serious hardship, coping with racial discrimination, family responsibilities, and long hours of work. Social life was very limited. Many of the women lived in isolation, as they spoke little or no English and had few friends. In addition to their responsibility for raising a big family, many of the women also worked in such family businesses as restaurants, laundries, grocery stores, or on the farm.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the Pacific Ocean, many wives of the Chinese-Canadian men endured tremendous emotional and financial hardships, raising the children on their own and serving their in-laws. Frequently, the remittances from Canada were the families’ sole source of financial support, and when the remittances were cut off during the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), many women and their families suffered from starvation. For some women at home in China, married life in separation meant seeing their husbands only a few times in decades, and for others the separation was permanent. In many cases, the wives had to wait decades before they were able to reunite with their husbands in Canada (Hoe, 1976; Li, 1998). For those women who eventually joined their husbands after the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1947, they experienced similar challenges as the pioneer Chinese women in the early days: language barriers, isolation, family responsibilities, and long hours of work without pay helping husbands run family businesses. Furthermore, due to decades of separation and infrequent visits of their “Gum San guest” husbands, those women hardly knew their men, and lived an isolated life. Some women were even abused by their husbands (The Women's Book Committee, 1992).

In the past two decades, the number of Chinese women arriving in Canada has grown rapidly. Women accounted for more than half of the total Chinese immigrants to Canada in recent years. For example, in 2005, Chinese women made up 53 percent of the total Chinese immigrants to Canada, very close to the percentage of all immigrant women to Canada (52%) (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2007). Compared to their predecessors, many of the recent Chinese women arriving in Canada were highly educated professionals before immigration, even though most of them did not enter the country as “independents,” but rather as “dependent” family members of
their husbands who were designated “principal applicant” under the point system. Studies on immigrant women show that the dependent status often renders many women legally dependent on men—the husbands, and disadvantaged in accessing government programs and assistance for employment, for family benefit and welfare (Ng, 1993). Like other immigrant women of visible minority, recent Chinese immigrant women continue to face “double or triple oppression” because of gender, race/ethnicity and class (Zhou, 2000) in the segregated Canadian labour market (Man, 2004; Ng, Man, Shan, & Liu, 2007) and in their increased domestic responsibility and their deteriorated gender identity after immigration (Man, 2002; Waters, 2002).

2.2.3 Critiques of Studies on Chinese Immigrants in Canada

As their population increased over the past two decades, research on Chinese immigrants in Canada also flourished. Research on early Chinese immigrants focused on the unjust Canadian immigration policies and its impact on Canadian Chinese (Chan, 1983; Knowles, 1997; Li, 1998, 2003a; Taylor, 1991). Chinese immigrant women were largely absent or remained minimal in the research. Studies on recent Chinese immigrants have focused mainly on their economic performance (Li, 2003b; Zong, 2004) and labour market barriers (Han, 2007; Zhu, 2005). In recent years, there have been more studies on Chinese immigrant women in Canada, most of which examined either the struggle and success of early Chinese women (Nipp, 1986; Poy, 2003), or the challenges and barriers of recent professional Chinese women in navigating the Canadian labour market (Man, 2004; Ng, Man, Shan, & Liu, 2007). A few researchers have explored the challenges that Chinese women faced in their family and household responsibilities, such as intensification of housework and lack of social support for childcare (Man, 1997; Salaff & Greve, 2004). My research will start by examining the various challenges the new Chinese immigrants encounter in unpaid household work, including those challenges already identified by previous researchers. In addition, my research will take a step further to explore both the challenges and the learning involved in household work among the recent Chinese immigrants.

In the following section, I will turn to a discussion of literature on housework, with my focus on the conceptualization of housework and the gender division of labour. I will introduce a new definition of household work, developed by the research team on the Household Work and Lifelong Learning Project, of which this dissertation is a part. Both the concept and the definition of household work were used as a guide to my research.
2.3 Household Work: Conceptualization and Gender Division of Labour

2.3.1 Household Work: How Is It Defined?

Like the other members of the research project on Household Work and Lifelong Learning, I initially used the term “housework” in my research on Chinese immigrants, as it is the most commonly used term in research on unpaid work in the household. But after a review of related literature, especially empirical studies on unpaid household work, I found the term “housework” does not seem to cover the different aspects and dimensions my research intended to capture. Thus, I joined the efforts of the research team in redefining housework as part of my doctoral research.

First of all, we found that there is no universal consensus as to what housework is. Most of the researchers tend to view it as self-evident and treat it as a given or understand it as a common sense concept. There is no consistency in the terms that the researchers use to describe the work that people do in the private household. Apart from the most commonly used term “housework,” a number of other terms have also been used frequently and sometimes interchangeably by scholars on family and unpaid work. Among those terms are domestic labour/work, family work, or household labour/work, to name a few.

Added to the confusion in terminology is the absence of a universally recognized definition of what housework is and what constitutes household activities/tasks (Macredie & Sewell, 1999). For example, Davidoff (1976) views housework broadly as creating or managing a household, a project of “boundary maintenance” (p.124), which is concerned with creating and maintaining order in the immediate environment, making meaningful pattern of activities, people and materials. DeVault (1991) describes housework as a kind of family work, and the nature of this work as largely mental. Mederer (1993) conceptualizes household labour as caring of family members, for the home, and for transactional matters, which involves not only task accomplishments, but also household management (p.133). Compared to the above definitions, Coverman’s (1983) conceptualization of household labour is more concrete, consisting of a list of five tasks: 1. housework; 2. child care; 3. consumption; 4. maintenance of family members’ emotional well-being; and 5. status production—activities linked to family status (i.e., husband’s
job status but not to women’s status within the family) that require a women’s time, energy, and organizational skills, such as entertaining and charitable work (pp. 626-627).

It is clear from the above definitions that there is no consensus as to what housework consists of. Some define it as largely a mental activity involving household management (Davidoff, 1976; DeVault, 1991), others emphasize the caring aspect of the work (Mederer, 1993). In comparison, Coverman’s (1983) conceptualization of household labour seems more comprehensive, as it includes both housework and carework, and multi-dimensional efforts/skills: mental (organizational), emotional, and social.

However, if we take a look at the empirical housework literature in mainstream sociological journals, an overwhelming majority of the literature, through time- and tasks-based analysis, rarely goes beyond a set of physical activities such as cooking, cleaning, washing, and childcare, while ignoring many other equally important but less visible and less measurable tasks such as planning, organizing, and household management. Many of the household tasks, such as providing emotional support or caring for the elderly and the disabled, are treated as separate categories and independent of housework (DeVault, 1987, 1991; Hochschild, 1989).

In their critique of empirical studies on housework, Eichler and Albanese (2007) reveal five assumptions embedded in the conceptualization of household work. These assumptions are: 1. Housework is performed exclusively by wives and husbands (women and men) within their own homes; 2. Housework consists primarily of a set of repetitive physical tasks; 3. Housework includes childcare, but does not include care of adults; 4. Housework remains largely stable; and 5. Housework and carework are two distinct types of work. Clearly, the absence of a comprehensive definition of housework makes it difficult to give a full description of what it is and even more challenging, to analyse its dynamics (Mahalinggam, Zukewich, & Scott-Dixon, 2006). With the supported of empirical data, the Household Work Project refutes each of these assumptions about housework and carework.

Like the other members of the Household Work Project, I later stopped using the term “housework” in my research, as the existing definition of housework does not fully capture the complexity and dimensions of such work revealed by the data collected through different phases and through various methods (e.g., survey, focus group, and interview). As a group decision of the Household Work Project, I subsequently switched to a more comprehensive term “household
work” which integrates all levels and dimensions of activities: physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual (see the new definition in Chapter 1), and which goes beyond the routine housework tasks to include carework (including childcare, eldercare, and self-care), and emotion work (which includes emotional support and emotion management). In this dissertation, I adopted the term “household work” and the new definition in my examination of the unpaid activities within and across the households among the recent Chinese immigrants to Canada.

2.3.2 Household Work: What Is Its Worth?

For a long time, household work was not considered real work, but a “labour of love” that women do willingly and selflessly for their loved ones. As it is unpaid and performed in private homes, housework remains largely invisible and is rarely understood or recognized as work (Eichler & Matthews, 2007). As a result, this work is not respected in the same way as paid work (Luxton, 1980).

Since the late 1960s, feminist scholars have sought various ways to make visible the value of housework. Marxist feminists of the day employed classic Marxist concepts to theorize women’s unpaid domestic labour—housework, childbearing, and childrearing by combining Marxism and feminism in interpreting women’s oppression (Vogel, 2000: 151). They argued that what women do in the home is not just housework, but domestic labour—the production of both family subsistence and labour power which is both socially useful and necessary in contributing to the maintenance and reproduction of capitalist society (Armstrong, Armstrong, Connelly, & Miles, 1985; Benston, 1971; Connelly, 1978; Gardiner, 1975; Smith, 1978; Luxton, 1980; Seccombe, 1974). In the early 1970s, feminist activists even launched an international campaign of “Wages for Housework” (Eichler, 1980: 133-139).

Economists have also noted the long neglected reality and economic exclusion of unpaid housework in national economies. In the early 1990s, some economists began to measure the value of unpaid household labour in economic terms, usually by focusing on the opportunity cost, replacement cost, or input/output costs (Luxton, 1997: 436). For example, in a study on “The Value of Household Work in Canada, 1992,” Chandler (1994) estimated the gross value of unpaid housework in Canada as either 46.3 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or 66.8 percent of personal disposable income if calculating the opportunity cost (p.3.5), or as 41.4 percent of the GDP or 59.7 percent of personal disposable income if calculating the replacement
cost (p. 3.8). By including the capital goods used in household production (housing, vehicles, and domestic appliances), Ironmonger (1996), an Australian scholar, calculated the Gross Household Product (GHP) at about 98 percent of the Gross Market Product (GMP) (p. 43). A Canadian survey (Statistics Canada, 1995) estimated that household labour performed by Canadians was equal to almost 13 million full-time jobs, with a conservatively estimated worth of $234 billion, which was equivalent to approximately 40 percent of Canada’s GDP (Nelson & Robinson, 2002: 247).

As a world leader in the field of measuring and valuing unpaid work, Statistics Canada has conducted dozens of studies on unpaid household labour and made volumes of data publicly available since the 1970s (Hamdad, 2003). Canadian Census collected its first data on unpaid work in 1996 (Statistics Canada, 1996). In a review of trends in valuing unpaid household work done by Statistics Canada, Hamdad (2003) argues that knowledge of households’ unpaid work is important for public policy decision-making, as it helps promote the awareness of women’s contribution to the economy and makes visible the hidden costs (in terms of reduced household non-market output) of economic growth. Information on the outputs and productivity of unpaid work and of quality differences between unpaid and paid household work may also help form a more complete assessment of the impacts of cutbacks in social services (p. 4).

2.3.3 Gender Division of Household Work: Who Does It?

It has long been recognized that unpaid household work is a highly gendered activity, with women performing the bulk of it, regardless of family type, race, or ethnicity, as well as women’s employment, whether part-time or full-time (Baxter, 1997; Beaujot, Haddad, & McFarlane, 2000; Beneria, 1999; Coverman, 1989; John & Shelton, 1997; South & Spitze, 1994; Zukewich, 2002). For example, in their study of family diversity and the division of labour in the United States, Demo and Acock (1993) show that women do two or three times more housework than their husbands or cohabiting male partners. In a survey on men’s housework, Coltrane and Ishii-Kuntz (1992) demonstrate that women in the U.S. perform approximately 75 to 80 percent of all housework. In her study of gender and family relationships, Walker (1999) shows that women are still responsible for more than two-thirds of their family’s housework time, even though the overall time women spend on housework is declining. Thus, many scholars (e.g., Kroska, 2004) conclude that women’s rapidly growing participation in the labour force in the
past few decades has not led to a significant change in the division of household work between women and men.

Studies on the gendered division of household work further indicate that women are doing not only more but different types of household work. Women are typically assigned primary responsibility for tasks performed within the home, while men are assigned or assume responsibility for tasks outside of the home itself, with the notable exception of indoor household repairs. Women are primarily responsible for the time-consuming tasks of cooking, washing up, house cleaning, and laundry (Robinson, 1988; Brines, 1993). Women’s tasks tend to be daily, more repetitive, isolating, boring, monotonous, and invisible (both in terms of being unnoticed until and unless they are not performed, and in terms of their required, but unobservable, nature of thinking and planning) (DeVault, 1991; Oakley, 1974). In contrast to the continuous and overlapping nature of women’s tasks, men’s tasks tend to be more discrete in the sense of having a definite beginning and ending (Coleman, 1988). In her analysis of the US National Survey of Families and Households, Noonan (2001) finds that women not only continue to do approximately one and a half times as much household labour as men (33 hours versus 19 hours per week), they are also more likely to be responsible for tasks that are frequent and not flexible (e.g., cooking, cleaning), while men are more likely to do tasks that are non-routine, less frequent (i.e., household maintenance) or seasonal in nature (e.g., gardening).

This gendered division of domestic responsibility has been documented in different types of households and families, mostly among married or cohabiting couples in developed countries such as the United States, Canada, and Australia (Alvarez & Miles, 2003; Batalova & Cohen, 2002; Baxter, 2005; Berk, 1985; Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, & Robinson, 2000; Bittman, et al., 2003; Brines, 1994; Ciabattari, 2004; Hochschild, 1989; Ishii-Kuntz & Coltrane,1992; Luxton, 1986, 2001; McFarlance, Beaujot, & Haddad, 2000; Mederer, 2000; Pittman, Kerpelman, & Solheim, 2001; Shelton, 1990,1992; Sullivan, 1997; Wu, 2000). A few studies have examined the imbalanced division of labour among same-sex couples or trans-gendered people (Ilig, 1999; Kawale, 2004; Oberton, 1997; Rohrbacker, 1999) and in different ethnic or immigrant families (Haddad & Lam, 1994; Hossain, 2001; Kamo & Cohen, 1998; Kim, et al., 1979; Man, 1997; Ng & Ramirez, 1981; Pessar, 1995a; Orbuch & Eyster, 1997). A similar gendered pattern of household work has also been observed in housework research in developing countries (Sanchez, 1993), including China (Bian, 1994; Zuo & Bian, 2001; Skinner & Meredith, 1998).
Nearly all the studies pointed to the same conclusion that the unequal share of household work puts women at a disadvantage in employment opportunities, pay equity, and spousal relationships (Brayfield, 1992; Greenstein, 2000; Hersch & Stratton, 1997). As household work takes place in the private sphere, the time, energy, and skill involved in such work are obscured (Dryden, 1999). More seriously, the gendered division of household work legitimizes the power discrepancy between men and women, and reinforces male domination and women’s subordination in the society (DeMaris & Longmore, 1996; Frye, 1983; Hartmann, 1981; Kluwer, Heesink, & Van de Vliert, 1996).

2.3.4 Gender Division of Household Labour in Urban China

Studies on household work in China have consistently shown that, even with their nearly universal working status, women in urban China shoulder a disproportionate amount of the housework, although wives with high income may have more bargaining power for a more equal distribution of household work (Whyte & Parish, 1984; Parish & Farrer, 2000; Wang, 2004). Men’s involvement in housework is primarily to help their wives rather than to shoulder all the housework or to genuinely share half of it (Zuo & Bian, 2001).

Studies on urban Chinese households find that division of labour in urban Chinese households is also shaped by the social relations and living arrangements. In households consisting of extended family members, parents or in-laws often play a helping role in housework and childcare (Parish & Farrer, 2000; Shen, Yang & Li, 1999). Wang’s (2004) study of housework in four Chinese cities reveals that men in some working-class households who shared some facilities, commonly kitchens and bathrooms, tend to do more housework than men who do not share facilities with others. This is especially the case with men whose incomes are either much lower or much higher than their wives’. Unlike other studies which limited their examination of division of labour within the household (Brines, 1994; Greenstein, 2000), Wang’s (2004) research indicates that, regardless of how unequal the housework division is inside the household, men in some urban Chinese families tend to do more household work in front of others in order to show that they support gender egalitarianism, reflecting the dominant gender ideology promoted by the socialist government. This finding is in sharp contrast with studies on household work in rural China (Feng, 2007), and with gender ideology theory about the gendered division of household labour (Brines, 1994; Kroska, 2004). These studies confirm that household work allocation is embedded in complex social relations (Coltrane, 2000). Doing household work is more than
simple physical labour. It demonstrates the symbolic meaning of self identity and conformity to generally acknowledged gender ideologies of the society in which one resides.

My doctoral research intends to explore to what extent the Chinese immigrant women and men in my studies are similar or different in their performance of household work, and how their gender ideology on household work has influenced the gender division of household work in their new homeland.

2.3.5 Immigrant Women and Unpaid Household Work

Research on immigrant women and household work contested some mainstream feminist tenets on paid and unpaid work and on the relationships between unpaid work and women’s oppression, and between waged work and women’s emancipation, for these tenets fail to capture experiences of women of differing ethnicities, nationalities, and social class identification (Ng & Ramirez, 1981; Pessar, 1995a). In their studies of working-class immigrant women in Canada and in the United States, Ng and Ramirez (1981) and Pessar (1995a) note that, unlike the white, middle-class feminists who view housework as isolating and oppressive (Delphy, 1984; Thiessen & Looker, 1999), working-class immigrant women, who are often trapped in low-paid employment, see that household work offers them relative autonomy, compared to their paid work, which is often a repetitive and alienating process. However, working-class women clearly experience the physical and emotional strains and inequalities of the double burden of both paid and unpaid work and are oppressed by patriarchy in the home and exploited as cheap labour by capitalists.

While increased involvement in paid employment provides working-class immigrant women with more power in family budgeting and decision-making (Ng & Ramirez, 1981; Pessar, 1995a), the loss of professional jobs after immigration increases middle-class women’s financial vulnerability, and causes a reversion to traditional gender roles and subordination in their family (Man, 1997; Waters, 2002). Thus, it is important that the multiple voices of immigrant women should be included and different theories/approaches should be developed to explain their life experiences.

2.3.6 Critiques of Housework Literature

As there is not a commonly recognized definition of housework or household work, many researchers tend to treat it as a given or understand it as a common sense concept, which results
in confusion and narrow understanding of what household work is. It also in part leads to the exclusive focus on low-skilled, physical tasks in many empirical studies and to an ignorance of many other equally important, but less visible, tasks such as eldercare, and emotion work, which are often treated separately.

Studies on housework have also been criticized for focusing mainly on married or cohabiting couples. Those studies assume implicitly that unpaid housework is only performed by spouses or partners within their own homes, ignoring the inter-household, inter-institutional, and community dimensions of domestic responsibilities (Doucet, 2000: 165). Furthermore, by assuming that household work remains the same across households and unchanged throughout one’s lifetime, these studies ignore the fact that many major life transitions or events, such as having a child, getting old, becoming disabled, international migration, etc., may also have a great impact on the amount of time people spend on unpaid household work and on the types of household tasks that they perform both in and across households (Eichler & Albanese, 2007). Failure to see the changing nature of household work also leads to the invisibility of the learning involved in it. On the other hand, scholars on immigrant women and housework also call for attention to the diversity of immigrant women’s everyday lives and the larger social contexts in which they are located (Ng & Ramirez, 1981).

In the following section, I will turn to literature on lifelong learning, and examine the different definitions and theories of lifelong learning that have evolved in the past two or three decades.

2.4 Lifelong Learning: Concepts and Theoretical Underpinnings

Compared to the voluminous literature and long-time debates on housework, research on lifelong learning is relatively recent but is growing rapidly. As I did with household work literature in the above section, I will now examine how the concept of lifelong learning was theorized and empirically applied in research on adult education and in government policies on lifelong learning.

2.4.1 Meaning, Concepts, and Goals of Lifelong Learning

At first glance, the concept of lifelong learning indicates an indisputable fact that human beings learn throughout the lifespan, that is, from cradle to grave, and that learning can take place everywhere in our everyday life: in the home, at school, and in the workplace. Therefore, the
meaning of lifelong learning is and should be closely related to learning to interpret the changes
in everyday life and in the world around us. Indeed, when it was first introduced in a UNESCO
report in the early 1970s, the goals of lifelong learning were summarized as “learning to know,
learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be” (Faure, et al., 1972, cited in Delors, et
al., 1998: 37).

If Delors’ vision of what lifelong learning is a bit vague or broad to you, the Hamburg
Declaration on Adult Learning (1997)\(^2\) makes it very clear on what lifelong learning is:

[Adult education] becomes more than a right; it is a key to the twenty-first century. It is
both a consequence of active citizenship and a condition for full participation in society.
It is a powerful concept for fostering ecologically sustainable development, for promoting
democracy, justice, gender equity, and scientific, social and economic development, and
for building a world in which violent conflict is replaced by dialogue and a culture of
peace based on justice. Adult learning can shape identity and give meaning to life.
Learning throughout life implies a rethinking of content to reflect such factors as age,
gender equality, disability, language, culture and economic disparities.

Adult education denotes the entire body of ongoing learning processes, formal or
otherwise, whereby people regarded as adults by the society to which they belong
develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, and improve their technical or
professional qualifications or turn them in a new direction to meet their own needs and
those of their society. Adult learning encompasses both formal and continuing education,
non-formal learning and the spectrum of informal and incidental learning available in a
multicultural learning society, where theory- and practice-based approaches are
recognized.

Despite the comprehensiveness that the concept of lifelong learning entails in the previous
statement, and despite its grand aim of “tying learning and learners to citizenship, participation,
justice, gender equality, peace, economic development, civil society, indigenous peoples and
minorities’ rights” (Mojab, 2006: 165), there has not been a unanimous understanding of what
lifelong learning is among researchers. For some, lifelong learning is “a process of further
learning and continuous self-education throughout [all people] lives” (Cropley, 1981: 189), or
the wide range of knowledge and skills that adults naturally pick up over the course of their
lifetime (Brookfield, 1984). While some scholars depicted lifelong learning as focussed,

\(^2\) The full text is available at http://www.unesco.org/education/uie/confintea/pdf/cpn5eng.pdf.
intentional learning, or “the systemic, purposeful, organized learning that lifelong education procedures seek to foster” (Knapper & Cropley, 1991, cited in Gouthro, 1998: 11), others argued that lifelong learning should also be lifewide, including all incidental, everyday type of learning across one’s lifespan (Gouthro, 1998). A few scholars emphasize the importance of including pre-primary and primary education, as a person’s formative years are of crucial importance for learning how to learn, and for stimulating the motivation to engage in further learning (Schuetze & Slowey, 2000), while others simply suggest that lifelong learning cuts across this school and post-school distinction and spans the whole of one’s life (Field & Leicester, 2000). But for many adult educators, lifelong learning is often associated with post-secondary adult learning or continued education.

For international or inter-governmental agencies such as UNESCO, OECD, and the EU, lifelong learning is mainly concerned with planned, purposeful, systematic, worthwhile learning, and has been used approvingly and enthusiastically promoted. In their policy discourse, however, lifelong learning is often used interchangeably with “adult education” (see the above quote from the Hamburg Declaration), and “lifelong education,” although the latter two terms may exclude learning in contexts other than educational institutions (Field & Leicester, 2000).

2.4.2 Lifelong Learning or “Worklong” Training?

When it was first introduced in early 1970s, the concept of lifelong learning, which emphasizes self-realization, personal development, and rights, was perceived as an approach to promote some of the democratic goals of the United Nations such as equal educational conditions/opportunities and improved quality of life for people all over the world (Schugurensky, 2007).

However, in the past two decades this humanistic approach to lifelong learning has given way to a powerful educational discourse of recurrent education that emphasizes economic competitiveness. In government policies on adult education, the dominant discourse of lifelong learning has been closely tied with the human capital theory that focuses on formal education for economic benefits. With the globalization of the world economy, Canada and other member countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has enthusiastically adopted this economic-oriented agenda of lifelong learning as their dominant discourse on adult education and vocational training (Edwards, 2000). Under this human capital
theory, lifelong learning is viewed as a condition or a strategy to enhance the economic competitiveness of the workforce in a globalized economy and for individual citizens to secure their employability in a global marketplace of opportunities.

Many scholars have criticized this human capital approach to lifelong learning for reducing human beings to an “economic creature” (Gustavsson, 1997), and for perceiving knowledge and skill attainment as investments with economic returns, and for equating schooling and training to social status and mobility (Mojab, 2009: 6). As a result, lifelong learning, with its great emphasis on knowledge acquisition for economic development, becomes “worklong” training (Mojab & Gorman, 2002), as it shifts the burdens of increasing adaptability to the individual workers.

Since the 1990s, a neo-liberal approach to lifelong learning has become dominant in adult education policies, which contributed to the commercialization of education in the OECD countries (Grace, 2002). In this market-oriented model, the learners are no longer conceived of as citizens with the inalienable right to education funded and often also provided by the state, but as potential consumers of educational products and services whose rights are reduced to choosing among several options in the marketplace. This neo-liberal approach to lifelong learning implies a transition from workplace training and state provision of public education to self-recovery or for-profit courses offered by private companies and paid for by the learners in a competitive marketplace (Pannu, Schugurensky, & Plumb, 1994).

The human capital theory underpinning lifelong learning has been criticized for reducing human beings to an “economic creature” (Gustavsson, 1997), for perceiving knowledge and skill attainment as investments with economic returns, and for equating schooling and training to social status and mobility (Mojab, 2009: 6). As a result, lifelong learning, with its great emphasis on knowledge acquisition for economic development, becomes “worklong” training (Mojab & Gorman, 2002), as it shifts the burdens of increasing adaptability to the individual workers. Similarly, with its rhetoric about the efficiency and democracy of the free market, the neo-liberal discourse of lifelong learning has also been contested because it has been used by policy makers to justify cutbacks to adult education programs, and by employers to withdraw from funding training programs (Schuetze, 2000).
2.4.3 Critiques of the Dominant Discourses of Lifelong Learning

As an educational concept, lifelong learning has undoubtedly broadened our view and understanding of the dimensions and scopes of learning, and has stimulated our thoughts for further inquiries on various issues of lifelong learning. While some researchers see lifelong learning as an idealized goal for education (Parson, 1990), a necessary Utopia (Delors, et al., 1998: 20), or a moral duty (Wain, 1991), many others criticize the conceptualization of lifelong learning as too idealistic, a vision which is rather empty of context (Gustavsson, 1997: 239) or as an “absent-present” (Edwards, 2000: 4). Giere (1995) notices the “vagueness,” and the “atheoretical nature” of the concept and its arbitrary quality and inherent tensions and contradictions (see Edwards, 2000: 4-5). To me, lifelong learning is a concept that is often broadly defined as any types of meaningful learning, but is narrowly applied in empirical studies which focus mainly on formal or institutional education/training. Larsson (1997: 251) fears that the excessive use of lifelong learning for too many purposes may lead to the loss of its richness and precision. More radically, Boshier (1998) considers lifelong learning a regressive notion in comparison to the idea of lifelong education because “[l]ifelong learning discourses render social conditions (and inequality) invisible” (p. 8).

As an educational discourse and government policy for adult education, lifelong learning and its various theoretical underpinnings have been extensively contested and criticized in the past decades. For example, the humanistic approach of lifelong learning is criticized for ignoring the inequality issues that range from economic resources to cultural capital to availability of time. The human capital approach of lifelong learning is criticized for its overemphasis on job-related skill training for economic competitiveness, which operates largely in the interests of capital, the state, and the corporations. In doing so, it may further polarize the workforce by helping the skilled move into higher positions but dumping those less skilled into unemployment or underemployment (Cruikshank, 2001). In addition, it puts most of the blame on low-skilled workers and not on the low availability of high-skilled jobs (Livingstone, 1999). The neo-liberal discourse of lifelong learning is criticized for the marketization of lifelong learning and commercialization of learning institutions. As educational institutions become for-profit enterprises, lifelong learners’ rights and opportunities to education diminish (Schugurensky, 2007).
Lifelong learning has also been criticized for “offer[ing] the comforting illusion that for every problem there is one simple solution” (Coffield, 1999: 486). It is also noted that in recent years the discourse of lifelong learning has been mobilized by different sectors as the panacea to cure all social and economic ills, from programs that help youth “at risk,” to skill training to maintain national productivity, reduce welfare costs, and to counter social exclusion of disadvantaged communities (Blackmore, 2006: 9). In her study on lifelong learning and paid work, Mojab (2009: 5) argues that the marketization and commodification of the concept of lifelong learning also alienates the learners from what they learn.

Feminist scholars have criticized the mainstream studies on lifelong learning for ignoring gender in their analysis (Leathwood & Francis, 2006: 2). They argue that just as the labour market is gendered, classed, and racialized, so is lifelong learning, in terms of access, participation, and outcomes of lifelong learning, because the economic rationale of lifelong learning gives little recognition of differential costs and benefits, nor of differential opportunities to engage in formal lifelong learning/training in the first place (Leathwood, 2006: 44).

In her study of Kurdish immigrant women in Sweden, Mojab (2006) notes that, while learning is a crucial factor in the process of successful re-settling and re-rooting, much of the learning is detached from women’s learning from their past and present experiences, creating disjunctures between immigrant women’s learning needs and desires and the State’s political agenda in creating new citizens, and the context of closer state and market relations (Mojab, 2006: 168).

2.4.4 Homeplace: A Long Neglected Site of Lifelong Learning

From the very beginning, research on lifelong learning has focused on formal, institutional adult education (Collins, 2003; Edwards, 2000; Hart, 1992; Jarvis, 1999; Schuetze, 2000), and its impact on its learners and the labour market (Crowther, 2004; Cruikshank, 2001; Field, 2000; Edwards, 2000; Fenwick, 2004; Griffin, 2001; Tight, 1998). Informal learning outside educational institutions and the workplace has rarely been the focus of research. So far, I have found only a handful of research on informal learning in the homeplace (Gouthro, 1998, 2005), on/through volunteer work (Schugurensky, Duguid & Slade, 2006), and unpaid household work (Eichler, 2007; Eichler, forthcoming; Eichler, et al., 2010; Hart, 1992; Liu, 2007a &b).

Hayes and Flannery (2000) note that the home was traditionally viewed as a location of few opportunities for learning, and that skills in housework and childcare were perceived as intuitive
and natural rather than learned. In her critical analysis of lifelong learning in the homeplace, Gouthro (2005) argues that, as a core aspect of the lifeworld, the homeplace is the first site for individual learning experiences, a place where values, beliefs, morals, and goals are often discussed and negotiated. It is also a place where women develop their gender identities and learn in personal ways the effects of gender hierarchies in social relationships and the sexual division of labour. Gouthro (2005) and Hart (1997) criticize the masculine perception that dominates the discourse and the research parameters of lifelong learning for ignoring the homeplace as a site of lifelong learning. Other feminist scholars (Eichler, 2007; Waring, 1999) attribute the devalued life-affirming learning to a masculine definition of work and the devaluation of unpaid labour. In her exploration of learning through unpaid household work for paid work, Eichler (forthcoming) notes that the devaluation of unpaid household work leads not only to the invisibility of learning involved in unpaid work and the lack of recognition of transferable skills among job seekers and the employers, but also to the sparseness of research on related issues.

Building on feminist scholarship on housework and lifelong learning, I have argued that the masculinized and market-oriented goal of lifelong learning is the result of a long-time denial of housework as “real” work and the home as a “real” workplace (Liu, 2007b). By making the work invisible, it consequently renders its learners, as well as their knowledge, genderless, classless, and raceless, thus ignoring the impact of those factors on the content of learning, process of learning, ways/means of learning, as well as the purpose of learning.

2.4.5 Dimensions of Lifelong Learning

Traditionally, learning was viewed as a mere cognitive process that is controlled by the central nervous system (J. Piaget), or as an emotional process that involves psychological energy (S. Freud), or as a social process that takes place in the interaction between the individual and his/her surroundings and is dependent on historical and societal conditions (K. Marx). In his book *The Three Dimensions of Learning*, Illeris (2002) combines these classical learning theories by perceiving learning as a process that consists of all three dimensions: the cognitive, the emotional, and the social.

Based on the situations and contexts in which learning takes place, scholars on lifelong learning have also differentiated the learning process into three types: formal, non-formal, and informal.
learning (Commission Staff Working Paper, EU, 2000; Livingstone, 1999; Malcolm, Hodkinson & Colley, 2003). According to Livingstone (1999: 164), formal learning is the full-time study within state-certified school systems. It is highly institutionalized and hierarchical. Non-formal learning, often known as continuing education or vocational training, refers to all organized educational activities that take place outside the formal school system. Informal learning, on the other hand, is broadly defined as any learning activity, both individual and collective, that is undertaken in order to gain new understanding, knowledge or skills without externally-imposed criteria or the presence of an institutionally authorized instructor. In recent years, non-formal learning has become the primary focus in most recent academic and policy discussions about “lifelong learning.” Livingstone (2002) argues that for most adults, informal learning represents the most important form of learning for coping with our changing environment and that no account of a person’s “lifelong learning” is complete without considering their intentional informal learning activities (p.2). Compared to formal education, however, informal learning remains largely the “iceberg” of adult learning, still hidden and unexplored (Livingstone, 1999:165).

In his study on lifelong learning through volunteer work, Schugurensky (2000) further divides informal learning into three subcategories based on the intention and awareness of the learner: self-directed learning; incidental learning; and tacit learning. While some of the informal learning is intentional and conscious, other forms may be less visible and less recognized by the person involved in the learning, for example, the learning of values, attitudes, and behaviours.

Despite these distinctions, however, there are some debates on the differentiation of lifelong learning into formal, non-formal, and informal processes. Malcolm, Hodkinson, and Colley (2003) note that with increasing research on informal learning in recent years, and with the recognition and enhancement of such learning because it is vital to improving social inclusion and increasing economic productivity, the boundaries between the informal, non-formal, and formal different forms of learning are not always clear-cut. Even worse, scholars cannot even agree on what informal, non-formal, and formal learning are. In recent years, there are strong and increasing tendencies to formalize informal learning— often through externally prescribed objectives, assessments, and funding, and to informalize formal learning—usually through informal supports to students such as learning advisers and mentors, etc. (Malcolm, Hodkinson, & Colley, 2003: 313).
Based on her research on Kurdish immigrant women and lifelong learning, Mojab (2006) cautions that while these distinctions are useful, they offer little insight into the contemporary dynamics of learning. Mojab finds that for the Kurdish immigrant women in her study, all three forms of learning coexist, and the artificial differentiation between formal, non-formal, and informal learning fails to cover the totality of the immigrant women’s learning, for and from life, which often transcend those boundaries of learning. Mojab (2006: 168) criticizes the theories of learning for not accounting for the contexts and contingencies of learning, their diverse forms, and the creativity of the learners in moving beyond the confines of formal and informal learning.

2.5 My Research: Bringing Together Lifelong Learning, Household Work, and Chinese Immigrants

Although there is a growing literature on immigrants’ learning, many of the studies focused on job or workplace training (Majob, 1999; Mojab & Gorman, 2003; Mojab, Ng, & Mirchandani, 2000), language learning for paid jobs (Duff, Wong & Early, 2002; Han, 2007; Wang, 1996), and learning to be a good citizen in Canadian society (Bron, 2003; Joshee & Derwing, 2004, Mojab & McDonald, 2001). Little research is done on immigrants’ learning associated with household work.

So far, literature on recent Chinese immigrants in Canada has focused mainly on their labour market experiences (Li, 1998, 2003b; Li & Dong, 2008; Lo & Wang, 2004; Wang & Lo, 2005; Zong, 2004). Empirical studies on recent Chinese immigrant women are limited yet growing, which have shed light on some of their settlement experiences (Salaff & Greve, 2004), the changes and challenges in their housework and childcare responsibilities (Man, 1996, 2004; Wan, 2003; Waters, 2002), their informal learning experiences in navigating the Canadian labour market (Ng, Man, Shan, & Liu, 2007; Shan, 2009a & b) and their experiences in adapting to the Canadian society (Han, 2007; Wang, 1996). My doctoral research on Chinese immigrants and lifelong learning is among the first of its kind to explore extensively the learning involved in household work among the Chinese immigrants in Canada.

Based on concepts of lifelong learning defined by various scholars (Brookfield, 1984; Cropley, 1981; Dave, 1976; Gouthro, 1998), I see lifelong learning as both lifelong (e.g., learning from cradle to grave) and lifewide (learning for both paid and unpaid activities, at home, at school, or in the workplace). I understand lifelong learning as both the process of learning as well as the
range of knowledge and skills. Furthermore, I also see learning as being constituted of various dimensions: cognitive, emotional, and social. In this study, I examined both the content as well as the ways of learning in its various dimensions and forms. However, given the unpaid nature of household work and the domestic domain where the work is performed, learning involved in household work is predominantly informal and self-directed, with some of the knowledge and skills intentionally pursued and others unintentionally acquired. Where applicable, I have also explored and expanded on the dimensions of learning. In addition, I have examined how the changes in household work and the related learning reconstructed the gender roles and gender identities among the Chinese immigrant women.

In the following chapter I will turn to a discussion of the social construction theory of gender, including the construction of women’s gender roles and identities in socialist China. I will also examine the relationship between gender, knowledge acquisition, and gendered ways of knowing/learning.
3.1 Introduction

Feminist scholarship suggests that gender roles and constructs may have a direct impact on what people do and how much they do it. So far, research has pointed to a unanimous fact that household work is gendered, with women not only doing more, but also doing different kinds of household work. Women are assigned as the primary caregiver of the family, assuming most of the household responsibilities while men are exempt from most household tasks within the home or are only expected to participate in some household activities, such as maintenance and repair tasks, just to “help out” (Weiss, 1990: 122). According to Mederer (1993: 143), household work is a firmly “embedded” element of women’s gender definition, and a contributing factor in the construction of gender. Given the gendered nature of household work, it is not surprising that nearly all related research to date has been done along gender lines.

Informed and inspired by feminist scholarship on social constructions of gender, division of household labour, and women’s way of knowing/learning, this dissertation uses a gender-based analysis to understand the changes in household work and gender relations among the Chinese immigrants, especially the women. In this chapter, I will first discuss how gender is theorized in feminist scholarship. Then, I will examine how gender is constructed in traditional Chinese culture and in socialist China and how changes in gender ideologies influence women’s view and engagement in household work, and their gender roles and identities. At the end of the chapter, I will examine feminist scholarship on gender, knowledge, and gendered way of knowing/learning. In doing so, my research intends to expand on the existing feminist theories of gender, household work, and the related learning.

3.2 Social Constructions of Gender and Gender Relations

Feminist scholarship defines gender as the socially constructed roles and relationships, personality traits, attitudes, behaviours, and values that society ascribes to men and women, based on their perceived differences (Ferree, 1990; Scot, 1986). However, gender differences are not accorded equal value. Characteristics associated with males are usually valued as normal and good while characteristics associated with females are viewed as inferior and negative (Jay, 1981). The differences between men and women are often assumed, amplified, and even created,
to support the “fact” and to reflect the “natural” order of things (Wong, 2005: 11). Many studies, including those on intersexuality, have demonstrated that most of the “differences” between men and women are not pre-existing, but rather are socially constructed (Anselmi & Law, 1998; Blackless, et al., 2000; Lips, 2005). However, once they are created, these differences are used to reinforce the idea of the “essentialness” of gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987). In other words, inequality is produced through the construction of differences (Risman, 1998).

According to the social construction of gender theory, “gender is a cognitive and symbolic construct that helps individuals develop a sense of self, a sense of identity that is constructed in the process of interacting with others within a given community” (Reid & Whitehead, 1992: 2). A gender perspective views gender not as an inherent or inevitable property of individuals based on “natural” psychological traits, but as a result of social organization (Mackie, 1995). Social institutions such as the family and work are organized in such a way that there is a continuous process of “engendering” behaviours and roles as separate and unequal (Ferree, 1990).

However, gender constructs vary across cultures and historical time. In every culture, gender is embedded in ideology and related to disadvantage, stratification, and hierarchy (Thompson, 1993: 558). Thus, “[g]ender is not a rigid or reified analytic category imposed on human experience, but a fluid one whose meaning emerges in a specific social context as it is created and recreated through human action” (Gerson & Peiss, 1985: 317). As West and Zimmerman (1987) contend, gender roles are not only what people learned but also what they do in their daily life, as women and men “do gender” all the time and in all contexts. Thus, a gender perspective emphasizes the connection among institutional, interactional, and individual processes by focusing on social structure, symbolic culture, historical change, the immediate situation, and everyday relations among people (Ferree, 1990; Gerson & Peiss, 1985; Hochschild, 1989; Thompson, 1993; Wharton, 1994).

Gender is also considered to be a primary way of signifying relationships of power (Scot, 1986: 1067). By differentiating themselves from women and by defining women as inferior and hence meriting inferior treatment, men maintain their greater power and dominance at all levels of social institutions, including the family (Mackie, 1991; Reskin, 1988). Frequently, unequal gender relations and male dominance are created, reflected, reproduced, and mutually reinforced in both the family and the labour market, which advantages men and disadvantages women.
The segregation of women into lower-paying and lower-status jobs contributes to the power imbalance by rendering women’s paid work less valued than men’s, reinforcing the assumptions about women’s perceived “natural” abilities, and strengthening the expectation in them that they should assume responsibility for household work instead (Davis & Carrier, 1999).

In her article *Hidden Power in Marriage* (1989), Komter identifies three types of power dynamics in the unequal division of household labour between women and men: manifest power, latent power, and invisible power (p.192). *Manifest power* can be observed in direct conflicts over desires for or attempts at change. *Latent power*—the power that prevents overt conflicts—is at stake when negative reactions are anticipated (e.g., fruitless dispute, pointless quarrelling; sanction or grievances). *Invisible power*—the implicit values, beliefs, or preconceptions—is used to confirm and justify power inequality, and to legitimize everyday reality in married life. Here, Komter (1989) defines power as the ability to affect consciously or unconsciously the emotions, attitudes, cognitions, or behaviour of someone else (p. 192). While manifest power focuses on the visible outcome, latent power and invisible power focus more on the power process and mechanism, which are less visible and thus often escape the awareness of the people involved.

### 3.3 Gender Constructions in Mainland China

#### 3.3.1 Traditional Chinese Ideology on Gender Roles

Traditional Chinese society was a patriarchal society with strict rules of conduct. Influenced by Confucianism, traditional Chinese culture held that “men are superior, and women inferior” and advocated that women should follow the moral rules dictated in the “three obediences” and the “four virtues.” While the “three obediences” require women to obey their fathers before marriage, their husbands after marriage, and their sons when widowed, the “four virtues” encourage women to behave with “moral disciplines, proper speech manners, modest appearance and diligence” (Wong, 1995). Education for women was intended to inculcate these virtues.

Women’s inferior position was reflected in the popular saying “women’s virtue lies in their ignorance” and was reinforced in the widely quoted words by Confucius: “it is only women and morally retarded men that are difficult to raise and provide for” (Hall & Ames, 1998). Another obvious symbol of the confinement and subordination of women was the custom of binding the
feet of young girls in order to achieve their "female beauty" according to men's standard. This backward custom started in the later 17th century and lasted until the early 20th century.

From a young age, girls were taught to follow Confucian doctrines about women inscribed in the Book of Women’s Indoctrination (the Precepts for Women) and were socialized with the notion of gender roles of “men controlling the outside, and women the inside,” that is, men were in charge of outside activities, such as farming, and women were responsible for the internal, housework and carework (Stacey, 1975). This gender division of labour was also reflected in the Chinese language, in which the character for man, nan ren, showed a labourer working in the field, whereas the character for woman, fu nü, was originally written like a figure with a broom in hand and half kneeling down—women’s traditional posture for greeting (Feng, 2007).

As a result of this gender role socialization, women accept the notion that household work is women’s work, and take it as “part of being female.” They also “judge themselves and one another on how well they do work associated with being female” (Kaplan, 1982: 546). Meanwhile, due to its unpaid nature, doing household work is devalued to “doing nothing,” even by women themselves, and thus reduces women to economic dependency on men, whose work remains associated with primary providership for the family. In her examination of Chinese women and patriarchy, Stacey argues that “Woman’s oppression starts right at home. The family is the central context for the transhistorical, transcultural oppression of women” (Stacey, 1975: 64).

3.3.2 Gender Roles and Gender Identities in Socialist China

With the radical social changes and revolutions in the 20th century, Chinese women's status was enormously improved. Since it was founded in 1949, the People’s Republic of China has provided the legal basis for the equality of women in all areas of social, economic, and political life (Croll, 1983). In the 1950 and 1960s, the state propagated rigorously to encourage women to step out of the patriarchal household and take paid work outside the home, through its widely publicized slogans, such as “Times are different, men and women are equal. What men can do, women can do as well,” and “Women can hold up half of the sky.” Hence, “half the sky” became the synonym for “Chinese women,” who were once known as “three-inch golden lotus” because of their bound feet (Feng, 2007: 5).
Although women’s production participation is seen as playing a key role in breaking the patriarchal restriction and segregation of women, and in elevating women’s social and familial status (The All-China Women’s Federation, 1994; Whyte & Parish, 1984), household work remains largely women’s work, and women are expected to perform unpaid work in addition to their paid jobs. In contrast to the lofty meaning attached to paid employment (e.g., its significance to women’s emancipation), unpaid household work is perceived as of little social and economic significance. Today, the term “housewife” still carries a negative connotation for many Chinese women, and being a housewife often means being jobless, ill-educated, narrow-minded, nagging, isolated, chained-to-the-stove, and so forth (Zuo, 2003: 326). Unlike in the West, where women, employed or non-employed, remain fashioned in the image of the “mother” (Keller, 1994: 156), the prevailing image of Chinese women was the “iron-girl” 3 (Croll, 1995; Jin, 2006) during Mao’s time (1947-76) and the dedicated, self-sacrificing, intellectual woman during the post-Mao economic reform era. 4 Both images portrayed women as equal to men in their ability in socialist production, although the former depicted women as desexualized or masculinized, and the latter intended to restore femininity and traditional women’s gender roles as wives and mothers (Croll, 1995).

Despite the fact that working outside the home enhanced Chinese women’s independent identity as well as their social and family status, it has not fundamentally changed the subordinate position of women within the household or society. Women are expected to behave as virtuous wives and good mothers after marriage and to put their husbands’ careers ahead of their own (Zuo, 2003).

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3 The image of the “iron girls” was created as the most famous women’s role model during the Cultural Revolution (1967-77) in order to encourage and mobilize women for their paid labour participation. Based on a very superficial understanding of gender equality, the “iron girls” challenged the traditional division of labour by portraying women as capable and as equal to men: they dressed like men and did “men’s work,” and could (physically) bear any hardship and shoulder heavy burdens with iron-like shoulders (also see Jin, 2006).

4 The image of the dedicated, self-sacrificing, intellectual woman in post-Mao China is vividly depicted in a very popular movie Reaching Her Midlife (ren dao zhong nian) (1983) based on an equally popular novel with the same title by Shen Rong (1980). The story portrays the life of an intellectual woman, Lu Wenting, an ophthalmologist, and shows how the double burden of juggling a demanding job and family responsibilities wore away her health. The story, set in the early 1980s, conformed to the theme of that decade which was marked by a searching for new models of femininity to replace the defeminized image of “iron girl” of the 1970s, and to reemphasize women’s domestic roles as wives and mothers.
3.3.3 Gender Ideology on Paid and Unpaid Work in China

In Mainland China, most women take paid employment. This is largely because of the socialist state’s longstanding belief that women’s participation in social production is the final solution to women’s emancipation (Andors, 1983; Wang, 1998). Under the State gender policy of the “same-job same-pay,” Chinese women have enthusiastically sought paid employment to achieve gender equality and women’s liberation in the past four decades (Zuo, 2003). Many State policies on family also privilege employed women, with many non-cash benefits, such as subsidized housing and daycare services for women with children (Bian, 1994; Whyte & Parish, 1984; Zuo, 2003). As a result, many women, like their male counterparts, have developed a high attachment to work outside the home and identified qualities such as intelligence, education, and employment/career involvement as part of womanhood. Although economic reform in the past two decades has brought dramatic changes in the labour market, in state policies, and even in gender ideology, the 40 years of gender equality education and practice have instilled in men, as well as in women, the value of paid employment and the egalitarian beliefs about women’s role in paid work. For many women, having a job not only contributes significantly to the financial well-being of the family, it also makes their life fuller and more meaningful, providing them with social standing, connections, and a sense of belonging (Zuo, 2003).

In contrast to the great emphasis on the economic and political value of paid employment and the significant social meaning attached to employment by women who work for pay, unpaid housework is deemed of little value. Women’s domestic role is seen as trivial, although, as a survey in China in the 1990s indicated, 90 percent of wives held full-time jobs, and 70 percent of them shouldered more household responsibilities than their husbands did (Zuo & Bian, 2001). Thus, while they regard working outside the home as the prime and only indicator of gender equality, women accept other forms of subordination, such as the unequal gender division of labour in the home (Honig & Hershatter, 1988; Wolf, 1985). These studies on gender and work in contemporary China highlight the fact that gender ideologies are fluid and socially constructed, and gender roles are practised (Wang, 2004: 98).

3.4 Gender, Knowledge, and Way of Knowing/Learning

An important part of my research on household work and lifelong learning was to explore how gender influences learning, what knowledge and skills are acquired, and how women and men
differ in their ways of learning. The goal was to see whether what they learn is gendered and whether there is a gendered way of learning.

As we have seen in Chapter 2, the dominant discourses of lifelong learning, be it in government policies or in the international organizations such as UNESCO, OECD, and the EU, presume that lifelong learning is neutral, and good for both men and women. However, feminist scholars contested this economy-oriented, market-driven rationale of lifelong learning, as it is “conceptualised entirely in terms of paid work, with women’s unpaid labour in the home/family/community (and indeed in the workplace) rendered invisible” (Leathwood, 2006: 423). Women rarely “count” in the mainstream economic theory and practices (Waring, 1988). Furthermore, the economic rational of lifelong learning policy ignores the fact that the labour market is gendered, classed, and racialised. Women at all qualification levels continue to be paid significantly less than men (DfES, 2004), with working-class women, especially ethnic minority working-class women trapped in “lifelong earning” in low-paid and low-status jobs (Leathwood, 2006: 44). As Leathwood (2006) points out, “within the social justice/social inclusion rationale for lifelong learning, inequalities are disguised, minimized, or individualized, and the status quo remains largely unproblematised” (p. 46).

Feminist scholars have also criticized the human capital theory of lifelong learning for privileging only skills for paid work and knowledge gained through formal education/training, whereas learning and skills acquired in the home, for unpaid work, and often possessed by women, are not valued as equally high. Blackmore (2006) argues that skills, like gender, are socially constructed, and reflect power relations, with women’s skills being valued less than those of men. By focusing on gender, feminist scholars problematized the economic rationale discourse and the human capital theory of lifelong learning for ignoring the gender inequality and social exclusion in lifelong learning policies for labour participation, and for overlooking the differential costs, barriers, as well as the benefits, for women to engage in paid work-related lifelong learning.

Feminist scholars writing on women as learners have noted that, just as household work is gendered, our knowledge as well as our ways of knowing and learning are also gendered. Due to the deeply rooted, traditional gender ideologies in our society, women were seen as emotional, intuitive, and nurturant, and were believed to be less capable of reasoning and rational thinking
than men, and thus, biologically and mentally more suitable for homemaking and childrearing (Jaggar, 1988). This dichotomous view of women and men and the relegation of women to the private world of the home and domesticity reinforced women’s identification with activities such as childrearing, which was believed to depend on non-rational, emotive type of knowledge (Donovan, 1987; Flannery, 2000). As a result, women’s work and women’s ways of knowing were seen not only as different but also as inferior to men’s work and men’s ways of knowing. Despite feminists’ long and persistent efforts in questioning and challenging those beliefs, they continue to influence our view of what work are considered as “real” work (Eichler & Matthews, 2007) and what knowledge and learning is considered worthwhile (Jagger, 1988).

According to some feminists, gendered work also leads to gendered knowledge (Harding, 1996) and gendered ways of knowing (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986), as women and men experience “gender cultures” differently and have different interests and needs for information even when they are engaged in similar situations (Harding, 1996). Furthermore, gender, as a system of historically and culturally constructed social relationships, may produce different knowledge systems not only between women and men, but also for all women from different societies, cultures, ethnic groups, and localities. In her study of knowledge production among black groups, Hurtado (1996) notes that the differences in gender, race, or class may create different identities, which can either enable or restrict women’s ways of knowing, and their access to knowledge and to the power to create knowledge. Thus, it is important to locate the origins of gendered ways of knowing in broad social and cultural systems, as different societies, cultures, and ethnic backgrounds may potentially result in differing knowledge systems among women as well as between women and men (Harding, 1996).

In their book Women’s Ways of Knowing (1986), Belenky et al. identified five ways that women acquire knowledge, of which the most important way is through “connection,” or through collaborative explorations in various kinds of groups. This emphasis on connectedness or collaboration in knowledge acquisition is significant in that for the first time it makes visible women’s learning experiences and justifies women’s ways of knowing, which have been historically ignored and devalued. However, the “connected way of knowing” is criticized for universalizing women’s way of knowing, as diversity in race, class, culture, and ethnicity may also create considerable differences among women in their ways of knowing and learning. According to Weiler (1988), women’s connected knowing and knowledge systems stem from or
reflect women’s subordinate position in society. In order to negotiate a male-dominated world, women become oriented to seeking to know and understand the ideas and feelings of other people, particularly men. Thus, it is suggested (Flannery, 2000) that we should avoid over-generalization of women’s ways of knowing and the assumption that women’s ways of knowing and learning exist in opposition to men’s ways of knowing.

3.5 Bringing Together Gender and Learning

From the above discussion, we can see that gender plays a vital role in what women do, what they learn, and how they learn. However, gender, household work, and learning do not exist in isolation, but are defined in relation to one another, and in the relationships between women and men, between gender and work, and between gender and knowledge. Learning can also be complicated by race, ethnicity, class, and other social identifiers, which situate women and men differently in the social landscape. These complications, in turn, may produce different knowledge systems and different ways of knowing/learning for women of different social, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds. Thus, taking gender in its different manifestations into account is crucial to the understanding of both the household work and the related learning among the new immigrants from Mainland China.

In this dissertation, I will do a gender-based analysis by examining the gender differences in food work, childcare/parenting, and emotion work and in what they learn and how they learn through household work. I will also explore whether there is a gendered way of knowing or learning. By focusing on gender and learning, I intend to join the effort of other feminist scholars (Eichler, et al, 2010; Gouthro, 2005) to reclaim lifelong learning by shifting the focus from paid work to unpaid work, and from formal learning to informal learning.

In the following chapter, I will discuss my research design and the mixed methods I used to conduct my research.
Chapter 4 Research Design and Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on my research design and methodology. I first introduce my research questions and research objectives. Then, I briefly discuss the sources of the data used in my research and the mixed methods, which include a survey, a focus group, and in-depth interviews, used in my data collection. In this chapter, I also discuss my theoretical framework for data analysis: a gender-based approach to household work and lifelong learning. I also provide a rationale for a mixed methods study and for the theoretical framework for my data analysis. This chapter concludes with a description of the organization of this dissertation.

4.2 Research Questions

Informed by questions from the WALL Survey on unpaid work and learning as well as by questions developed for Phase 2 and Phase 3 qualitative research of the Household Work Project, I addressed the following three questions in my dissertation:

1. How has household work changed after immigration among the recent immigrants from Mainland China?

2. What did the Chinese immigrants learn and how did they learn to cope with the changes in household work?

3. How does immigration interact with gender and ethnicity in influencing the gender division of household work, the content of learning, as well as the ways of learning involved in household work?

I chose to focus on food work, childcare/parenting, and emotion work for my research on household work and the related learning because the Chinese immigrants in the interviews reported changes and learning in these three areas far more than in any other household activities. Although food studies, childcare/parenting, and emotion work are often treated as different categories in literature, I examined the three aspects of unpaid work together, because they are often intertwined and interconnected with each other.
4.3 Research Objectives

By focusing on household work and lifelong learning among immigrants from Mainland China, both male and female, who had been in Canada within five years prior to their participation in the Household Work Project, my research intends to achieve the following objectives: 1. To bridge the gaps in the existing literatures on immigrants, household work, and lifelong learning through empirical research. 2. To make visible the unpaid household work and the learning involved in its various dimensions: physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual.

The goal of this research is not intended to glorify household work, but to unveil some important aspects of it, which have remained largely undervalued and unexplored in household work literature. By making visible some of the household work, I hope to make visible its social worth, and the significance of the learning to the Chinese immigrants’ settlement experience in their new home country.

4.3.1 A Mixed Methods Approach

I used mixed methods, both qualitative and quantitative, for my research, which included interviews, a focus group, a discussion group, and a survey. Qualitative research is known for its emphasis on the socially constructed nature of reality and how social experience is created and given meaning, while quantitative research emphasizes the measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables (Qiu, 2010: 40). However, each research method has limitations. Pure quantitative data analyses have been criticized for over-generalizing the research results, and for lack of contact with the people being studied (Blaikie, 2000), while qualitative data analysis is limited by its small sample size. As Erzberger and Kelle (2003) point out, “Qualitative or quantitative data alone did not yield sufficient information to allow us to fully understand the social processes under scrutiny. Qualitative and quantitative methods have to be combined to allow adequate explanations of the phenomena under study” (p. 474).

Mixed methods research is on the rise in sociological studies. Compared with the traditional mono-method approaches of conducting research, mixed methods have the following strengths:

- Mixed methods neutralize or cancel biases inherent in any single method (Creswell, 2005: 53).
• Mixed methods allow for research to develop as “comprehensively and completely as possible” (Morse, 2003: 189).

• Multiple sets of data collected through different research methods, and the resulting mixture or combination, have complementary strengths and non-overlapping weaknesses (Johnson & Christensen, 2004).

• Results from one method can help develop or inform the other method (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989) and provide insight into different levels or units of analysis (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998; 2003).

• By bringing together the findings from quantitative and qualitative methods, the results of both can be elaborated and thus enhance interpretability (Clark-Carter, 2004; Morse, 1991; Neuman, 2003; Qiu, 2010).

As a member of the large WALL research network and its sub-project on housework and lifelong learning, I had access to data from the WALL national survey and data from the four phases of the household work project. However, given that my research focus is on household work and Chinese immigrants, I examined data that are relevant to my research, that is, the quantitative data on unpaid work and informal learning from the WALL Survey, and the qualitative data on household work and informal learning from individual interviews, a focus group, and a discussion group with the new Chinese immigrants in the Greater Toronto Area, all of which were collected as part of the Household Work Project.

I see the following benefits of using the mixed methods approach and both qualitative and quantitative data in my multidisciplinary research:

• Compared to the single method used in most of research on household work, the mixed methods approach gave me both breadth and depth in my research on household work and lifelong learning among the Chinese immigrants, and it allowed me to examine my research questions from multiple perspectives and positions.

• The Survey data, which involved nearly 10,000 people across Canada, helped situate my qualitative research in a larger picture of the Canadian context by comparing the Chinese
immigrants with their native-born and other foreign-born counterparts in household work and the related learning.

- The qualitative data, in contrast, enabled me to explore in-depth some of the issues, which can hardly be measured by quantitative data, such as the causes and consequences of changes in food work, carework and emotion work after immigration, the content, processes as well as means of learning involved in such work.

- The multiple set of data collected through mixed methods greatly enriched and informed my data analysis, as these data sets complement each other in strengthening my arguments and expanding my knowledge and understanding of the dynamics of household work and the related learning.

It is noted that mixed methods can be especially useful when unexpected results arise from a quantitative study (Morse, 1991). In each of the qualitative data chapters, I also compared, where data are available, the similarities and differences in the findings between the Survey and the individual and group interviews. Thus, I believe a mixed method approach was the most effective way for me to gain a more comprehensive understanding of household work and the related learning involved in the household activities.

4.4 Data Sources

Data used in this research came from two main sources: quantitative data from the WALL National Survey on Work and Lifelong Learning (2004), and qualitative data from interviews, a focus group, and a discussion group with recent Chinese immigrants in the Greater Toronto Area. Although not personally involved in the WALL Survey, I conducted all the individual interviews, and facilitated the focus group and the discussion group with the Chinese immigrants, all through, and as part of, my research assistant work for the Household Work and Lifelong Learning Project.

4.4.1 National Survey on Work and Lifelong Learning (WALL)

Conducted through telephone interviews during late October 2003 and July 2004 by the Institute for Social Research (ISR) at York University, the national Survey on Work and Lifelong Learning involved 9,063 Canadian adults over age 18, of whom 4696 (52%) were women and 4330 (48%) were men. Based on their self-report, the majority of the people surveyed were white
(86%) and about 14 percent were non-white. Eighty percent of the respondents were Canadian-born, 20 percent were immigrants. There were a total of 183 respondents of Chinese origin in the Survey, making up 2 percent of the total participants. Among the Chinese in the survey, 115 were immigrants from Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan (1.3%) (see Livingstone & Scholtz, 2006; Livingstone, 2005).

The Survey on Work and Lifelong Learning was the first in North America to examine informal learning extensively in relation to unpaid work, such as housework, volunteer work, and general interests. I examined five sets of WALL data associated with household work and the related learning: 1. Participation rates and weekly hours of housework, childcare, eldercare, and helping neighbours among all participants; 2. Participation rates and weekly hours of informal learning on housework and general interests among all participants; 3. The weekly hours devoted to housework, childcare, eldercare, and helping neighbours among four Canadian subgroups: the Canadian-born, white immigrants, (other) non-white immigrants, and Chinese immigrants. 4. The weekly hours devoted to informal learning among the four subgroups; 5. Content of learning involved in household work and general interests activities among the Chinese immigrants. I analysed and compared data by sex within and between the four groups. Through the comparison between women and men among different subgroups and within the Chinese group, I hoped to get an unprecedented glimpse into the wide array of unpaid work and learning activities and a unique insight into both the extent and content of unpaid work and learning and the relations between these activities.

4.4.2 Household Work and the Lifelong Learning Project

As one of the 12 case studies in the WALL research network, the project on Unpaid Household Work and Lifelong Learning was conducted in four phases from 2003 through 2007 and involved over 400 participants. Each of the phases was built on the information collected from the phase(s) preceding it. 6

5 For comparative purposes, Chinese immigrants were not included in the non-white immigrant group.

Phase 1. Conducted in 2003, Phase 1 consisted of a mailed-in survey to members of various women’s organizations (n=254), and examined the housework, carework, and community work within and beyond one’s own household.

Phase 2. During the fall and winter of 2003 and 2004, 11 focus groups were held in three cities in Ontario, with a focus on the cognitive and emotional aspects of household work, the changes in their household work in the past five years, as well as the learning in relation to the life changes. It involved a total of 57 women and nine men from diverse ethnic, or racial backgrounds, including one focus group with Chinese women (n=8).

Phase 3. Conducted mostly between the fall of 2004 and the winter of 2005, Phase 3 comprised in-depth interviews on unpaid household work, which involved 75 people, both women and men, young and old, from the Greater Toronto Area. The interviewees (with the exception of 12 recent Chinese immigrants) in Phase 3 were selected from the WALL Survey, in which they had agreed to be contacted for follow-up interviews. The goal of Phase 3 was to examine how major life transitions, such as getting a new child, getting a new job, or losing a job, losing a partner, as well as international immigration had influenced people’s unpaid household work and what and how they learned in order to cope with the changes.

Phase 4. In the spring of 2005, individual interviews were conducted with 10 cleaning ladies and 10 nannies who did housework and carework for pay. Interviews in Phase 4 explored the different experiences of performing and learning housework and carework when they are done for pay rather than without pay. The interviews also explored whether knowledge and learning transfer between paid and unpaid sites of household work.

In the spring of 2006, the Household Work Project received a dissemination grant from SSHRC (Project No. 502-2005-0021). Built on the findings from the four phases of research, the unpaid household work research team collaborated with Skyworks, a non-profit production company, to co-produce a documentary film and a teacher's guide, which would be suitable for use in high school and undergraduate classrooms. Five discussion groups, including one with five Chinese

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immigrants, were held and filmed at the Skyworks studio in Toronto to set the background for the DVD. Most of the participants in the discussion groups came from respondents in Phases 1, 2, and 3. The DVD was completed and a launch party was held in September, 2007.8

The film/DVD contains four thematic segments: “What’s It Worth?” “More Than It Seems,” “Parents and Children,” and “Barriers to Paid Work.” The DVD also contains six portraits of individuals who recount some of their journeys through their understanding of household work and learning. The Chinese participants were part of each of the thematic sections and the portraits, too. The DVD also includes a teacher’s guide in CD, created by high school teachers, making it suitable for classroom use (Albanese, 2010).

4.4.3 My Involvement in the Unpaid Household Work Project

I joined the Project on Unpaid Household Work and Lifelong Learning in the fall of 2004, when I was working as a research assistant to Professor Margrit Eichler, the principal investigator of the Household Work Project. I first helped with the data analysis of the Phase One Survey, and later assisted Professor Eichler in setting up focus groups, and helped conduct a focus group with eight new Chinese immigrant women in the GTA. As my knowledge of the project themes expanded through taking related courses and conducting literature reviews, I became very interested in understanding the changes as well as the learning among the new Chinese immigrants. This is partly because of my increasing involvement with the unpaid Household Work Project, but more importantly, because I was new in the country, and was faced with the triple burden of adjusting to a new life in a new culture while trying to balance my household responsibilities and my academic work. So, in the summer of 2005, after I attended the WALL conference held at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, I decided to write my doctoral dissertation on the Project, that is, on unpaid household work and lifelong learning with a focus on the recent Chinese immigrants. I also read extensively the literature on Chinese immigrants and housework, and took a course in lifelong learning and Canadian families. I participated in the training sessions for graduate students who were recruited to conduct interviews for Phase 3, and was responsible for document filing. Between

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8 For a copy of the DVD Household Work: More Than It Seems, plus the CD with the teachers’ guide, contact VTape at: 416-351-1317 (tel.) or 416-351-1509 (fax).
the winter of 2005 and late fall of 2006, I conducted and transcribed 20 interviews with new
Chinese immigrants, six males and 14 females from the GTA. This dissertation draws on data
mainly from the interviews and the focus group with the Chinese immigrants.

I chose to focus on recent Mainland Chinese immigrants (i.e., those who were within five years
of residence in Canada) partly because they are the largest immigrant group to Canada in the past
decade, but more importantly because I was from Mainland China, and was also new to Canada
when I joined in the Household Work Project in 2004. Thus, I have the same language and
cultural background as the people who participated in my qualitative research. I chose
immigrants who were within five years of residence in Canada in order to be consistent with the
criteria used by the WALL Survey and the Household Work Project, both of which recruited
participants who had gone through/experienced big life events or major changes in life and work
in the previous five years before they participated in the research.

The past few years have witnessed my intellectual growth as the project progressed. As a
member of the household work research team, I contributed considerably to the dissemination of
the project’s research findings by presenting over 20 papers at various conferences, national and
international, within and beyond North America, including international conferences organized
by the WALL research network in 2006 and 2007. I have published two journal articles, two
book chapters, and a co-authored book, as well as numerous media contacts in the Chinese
language (e.g., through interviews and reports with newspapers, television, and radio). In
addition, I was involved in the SSHRC-funded dissemination project following the completion of
the four phases of the research: first, I assisted in writing a proposal to SSHRC for its
dissemination funding of a documentary film on our research findings, and then helped organize
on-camera discussion groups at Skyworks Studio. I worked as an interpreter and translator for
the discussion group with the Chinese immigrant women and then for the film.

4.5 Data Collection
4.5.1 The Survey

Initially, I planned to use only the qualitative data from the interviews I conducted and the focus
group with the Chinese immigrants that I organized and facilitated. My decision to include the
WALL Survey data was relatively more recent, occurring only after I got more contact with the
larger WALL network, and knew more about the WALL Survey, through conferences and
through the unpaid Household Work Project. As I began analysing my interview data and presenting some of my preliminary findings at conferences, I developed a strong desire to include some of the WALL Survey data on unpaid work in my research, as the interview questionnaire I used includes and probes all the questions on unpaid work in the WALL Survey. I was especially interested in knowing in what ways my research findings were similar to or different from the WALL Survey on Chinese immigrants. So, after consulting with my supervisor, I decided to include the WALL Survey data on household work in my doctoral research. As a result, this dissertation combined data from four sources: the WALL Survey, the interviews, the focus group and the discussion group.

4.5.2 The Interviews

As part of Phase 3 of the Household Work Project, I interviewed 20 Chinese immigrants between late 2004 and 2005, including eight people, four men and four women, from the WALL Survey. Due to a lack of qualified participants in the Greater Toronto Area from the original survey, I got the other twelve interviewees, 10 women and two men, from my own contacts. Initially, I intended to interview 15 people, all from the WALL Survey, so that I could compare data from the same group of people. However, despite a large data pool of the WALL Survey, only 10 people who fit my criteria were available for my interviews (i.e., recent Chinese immigrants within five years of residence in the GTA, and who agreed to participate in follow-up interviews). After initial telephone contacts, 8 people, four women and four men, agreed to participate. The other two I failed to reach. I found the other 12 people (including one couple) through snowballing. Coming from Mainland China myself and having lived in Toronto for three years, I had no difficulty in finding potential participants for my interview, as I had many old friends living in the GTA, and had made many new friends who were also from Mainland China. Some of those friends either participated in my interviews or helped me find people suitable for my research. I chose the non-WALL interviewees based on their length of time in Canada, sex, age, educational level, marital status, family size, and family patterns (i.e., nuclear family, extended

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9 In the original research plan for Phase 3 interviews in the Household Work Project, it is decided that the WALL Survey would oversample in the GTA so as to give us enough samples to draw on for follow-up interviews. Chinese immigrants were not in the original plan, and thus were not oversampled. I joined the Household Project as a research assistant at the end of Phase 1, and decided to write my dissertation on Chinese immigrants shortly before Phase 3 started in 2005.
family, and single-parent family) and employment before and after immigration. By doing so, I intended to capture as much as possible the diversity of new Chinese immigrant families in Canada.

Most of the interviews were conducted in the Project office at OISE/UT, and a few were conducted in the interviewees’ homes. I first approached all my potential interviewees by telephone and used an information sheet and telephone script prepared by the research team of Phase 3, which I translated into Chinese. I explained in Mandarin the goals of the Household Work Project and my own research, and the ways we were to use and keep the collected information. If they agreed to be interviewed, I generally gave them an option to choose the time and the location which they found most convenient for them. If they did not have any preferences, I would suggest having the interview in the Project office, as it is in downtown Toronto, quiet and comfortable, and within easy reach by public transit. Before each interview, I would ask the participant to read and sign a consent form. At the end of the interviews, I presented the interviewees with a small honorarium and thanked them on behalf of the Project for spending the time sharing their story with me.

The interviews were semi-structured, with each about two hours long. In my interviews I used a modified version of a semi-structured questionnaire developed by and for the entire household work project. I added a few more questions on immigration and a Chinese translation of the questionnaire. The interviews were done in the language of the informants’ choice. Of the 20 interviews, 10 were done in English, eight were in Mandarin Chinese, and two were mixed, switching between English and Mandarin, depending on the comfort level of the participants. In almost all the interviews, the respondents used some English or Chinese words and phrases occasionally if they could not express themselves in the language chosen. Actually, after doing the first few interviews, I encouraged the respondents to use more Chinese when they had difficulty expressing themselves in English even if they had chosen to be interviewed in English in the beginning.

All the interviews were taped and then transcribed. All the interviews conducted in Mandarin were translated into English. For clarity purposes, interviews conducted in English were slightly edited in grammar when cited in my writing.
The interview participants were between the ages of 25 to 58 years old, had immigrated to Canada from Mainland China in the previous five years, and were residing in the GTA at the time of the interviews. Most of my interviewees (90%) were married, many of whom had one child in their family. These children ranged in age from a few months to young adults in their 20s. With the exception of two who had college diplomas, the majority of the participants (90%) had a university degree. All of them had held professional jobs before immigration. At the time of the interviews, however, many of the interviewees (65%) were engaged in non-professional or semi-skilled jobs (e.g., what the Chinese dubbed as “labour” jobs). Five of the respondents (25%) were students at Canadian colleges and universities; three of whom were re-training themselves in a field completely different from their previous professions, and one young woman was attending adult high school to improve her English in order to start a new career. Three of the people I interviewed (15%), a male and two females, were unemployed (see Appendix I).

I interviewed more women than men because, as the literature review indicates, women still do two-thirds of all household work despite their increased participation in the labour force. I chose immigrants who were within five years of residence in Canada because the literature on lifelong learning and immigration suggests that major life transitions, such as international migration, lead to significant learning for those involved in such transitions. Therefore, for the Chinese immigrants, the first five years of immigration is crucial in terms of learning to adjust to a new life in a physically as well as socio-culturally different environment.

4.5.3 The Focus Group

One focus group with eight Mainland Chinese immigrant women was conducted in early 2004 as part of Phase 2 research of the Household Work Project. One of the participants was later selected for the in-depth interview in Phase 3, and two were invited to participate in the discussion group for the documentary film Household Work: More Than It Seems.

Of the eight women in the focus group, six were new immigrants within three years of immigration in Canada, and two had resided in Canada longer than five years prior to the focus group. Data on those two women of longer residence were not included in my research. All the women in the focus group were between the ages of mid-30s to early 50s, and with the exception of one woman who was a single mother with two children, the rest of the women were married, and had one child in the family. Like most new immigrants from Mainland China, all the women
in my focus group had university degrees and had held professional jobs (e.g., medical doctors, university or college teachers) before immigration. However, at the time of the focus group, only one woman was practising medicine in her own home-clinic, three of the women were working as lab technicians, two were doing service jobs, one woman was taking nursing courses at a college, and one woman was a stay-at-home mother with a young child (see Appendix II).

Conducted in English, the focus group was about an hour long, taped and transcribed. However, the original transcript was hardly readable with many sentences incomplete or not transcribed, largely due to the language and accent issues of the women. I helped with editing the transcripts. As different phases have their own goals, the focus group focused more on the participants’ perception of household work and on whether they viewed it as work. The focus group explored the range of household activities the participants actually did and probed for mental and emotional functions associated with housework. In the focus group, the participants were also asked if and how unpaid housework changed for them after immigration, and what and how the women learned to adjust to these changes.

4.5.4 The Discussion Group

An on-camera discussion group was added to my data pool after the research team received dissemination funding from SSHRC for making a documentary film on the project’s research findings. Conducted at Skyworks Studio in downtown Toronto in the summer of 2006, the discussion group involved five Chinese immigrant women: two from the Phase 2 focus group, and three from the Phase 3 interviews. They were selected largely based on their performance in the interviews and/or focus group and on their life changes and experiences in performing household work after immigration. I acted as a translator during the discussion as a large segment of it was done in Mandarin, and later I also helped with editing, revising, and translating the transcript of the discussion group. The focus of the discussion group was on the current policies concerning unpaid household work, and recommendations for policy changes.

Completed in September, 2007, the documentary film was produced by Skyworks Charitable Foundation in association with Elan Productions Ltd, with Margrit Eichler as the principal investigator and co-producer. The DVD Household Work: More Than It Seems is 90 minutes long, and features four fifteen-minute modules and six short portraits. I later helped with the DVD launch and distribution.
Initially, I intended to use N6 for my qualitative data analysis and had put some of the data in N6, but I gave it up due to the complicated data sets I had. My quantitative data were generated by using SPSS with the assistance of two researchers from the larger WALL project. All the data I collected for my doctoral research were stored in the project office computer and hard copies of the transcripts were stored in a locked file cabinet in the project office.

4.6 Data Analysis

As part of the Household Work Project, my data analysis was informed by prior findings of the Project’s three phases of research on unpaid work, but in turn, it also informed and enriched the work of other researchers on the project. Guided by the new definition of household work developed by the research team in Phase 3, which is “the sum of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual activities performed for one's own or for someone else's household and that maintains the daily life of those one has responsibility for” (also see Chapter 1), I paid special attention in my data analysis to the four dimensions of household work and the informal learning involved in each of the dimensions whenever and wherever it was possible/applicable.

4.6.1 A Gender-Based Analysis

In my data analysis, I employed a gender-based analysis informed by feminist theories on gender, household work, and lifelong learning in my examination and explanation of data from both the WALL Survey and the interviews and focus group. In the WALL Survey chapter, I examined the gender differences between women and men by comparing the participation rates and the weekly hours spent on household work and the related informal learning among the Chinese immigrants in comparison to their Canadian-born and other foreign-born counterparts. In my qualitative data chapters, I used a gender lens to examine the challenges, the changes, as well as the learning involved in food work, childcare/parenting, and emotion work. I explored how the changes and learning affected women and men differently with respect to their gender roles and identities, and to their views and attitudes towards family, paid work, and the meaning of life.

4.6.2 An Insider’s View

I chose to focus on new professional immigrants from Mainland China partly because they have been the single largest immigrant group to Canada in the past decade, and partly because I was from the Mainland myself and held a professional job there before I came to Canada in 2003.
Therefore, I had similar social, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds as the participants in my doctoral research, making it easier for me to win their trust so that they were willing to share their stories with me.

Like many of the Chinese immigrants in my interviews, I experienced similar challenges in my household responsibilities largely due to the changes in my economic situations after I came to Canada. As a result, I had to juggle my study and my household work and learn to cope with the new challenges in my life in the new home country. I was interested in knowing what changes the Mainland Chinese immigrants experienced in their household work, and how they managed or learned to accommodate those changes. That was one of my motives in choosing Chinese immigrants as the focus of my doctoral research. That was also one of the reasons why I felt compelled to share my experiences during the interviews and to insert a personal narrative at the beginning of the qualitative data chapters on food work, childcare/parenting, and emotion work, detailing my own experiences in performing and learning about those household tasks.

During the interviews with the Chinese immigrants, I took an insider’s position by sharing my own experiences, such as the changes in food work, the challenges in parenting, and the various ways I used to communicate with my parents back in China. Coming from the same country, I had many commonalities with my participants, such as ethnicity, language, level of education, experiences of doing professional work in China, which enabled me to engage in regular conversations in Mandarin, if they chose to. Sharing my own experiences during the interviews, in particular, helped narrow the gaps between me—the researcher, and the new immigrants—the research participants, who began to accept me as one of them soon after the interview started. Several women shared with me the conflicts and crises they encountered in their relationships with their spouses and children after immigration. Thus, my insider’s position enabled me to elicit information which those women would not have shared with other people otherwise, as the Chinese believe that “family problems should not be revealed to an outsider” (jiachou buke waiyang).

However, as a researcher who conducted the interviews for and on behalf of a project, I was also viewed as an outsider. Doing a PhD at a well-recognized university and in a field many of the Chinese immigrants were unfamiliar with polarized me from them. On one hand, they admired me for my proficiency in English and for my ability to pursue advanced academic work, but on
the other hand, they were bewildered by my “trivial” research topic (i.e., housework and the related learning—the Chinese translation for housework and household work is the same), which they could hardly associate with the highly respectable status of doctoral research.

As an insider “outsider”, I was aware that the relationship was not fully equal and my understanding of their lives is partial. I tried to be as faithful as I could to the context and the specificities in my interpretation of their stories and in the knowledge produced through my research (e.g., my doctoral dissertation). On the other hand, by participating in my research, the new immigrants also got an opportunity to tell their stories, to have their voice heard, which may otherwise not be told or heard (e.g., the challenges in their household work, the changes in gender relations and gender identities, as well as the related learning).

4.6.3 Challenges in Data Collection and Analysis

Initially, the WALL Survey was not part of my research plan. I decided to add the WALL survey data to my thesis after I started analysing my qualitative data, partly because I wanted to take the opportunity of writing the thesis to improve my knowledge and skills in quantitative research, but mainly because I wanted to enrich my qualitative research by situating it in a broader Canadian context through comparison of Chinese immigrants with other subgroups in the Survey. I believed that the mixed data would complement each other, giving me both the depth and breadth in my analysis, and greatly enhancing the validity and credibility of my research as well as my understanding of the subject matter.

However, due to my limited knowledge about quantitative research and my unfamiliarity with the WALL survey design, I encountered great difficulties in getting the right data I needed for my research. As I did not have direct access to the WALL database, I had to rely on the WALL staff to get the data for me. First I had to decide what data I needed and how I was to compare them. Due to the limitation of the WALL Survey (mainly the small sample sizes of the Chinese immigrants and other non-white immigrants in the Survey), I had to modify and re-modify my research design, and refine my requests for relevant data numerous times before I could do a valid data analysis. Throughout the past three years, I have explored different combinations and comparisons: I compared Chinese immigrants with the native-born, white immigrants, and other immigrants from Asia or other parts of the world; I compared immigrants by their immigration period, marital status, family size as well as by gender and age. At one point, I found myself so
overwhelmed by the complexity of data that I got completely stuck, and was even advised to drop the WALL Survey chapter in order to move forward. However, after seeking advice from experts on quantitative research and by discussing my problems with them, I was finally able to get out of my stuck situation and to keep the WALL Survey chapter as part of my thesis.

I also encountered a challenge in my search for a theoretical framework to explain the changes in household work and the learning involved in it. Although my data were collected through the Household Work Project and I had a new definition of household work to guide my research, there was not a master theory to work with to explain the findings, especially to explain the learning involved in food work, childcare/parenting and emotion work, the three main themes in my qualitative research.

My journey exploring different learning theories was a long one. I began my exploration with activity theory, which was used and recommended by the larger WALL project. After I realized that it was not a good fit for my research, I embarked on another round of searching for a suitable theoretical framework by reading extensively on adult learning theories, including self-directed learning (Tough, 1971), experiential learning (Jarvis, 1987), situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991), informal learning (Knowles, 1950), and transformative learning (Mezirow, 1990, 2000) (also see Jarvis, 2006, and Merriam & Caffarella, 1991, for comprehensive reviews of adult learning theories). I found that each of those theories speaks in part to my data, but none of them seems to be able to explain all of the learning taking place through household work—informal, self-directed, experiential learning as well as situated and transformative learning. It was only after I had reviewed various adult learning theories that I began to give lifelong learning a second gaze, this time, from the perspective of an adult learning theory. I found the concept of lifelong learning meets my request for a more comprehensive analytical framework, as it covers all the areas, scopes and dimensions of learning I examined through household work. My first gaze of lifelong learning took place when I first joined the WALL sub-project on Household Work and Lifelong Learning. Through my contact with the larger WALL project and by taking a course on critical analysis of lifelong learning, my initial understanding of lifelong learning was that it was a government policy on adult learning, and I had not realized that I could use it as a theoretical framework to explain my findings.
4.6.4 Discrepancy and Mismatch Issues with Mixed Data Sets

Although lifelong learning, as one of the fastest growing subfields in adult education, has been extensively researched and debated in the past decade, most of the literature focuses on labour market-related formal education and training, informal learning remains largely under-explored. Furthermore, most of the studies on lifelong learning have been done on a theoretical level, empirical research is scarce. A literature review conducted by Eichler and Matthews (2007) at the initial stage of the project showed only four empirical studies had discussed housework- and carework-related learning through the lens of lifelong learning (Hasselkus & Ray, 1988; Butler, 1993; Livingstone, 2005; and Gerzer-Sass, 2004).

This study is among a few empirical studies that examine lifelong learning involved in unpaid household work by focusing on Chinese immigrants and by highlighting gender, class, ethnicity and immigration. As a result, there is little literature I can rely on to guide my research. At the beginning of my data analysis, I had to use Patricia Gouthro’s work on homeplace learning (1998, 2000, 2005) and Hart’s *Working and Education for Life* (1992) as my main sources of references.

While mixed methods neutralize biases inherent in any single method, they also created problems in my data analysis. Although quantitative and qualitative data reinforced each other by pointing to similar conclusions in household work performances between women and men, they produced discrepancies, mismatches or even contradictions in the findings, especially with regard to informal learning involved in housework and care work, which were not always easy to reconcile. Very often, I had to struggle to find an explanation for the differences or refer to other sources of data for evidences and support, like the Longitudinal Studies of Immigrants to Canada, studies on immigrant housing, and so on. Sometimes I came up with a mere hypothesis rather than an explanation, which may raise further questions in the readers, or require another study to explore it, such as in the case of eldercare-related learning.

4.7 A Word on the Organization of This Dissertation

Unlike most of the dissertations in the social sciences, which devote one exclusive chapter to literature review, my dissertation differs from this model. Apart from Chapter 2 that provides an overview of three bodies of literature pertinent to my research, that is, literature on household work, lifelong learning, and Chinese immigrants in Canada, which situates my doctoral research
in proper context, I also provide a brief literature review in each of the three qualitative data chapters. As they focus on a specific area of unpaid household work, I find a general review of household work literature would not suffice. Instead, a separate and expanded literature review was necessary for each of the qualitative data chapters because food work, childcare/parenting, and emotion work, though important components of household work, are often left out in most of the existing literature on household work (Eichler & Albanese, 2007; Erickson, 1993). Furthermore, putting all those bodies of literature in the literature review chapter not only makes it unusually voluminous, but also makes it distracting rather than informative, as they often seem unrelated to one another (i.e., food work, childcare, parenting, and emotion work), due to the traditional ways in which they were classified and studied. For these reasons, I placed the related literature in the chapter where it is most relevant. At the beginning of each of the three qualitative data chapters (Chapters 6, 7, 8), I also provide a short narrative on my own experience related to the specific topic in discussion.
Chapter 5 WALL Survey on Unpaid Work and Informal Learning

5.1 Introduction

This chapter examines quantitative data on unpaid work and the related informal learning from the 2004 Canadian Survey on Work and Lifelong Learning (WALL), with my focus on Chinese immigrants. Three sets of data will be examined, based on their availability: a. participation rates (%) and weekly hours of unpaid work and the related informal learning among all participants; b. average weekly hours on household work and on informal learning involved in household work and general interests among four Canadian subgroups: native-born, white immigrants, other non-white immigrants (excluding the Chinese), and Chinese immigrants; c. content of informal learning related to household work and general interests-related activities among the Chinese immigrants. All the figures presented in this chapter are weighted by age, sex, formal education and region to match population parameters. Special attention is given to the gender differences in household work and the related learning because past and current literature suggests that housework and carework remain largely gendered, with women doing more than men. Given the unpaid and gendered nature of household work, I expected that much of the learning involved in it is informal and gendered.

The goal of this chapter is to provide an overall picture of both the housework and the related informal learning among the Canadians of various backgrounds, in order to better inform and situate my qualitative data from interviews and focus/discussion groups in a broader, national context of Canada. The Survey data will complement my interview data in making visible the learning involved in household work, and in shedding new light on our understanding of the importance of learning to immigrants’ settlement experiences and to a successful adjustment to the Canadian culture and the Canadian society.
5.2 Household Work and Informal Learning among All Participants

5.2.1 Participation Rates and Average Weekly Hours\(^{10}\) on Household Work and the Related Informal Learning

In the 2004 national Survey on Work and Lifelong Learning, participants were asked if they were involved in any unpaid activities outside their paid work such as volunteer work and housework.\(^{11}\) Those who reported some involvement in unpaid work were also asked to give an estimate of the average weekly hours they spent on those unpaid activities. In this chapter, I will focus only on housework (including cooking, cleaning, shopping, home budgeting, yard work, or home maintenance), childcare, eldercare, and helping friends and neighbours. The following table summarizes the participation rates of household work and the weekly hours devoted to it.

**Table 1** Participation rates (%) and average weekly hours of unpaid work among all participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Housework [%]</th>
<th>Hours</th>
<th>Childcare [%]</th>
<th>Hours</th>
<th>Eldercare [%]</th>
<th>Hours</th>
<th>Helping Neighbours [%]</th>
<th>Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>39.2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8508</td>
<td>8684</td>
<td>8851</td>
<td>8607</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: WALL Survey, 2004

Table 1 provides a general picture of the unpaid household work performed by Canadian adults above age 18. Overall, of the 9,026 valid reports, nearly all women and men did some general household work on a weekly basis. According to their self reports, 97 percent of the participants,

\(^{10}\) In this chapter, the average hours per week are calculated as the mean for those who reported doing household work and also related informal learning.

\(^{11}\) In the WALL Survey questionnaire, the term “housework” is used and covers different domains in different sections of the survey. It excludes carework (e.g., childcare and eldercare) in its questions on frequencies and time estimates in housework performance (see Section 2 of this chapter). However, in questions related to informal learning, the term “housework” seems to include childcare and eldercare as well as many other unpaid household activities (see Section 3). In my discussion, I keep the term “housework” when it is separated from childcare and eldercare. I switch to the term “household work” when childcare and eldercare are included in order to be consistent with the new definition of household work.
both male and female, claimed to have done some unpaid housework. This indicates that housework is the most widespread form of work among adult Canadians in the Survey. Over a third of the participants (37% for males and 41% for females) reported some involvement in childcare, and 15 percent of the males and 17 percent of the females reported involvement in eldercare. About two thirds of the participants were also involved in helping their friends and neighbours, with men (70%) somewhat more involved than women (63%).

Compared to the relatively even participation rates between women and men, time devoted to housework and carework is highly gendered, with women doing more than men, especially in housework (21 hours for women versus 13 hours for men) and childcare (39 hours for women versus 21 hours for men). The gender gap is narrower in eldercare (14 hours for women versus 10 hours for men), and almost negligible in helping neighbours (5.8 hours for women versus five hours for men).

In the WALL Survey, participants who indicated doing unpaid work in a particular area were asked whether they engaged in any related informal learning, and those who did so were also asked to estimate the amount of time they devoted to informal learning on a weekly basis. Table 2 presents the findings on participation rates and the weekly hours on informal learning involved in housework and general interests.

### Table 2 Participation rates (%) and average weekly hours of informal learning among all participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Informal Learning</th>
<th>Participation rates</th>
<th>Weekly hours</th>
<th>Total Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housework</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Interests</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


12 Throughout this chapter, I use the following criteria to report the degrees of differences in participation rates: <6% = slight or minor difference; 6-10% = some or obvious differences; 11-20% and above = large or substantial difference. Note that the survey results shown in this chapter are weighted by age, sex, formal education, and region to match population parameters.

13 In questions related to informal learning in the WALL survey, housework includes both childcare and eldercare.
Table 2 indicates that, unlike the participation rates in performing unpaid work, which vary greatly by area from a minority in eldercare (16%) and childcare (39%) to over 60 percent in helping friends and neighbours, to virtually everyone in some form of housework (97%) (see Table 1), the vast majority of participants who performed unpaid household work also reported engaging in some forms of related informal learning. On average, about 82 percent of all the participants reported informal learning on housework and general interests respectively, suggesting that there is substantial informal learning involved in household work that warrants recognition in a learning society (Livingstone & Scholtz, 2006).

Furthermore, in contrast to the diversity of time women and men devoted to performing housework and carework, the estimated weekly hours devoted to informal learning appear to be quite similar: averaging a little over five hours, with women devoting slightly more time per week on learning household work and general interests. However, is this pattern universal among the different subgroups? The following two tables will respond to this question by examining the gender differences among different subgroups.

5.3 Weekly Hours Devoted to Household Work and Informal Learning among Different Subgroups

This section examines four types of unpaid work: housework, childcare, eldercare, and helping neighbours, and the informal learning involved in household work and general interests among four Canadian subgroups: the Canadian-born, white immigrants, non-whites, and the Chinese immigrants. According to the WALL Codebook (Livingstone, 2005) 80 percent of the participants (n=7,210) were Canadian-born, 11 percent were white immigrants (n=990), and 9 percent were non-white immigrants (n=764), of which 1.3 percent were Chinese immigrants (n=115). The findings are presented in Table 3 and Table 4.

Table 3 indicates that women in all four subgroups devoted substantially more weekly hours than men to housework and childcare. Eldercare is less gendered. The exception is among the white immigrants, where males devoted an average of 22 hours on eldercare, as compared to 13 hours for white immigrant women and an average of eight weekly hours by their other male counterparts. There is little difference in the average hours spent helping neighbours by women and men across the four groups.
Table 3 *Average weekly hours of unpaid household work among four Canadian subgroups.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Work</th>
<th>Canadian-Born</th>
<th></th>
<th>White Immigrants</th>
<th></th>
<th>Non-White Immigrants</th>
<th></th>
<th>Chinese Immigrants</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housework</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>40.6</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>33.2</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>32.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eldercare</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping neighbours</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total Number**

|            | 3369 | 3539 | 425 | 499 | 330 | 347 | 57 | 53 |

*Sources: WALL Survey, 2004.*

*Note: The total number in this table refers to the number of people who gave a report of any hours of unpaid household work.*

A closer examination by age group and marital status indicates that the anomaly in eldercare is largely influenced by the disproportionately higher percentage of single senior white immigrant males in the survey (24%) as compared to males in other subgroups (16% for the Canadian-born, 6% for the non-white immigrants, and 0% for the Chinese). Here, eldercare seems to mean different things depending on age. For seniors (age 65 and above), it likely means caring for those of their own generation, notably spouses. For younger people (age 18 to 34), it is likely to involve parents or others of their generation. Those in middle-age groups (age 35 to 64) may be doing both kinds of eldercare. Thus, in contrast to the non-white immigrants, who are mainly in the middle-age groups and are likely involved in eldercare for two distinct client groups—their own generation and their parent generation, the much younger Chinese immigrants are likely to be involved in providing eldercare only to their parental generation. This may explain the differences in participation in eldercare between the two groups.\(^{14}\)

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\(^{14}\) A close examination of eldercare by age group shows that half of Chinese males are under 25 and are not involved in eldercare; only a third of the non-white immigrant group is under 25 and they do some eldercare. The non-white immigrant group has a higher proportion of middle-aged people and seniors doing more eldercare than the young.
Of the four household activities examined, Chinese immigrants displayed a similar pattern as the Canadian-born and other non-white immigrants in terms of devoting a similar amount of time to each of the four tasks. Like their female counterparts in the Canadian-born and other non-white groups, Chinese women devoted substantially more time than their male counterparts to both housework and childcare, although gender makes less difference on the time devoted to eldercare, and almost no difference on helping neighbours.

Table 4 Average weekly hours of informal learning among four Canadian subgroups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Informal Learning</th>
<th>Canadian-Born Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>White Immigrants Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Other Non-White Immigrants Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Chinese Immigrants Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housework</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General interests</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number</td>
<td>3165</td>
<td>3343</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>461</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The total number in this table refers to the number of people who give a report of informal learning on the topics.

Table 4 indicates that Canadian-born and the white immigrants displayed a similar pattern in the hours they devoted to informal learning (a little over 5 hours for housework-related learning, and about 5 hours on general interests-related learning). Non-white males shared a similar pattern in the hours devoted to both housework- and general interests-related learning (6.6 hours and 5.3 hours respectively). Chinese males also fall in this range for housework-related learning (close to 6 hours), but their average hours of learning related to general interests is lower (only 3.7 hours). Women in the non-white immigrant group, including the Chinese immigrants, however, showed patterns distinct from the Canadian-born and white immigrants—and from one another. Non-white immigrant women have exceptionally high average hours of informal learning related to both housework and general interests (9.2 hours and 8.5 hours respectively), while the average hours in both areas are exceptionally low for the Chinese immigrant women (about 3.5 hours for each). A tentative explanation for Chinese women’s low involvement in informal learning is provided in the following section.
5.4 Content of Informal Learning: Chinese Immigrants

In this section, I will examine the content of informal learning involved in household work and general interests-related activities among the Chinese immigrants in the WALL Survey. As I did in the section above, I will compare the content of learning by sex and activities. I will also show how useful women and men view their housework-related informal learning for their household responsibilities and for their paid jobs.

5.4.1 Household Work-Related Informal Learning among the Chinese Participants

The 2004 WALL Survey indicates that, like their Canadian-born and other foreign-born counterparts, Chinese immigrants had almost universal participation rates in household work (99% for women and 97% for men) and very high involvement in household work-related learning (87% for men and 81% for women).

Figure 1 suggests that informal learning is embedded in a variety of household activities, from the routine tasks of cooking and childcare to the less frequent or seasonal tasks of home repair, renovation/gardening, and to the less visible work of budgeting and financial management, and organizational and management skills. However, participation rates in informal learning vary greatly with the activities and the people who performed them.

According to Figure 1, women were more likely to be involved in learning the “feminine” task of cooking (53% for women versus 33% for men) and organizational and management skills (40% for women versus 26% for men), and with men more involved in learning the “masculine” tasks of new equipment and appliances (53% for men versus 41% for women), home repair (43% for men versus 35% for women), and renovation and gardening (38% for men versus 24% for women). However, Chinese men and women showed an equally high involvement in learning budgeting and financial management (41% respectively).
In contrast to the substantial time they devoted to childcare (see Table 3), comparatively fewer Chinese women than men reported learning on childcare (17% for women versus 21% for men) and women’s involvement in eldercare-related learning is even lower (14% for women versus 23% for men). Overall, the average involvement of Chinese immigrant women in carework-related learning is much lower than that of their counterparts in the other three subgroups (see Appendix VI). This may likely be a result of their devaluation of unpaid carework, which subsequently led to their neglect of the learning involved in both childcare and eldercare (also see Table 4).

In contrast to the fewer hours they devoted to childcare and similar hours to eldercare (see Table 3), Chinese immigrant males seemed to be slightly more involved than their female counterparts in learning in both care activities, suggesting that male Chinese immigrants may have
experienced greater changes in both their paid and unpaid work after immigration that required them to explore new job opportunities, get more involved in household work, and learn new ways to perform some of the household tasks. In my interviews, a few male respondents talked about the potential of using their newly learned cooking skills to open their own restaurants if they became unemployed. Thus, it may not be very surprising to see more Chinese men than women rate their household work-related informal learning as very helpful to both their household responsibilities and to their paid jobs (36% and 33% respectively for men versus 22% and 23% respectively for women) (see Figure 2). Compared to Chinese males, fewer women rated their household work-related learning as very helpful, probably because they had been doing household work before immigration and thus experienced less dramatic changes than their male counterparts. Meanwhile, the equally high involvement in budgeting and finance management among both women and men (41% respectively) suggests a greater need for all the Chinese immigrants to economize after immigration in order to accommodate their declined economic situation (see Figure 1).

Figure 2: "Very helpful" rates (%) of learning by sex (%) among the Chinese immigrants

As we will see in the following chapters, the low involvement of women in learning childcare is in sharp contrast to data from my interviews, in which women reported great challenges and
enormous learning in childcare and parenting as they no longer have the social network which they used to rely on for childcare, and as many of their traditional beliefs and practices in parenting are in conflict with the Canadian way of parenting (see Chapter 7). However, the low involvement of Chinese immigrants in learning eldercare is more or less consistent with my interview findings, in which many women reported reduced work on eldercare due to the absence of extended families. This may also be related to the absence of seniors (age 65 and above) in the Chinese immigrant group. A closer examination of the Chinese immigrants in the Survey shows that no older Chinese immigrant women (age 50-64) reported any learning on eldercare (0%), which is in sharp contrast to eldercare reported by their male counterparts (29%). This may have contributed to Chinese women’s overall low involvement in eldercare-related learning. Given the fact that most of the recent immigrants came to Canada only with their nuclear family, this finding may suggest that older Chinese immigrant women may have a narrow understanding of eldercare, that is, thinking about eldercare as taking care only of their aged parents, and ignoring the carework or support they might have provided for other older people, such as elderly partners, friends, or siblings, as in the case of the white immigrants (see the explanation for Table 3). Furthermore, as they were no longer physically involved in eldercare after immigration, it is possible that many Chinese immigrant women may have ignored other forms of eldercare, such as emotional care and support of the elderly through regular telephone calls, which is often less visible or not viewed as carework.

In addition to childcare and eldercare, Chinese immigrants on the whole showed the lowest participation rates in renovation and gardening, as compared to their Canadian-born and other foreign-born counterparts (see Appendix VI). Other studies on immigrants’ housing conditions may provide some explanations for Chinese immigrants’ low average involvement in learning about home renovation and gardening. According to the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada (LSIC), many new immigrants had difficulty finding proper housing in the first four years after arrival in Canada, largely due to housing cost, lack of credit, poor knowledge of their city, and lack of transportation (Schellenberg & Maheux, 2007). In a recent study by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) on the housing situation and needs of recent immigrants in three large Canadian cities: Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver, it was found that the majority of newcomers (73%) in Toronto live in high-rise apartments (47%), while only 17 percent of the newcomers have homeownership (CMHC, 2006: 11). Like other non-white
immigrants to Canada, Chinese immigrants are relatively new in the country due to changes in the Canadian immigration policy in the past two decades. As a result, they were less likely to be settled than their native-born and white, foreign-born counterparts, and thus were less likely to own their own homes in order to perform these activities.

This finding is also supported in my interviews with the new Chinese immigrants, who reported little or no involvement in doing and learning home renovation and gardening because nearly 90 percent of them live in rented houses and apartments. But the two house owners in the interviews talked in great length about what they learned in home renovation and gardening. A couple in the documentary film proudly showed off the renovations they did on their own in their newly-bought townhouse.

5.4.2 General Interests-Related Informal Learning among the Chinese Immigrants

In the WALL Survey, learning related to general interests is also examined because it is an important part of unpaid household activities, although it has no immediate connection to unpaid work. I include general interests-related learning because they include different dimensions of domestic life beyond housework and carework, and because it fits in our new definition of household work, which covers the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual dimension of efforts.

Chinese immigrants devoted, on average, slightly fewer hours to general interest learning than other groups (see Table 4). However, they reported engaging in informal learning on a wide range of topics as frequently as other groups. Furthermore, compared to the gendered pattern of informal learning involved in household work, general interests-related learning is less gendered among the Chinese immigrants, as is also the case with the other three subgroups (see Appendix VII).

As is indicated in Figure 3, Chinese immigrants reported an overall high involvement in computer (71% for men and 56% for women), and language (59% for men and 64% for women), which is also the highest among all the four subgroups examined. Like their Canadian-born counterparts, Chinese immigrants reported high participation rates in learning about health and well-being (55% for men and 62% for women), leisure and hobby (54% for men and 48% for women), and in improving their social skills and personal development (55% for men and 48%
for women). Both men and women show almost equal concerns for social, political, and environment issues (48% and 46% respectively), and sports and recreation (36% for men and 37% for women).

Like other non-white immigrants, Chinese immigrant men and women also reported high involvement in learning new traditions and customs (45% and 49% respectively), and in improving their intimate relationships (39% and 34% respectively). However, unlike their other non-white immigrant counterparts, who showed almost an equally high involvement in learning religion and spirituality (53% for men and 59% for women), Chinese immigrants showed a large gender gap in their report of learning on religion and spirituality (54% for women versus 29% for men).

Figure 3: Content of General interests-related informal learning by sex (%) among the Chinese immigrants

Note: Only those who reported some general interest-related informal learning were asked questions about the topics.

Figure 3 Content of general interests-related informal learning by sex (%) among the Chinese immigrants
The variations in Chinese immigrants’ participation rates in general interests-related learning may partly reflect some of the social and cultural realities of the Chinese immigrants in Canada. As immigrants from non-English speaking countries, it is not surprising to see Chinese immigrants highly involved in learning language for both women and men. The involvement of learning about computer is the highest among the Chinese immigrants, especially men (71% for men versus 56% for women), as compared to their Canadian-born and other foreign-born counterparts (see Appendix VII). This high involvement in learning about computers may be largely due to the fact that many of the Chinese immigrants who came to Canada in recent decades were well-educated professionals with a science background (see Appendix I). Like their native-born and other foreign-born counterparts, Chinese immigrants, both women and men, are actively involved in learning about health and well-being (62% for women and 55% for men) as well as about leisure and hobby (54% for men and 48% for women) (also see Appendix VII).

Further research is required to explain the large gender gap between Chinese immigrant women and men in their informal learning about religion and spirituality. Although women in the other three subgroups were slightly more involved than their male counterparts in learning about religion and spirituality, the difference is less than 10 percent, whereas the gap between Chinese women and men in this area is 25 percent (see Appendix VII). While literature on immigrants’ religious participation suggests that women are more likely than men to be involved in religion (Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2000; Min, 2000), data from my qualitative research do not support this WALL survey finding on religion and spirituality. Less than a third of the Chinese immigrants (both women and men) in my interviews reported church-related experiences. According to a study of new Chinese immigrants’ religious involvement in Toronto, many new immigrants go to church not only to connect with God, but also to socialize with other church-goers in order to expand their social network for settlement information and job opportunities (Han, 2007). From my own interviews with new Chinese immigrants in the Greater Toronto Area, I found that, coming from Mainland China where religion and spirituality are often regarded as superstitions, many Chinese immigrants did not have any religious beliefs before they came to Canada. However, many newcomers began to frequent churches to improve their English, to socialize with their fellow immigrants, or to search for new meanings of life. Some of them developed a
religious faith as a way to cope with their disappointment and frustration from failures to find professional jobs and from their deteriorated living standard after immigration.

5.5 Summary

The 2004 Canadian Survey on Work and Lifelong Learning (WALL) reveals that nearly all Canadians above 18 did some household work on a weekly basis (97%), and that women continue to be the primary housekeepers and caregivers in their households, regardless of their place of birth, race, or ethnicity. However, in contrast to the large diversity in frequency and duration between different household activities and between women and men, informal learning on unpaid work varies little in participation rates and in the weekly hours that people devoted to informal learning. Overall, 82 percent of the participants reported an average of five hours on housework- and general interests-related informal learning. Of the four subgroups examined, non-white immigrants devoted most weekly hours to informal learning, averaging about six hours for men and nine hours for women. Further exploration and analysis is needed to explain this gender discrepancy between the other non-white immigrants, which is not the focus of this study.

Compared to their Canadian-born and other foreign-born counterparts, Chinese immigrants shared a similar gendered pattern in the hours they devoted to unpaid work, with women devoting substantially more time than men in housework, childcare, and eldercare. However, in contrast to their female counterparts in the other three subgroups, Chinese immigrant women reported below-average weekly hours in learning about household work and general interests. Despite their equally below-average hours on general interests-related learning, Chinese immigrant men reported spending more time than women on household work-related learning, suggesting that Chinese immigrant men may have experienced greater changes and challenges in their household responsibilities after they moved to Canada and thus may have greater needs to learn to adjust to their changed lifestyle in the host country.

When examined by the content of informal learning, much of the learning involved in household work was done along gender lines, just as is the case with the work itself. More Chinese immigrant women than men reported involvement in learning traditional “female” tasks such as cooking, and organizational and management skills, whereas more Chinese men than women reported involvement in learning about the traditional “male” tasks such as home repair,
renovation/gardening. The equally high involvement both men and women reported in learning budgeting and financial management indicates the financial pressure the Chinese immigrants encountered in their daily life and the need to economize to cope with the downward mobility in economic resources after immigration. Meanwhile, compared to the Chinese females, the slightly higher involvement of Chinese immigrant males in learning the traditional “feminine” tasks of childcare and eldercare may help us to see where the changes occur for them after immigration and why more Chinese men than women rated their household work-related learning very helpful to both their unpaid household responsibilities and to their paid jobs.

Compared to their below-average weekly hours on learning involved in general interests, the participation rates of the Chinese immigrants in various general interest-related activities are relative high and less gendered, as is the case with other subgroups. Overall, Chinese immigrants had much higher participation rates in learning about computers, and language, as compared to their Canadian-born, and other foreign-born counterparts. This finding is not surprising given their professional and cultural backgrounds.

To sum up, the WALL Survey has illustrated some of the similarities and differences between Chinese women and men, and between the Chinese immigrants and their Canadian-born and other foreign-born counterparts in performing and learning different types of household tasks and leisure activities. Compared to their Canadian-born counterparts, the Chinese immigrants shared a similar pattern in the weekly hours on household work, with women devoting substantially more time than their male counterparts to housework and childcare, slightly more time to eldercare, and an almost equal amount of time to helping neighbours.

In sharp contrast to their other non-white immigrant counterparts, Chinese women devoted far fewer hours to household work- and general interests-related learning (see Table 4), and their involvement in parenting/childcare and eldercare is far below average (see Appendix VII). Consistent with their other non-white immigrant male counterparts, Chinese immigrant males showed exceptionally low involvement in home renovation, repair, and gardening, but showed sharp inconsistency with other non-white males in their exceptionally low involvement in learning about religion and spirituality.

In the next three chapters, I will focus on qualitative data on recently arrived Chinese immigrants in the Greater Toronto Area, and explore in detail three types of household work and the learning
involved in them: food-related household work, childcare/parenting, and emotion work. In each of the chapters, I will compare the findings from the interviews and focus groups with the WALL Survey, where data is available, and see how these data on Chinese immigrants conform or contradict each other.
Chapter 6 Food-Related Household Work and Learning

It was Saturday morning. A friend of mine came to ask me for a favour, and brought with her two big buns of steamed bread, a staple Chinese food which I have not been able to prepare well since I came to Canada. At first I was not impressed by the look of the buns. While waiting for the water to boil to make my morning coffee, I took a tiny piece and put it into my mouth. It tasted good! So I grabbed another piece, then another…. Just then, my daughter walked in. She laughed when she saw me standing there, taking bites of a bun. “Are you having your breakfast like this?” she asked curiously, grabbing a little piece and putting it into her mouth. “Umm, it tastes quite authentic,” she said. “I know what you are going to do next. Ask her for the recipe, right?”

She was absolutely right. Collecting cooking recipes has become a hobby for me since I came to Canada. Whenever I was invited to a party, a friend’s place for dinner, or a potluck gathering, I would ask for recipes of the food I enjoyed. Over the years, my daughter has seen me collecting several recipes for making steamed bread, and has also “enjoyed” steamed buns of different sizes, shapes, and even colours—the outcome of my experiments with various kinds of yeast, baking soda, or baking powder! Indeed, I would feel very proud when I heard my daughter say “Mom, your buns look much better now. You can show them off to your friends!” The sense of accomplishment I got from the food I cooked and from my daughter’s subsequent complements was no less than the joy I felt the moment I heard that my paper was accepted for publication!

6.1 Introduction

In the past two decades, the study of food and eating has been one of the fastest-growing areas in sociology. Despite an avalanche of books and articles on food, cooking, and eating, most of the research focuses on food nutrition and health (Beardsworth & Keil1, 1997; Fieldhouse, 1995; Germov & Williams, 2004; McIntosh, 1996), and a few on gender and foodways (Avakian, 2005; Counihan & Kaplan, 1998; Mennell, Murcott, & Otterloo, 1992). Literature on immigrant food is growing, with most focusing on food security (Koc, MacRae, Mougeot, & Welsh, 1999),
food identity (Koc & Welsh, 2002, Lessa, Rocha, & Fields, 2007), and food acculturation (Kocturk, 2004; Lv & Cason, 2004; Pan, Dixon, Himburg, & Huffman, 1999; Satia, 1999).

This chapter explores food-related household work and the informal learning involved in cooking, eating, and grocery shopping. Based mainly on in-depth interviews with 20 new Chinese immigrants in the Greater Toronto area, this chapter examines the impact of cross-cultural migration on food-related household work and informal learning involved in it by focusing on the changes in the way people plan, shop for, prepare and cook food, and what they have to learn to adjust to those changes. This chapter pays special attention to the gender division of food work between the Chinese immigrant women and men, the informal learning involved in the four dimensions of food-related household work, and its impact on their food choices and practices, as well as their gender, and cultural identities. This chapter also draws on and compares with the WALL findings on food-related learning.

6.2 Food Work, Food Habit, and Acculturation

6.2.1 Food Work as “Women’s Work”

Past and current research on food work suggests that cooking at home, along with housework in general, was, and still is, disproportionately carried out by women, and that this gendered pattern of work varies little across time and place (Beagan, Chapman, Sylva, & Bassett, 2008; Charles & Kerr, 1988; DeVault, 1991; Murcott, 1984). It is also well-documented that all aspects of food work, whether it is food preparation, cooking, serving, storing, and procuring, are intimately related to women’s roles and responsibilities (Van Esterik, 1999), and to how they see themselves in the family and community (Lessa, Rocha, & Fields, 2007). Furthermore, women across country, race, and class also view it as their responsibility, whether they like it or not, or indeed, whether they do so in practice (Mennell, Murcott, & Van Otterloo, 1992: 95). Although central to food practices and food work, women are seldom at the centre of food research (Avakian, 2005: 2). Similarly, food work, though a major part of household work, is rarely the explicit focus of examination and remains largely buried in the vast body of literature on housework.

Many scholars argue that women’s responsibilities for food work and feeding the family, as well as their food practices, result in gender asymmetry, contribute to the reproduction of patriarchy, and reinforce women’s subordination in both the family and society (Charles & Kerr, 1988;
DeVault, 1991; Furst, 1997; Luxton, 1980; Murcott, 1984). As food providers, women usually design and organize their meals with their husbands’ and children’s preferences in mind (Charles & Kerr, 1988; Counihan, 1999; DeVault, 1991; Vallianatos & Raine, 2008). However, this does not necessarily mean that women have the power to control the flow of food into the family (McIntosh & Zey, 1989: 318). Charles and Kerr (1988) highlight the power relations in food work. “Women cook to please men, they decide what to buy in the light of men’s preference, they carry the burden of shopping for food….” (p. 40), but it is men who have the power and control of the food that their family eats.

In her classic work *Feeding the Family* (1991), DeVault argues that this gendered nature of cooking and food preparation, although central to the construction of family, has consequently led to the invisibility of such activities as work, not only by those who enjoy this work, but also by women who perform it as well as by sociologists on work and family. DeVault (1991: 55) attributes this invisibility of women’s food work partly to the devaluation of women’s work and partly to the invisible and hard-to-measure nature of some of the food-related work, for example, meal planning, which is largely mental work, and often mixed with other activities. Consequently, it is often hidden from sight and can hardly be captured by time- and task-based studies.

6.2.2 Food and Eating in Chinese Culture

Food and eating are an important part of Chinese culture and central to the Chinese way of life. Marked by its variety and distinctive regional styles of cooking, Chinese food, nevertheless, is made up primarily of two parts: *fan* and *ts’ai*. *Fan* includes grains and other starchy foods, such as rice, noodles, and steamed buns, and *ts’ai* usually includes stir-fried vegetable and meat dishes. Greatly influenced by the *yin-yang* principle, Chinese food emphasizes a balance of both *fan* and *ts’ai* (Chang, 1977) as well as the balance of ‘hot’ items such as fried, spicy, or rich foods, and ‘cold’ foods such as leafy green vegetables (Chau, Lee, Tseng, & Downes, 1990; Chen, 2001). Compared to many other cultures in the world, Chinese culture has relatively few or no food taboos (Wu & Cheung, 2002: xvi). The great preoccupation with food in Chinese culture is also reflected in the Chinese language. For instance, the most popular Chinese greeting is “Have you had your meal yet?” which is equivalent to “How are you?” in English. Many common sayings and phrases used in daily conversations are also related to food, such as *min yi shi wei tian* (“To people, food is Heaven”); and *duan tien fanwan* (“holding an iron bowl,”
meaning having a stable or permanent job). A person who does not engage in paid work is called *chi xianfan* (getting food without working for it). These expressions clearly demonstrate how important food is to the Chinese way of life, especially in relation to paid work. This chapter will shift this focus onto unpaid food-related work, a much neglected aspect of Chinese food research.

6.2.3 Immigration and Food Acculturation

Research on immigration and food indicates that food, as an essential component of culture and identity, can be carried over during migration from the country of origin to the country of destination (Koc & Welsh, 2002: 47). For many new immigrants, consumption of traditional foods serves to maintain their ethnic identity, forms a link between their past and present, and eases the stresses of entering the new culture (Kalcik, 1984; Lessa, Rocha, & Fields, 2007).

Researchers have long noted that certain traditional dietary practices remain intact, while some foods from other cultures are incorporated (Grivetti & Paguette, 1978). Studies on Asian immigrants’ food practices in the United States indicate that Asian immigrants retain certain traditional foods such as rice, but replace other non-traditional food with cereal, bread, sandwiches, milk, and soft drinks (Pan, Dixon, Himburg, & Huffman, 1999: 54).

Research on food acculturation indicates that dietary changes are positively related to acculturation (Satia, 1999; Liou & Contento, 2006; Lv & Cason, 2004), and that immigrants change their diet through substitution, addition, or modification, without completely rejecting the foods and the eating habits of their home country nor that of the host country (Lee, Tseng, & Downes, 1990). Furthermore, research also shows that dietary changes are related to age, gender, length of residence, their fluency in the new language, and their social contact with people of the new culture (Lv & Cason, 2004; 1999; Satia, 1999). Younger people and male immigrants are more likely to change their food habits than older immigrants and women who have more experience preparing traditional cuisines (Pan, Dixon, Himburg, & Huffman, 1999: 54). Longer exposure to the new culture and more frequent social contact with the local people, as well as good language skills, also contribute significantly to food acculturation and dietary changes (Lv & Cason, 2004: 771; Newman, 1982: 270).

In the following sections, I will explore some of the changes as well as the learning involved in food-related work, including food preparation, cooking, and grocery shopping among
newcomers from Mainland China. I adopted the term “household work” and the new definition of household work (see Chapter 1) to guide my research. The goal of this chapter is to make visible the different dimensions of food work, as well as the invisible learning involved in food-related household work, which has not received due attention in the literatures on housework and lifelong learning (Liu, 2008).

6.3 Chinese Immigrants, Food-Related Household Work and Learning

Like many other recent immigrants to Canada, the new Chinese immigrants I interviewed, who are mostly women and were professionals before immigration, reported a sudden increase in their housework and childcare responsibilities upon arriving in Canada. They experience a dramatic downward social and economic mobility due to the obstacles that new immigrants face in accessing the Canadian labour market (Li, 1998; Wang & Lo, 2005), and the absence of social support networks that they used to rely on for housework and childcare in their home country (Salaff & Greve, 2004). Much of the increased work is related to meal preparation and cooking, especially of staple foods.

6.3.1 “I Do All the Cooking Because That’s a Good Way to Save Money.”

—Learning New Ways to Cut Down Food Expenses

Of the 20 people I interviewed, eighteen of them, male and female, married and single, reported a dramatic increase in food work after immigration. Nearly all the women talked about spending more time than before on food work, especially on their staple foods such as steamed bread, noodles, and dumplings, which they used to buy in China. This is especially true in the initial stage after immigration partly because they did not know where to get these foods, but more frequently because they could not afford to buy them. “I do all the cooking now because that’s a good way to save money,” said Juan, a 40-year-old woman who was previously a college professor but is now a salesclerk in a supermarket. Yun, a 46-year-old woman who was an engineer before immigration, but now is a daycare assistant, gave a similar account, detailing some of the reasons for her increased food work:
In China, I used to buy many foodstuffs in our cafeteria, like the steamed bread, it is very cheap: 5 big buns for just 1 yuan. So, why bother making them yourself? There is more housework here because I want to save money. I have to make the bread by myself. I have to mix the flour, wait for it to rise, knead the dough... It is very time-consuming.

Apart from the need to reduce food expenses, preparing the right kind of food constitutes another, and perhaps the most important, reason for their new routines. Ying, a woman in her mid-40s, a paediatrician by profession but a lab technician in Canada, cited her concern about taste and health as the main reasons for her increased food work. “Cooking Chinese dishes (food) is not easy here. It is very time-consuming. The problem is that I am not used to Canadian food.” Ying said, “I must cook by myself. I must cook Chinese food. Otherwise, I will lose weight.” Mei, a woman close to 50, a gynaecologist before immigration, said that, with a hired helper for cooking and cleaning, she rarely did any cooking in China. But she became solely responsible for all the housework in her family after moving to Canada. During the interview, Mei showed her strong dislike of having to cook every day. “Cooking is the biggest challenge for me here in Canada. I hate cooking, the mess, the smell…. But I have to learn to do it. Otherwise, I will starve.” In contrast, Lisha, a lone mother with a 11-year-old boy, who used to be responsible for all the household work in her family in China, said that she does not see much changes in her household responsibilities before and after immigration, but admitted that she has to cook not only each meal, but also more food each time, as she had to pack lunch boxes for herself and her son.

To many of the women, doing more cooking is a strategy that they learned in order to cope with their changed social and economic situations in the host country: to save money, to stay healthy, to have their own ethnic food, as well as to adapt to the new living and workplace arrangements in Canada. Several women recalled that they did less cooking in China because they used to dine out more frequently, or eat with their parents on a regular basis. Jie was a married woman with a three-year-old son. However, at the time of interview, Jie was living alone with her son in Canada, as her husband returned to China after he failed to get a job in Canada. In addition to a demanding job with an IT company, Jie had to spend most of her spare time cooking and taking

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15 Yuan is a unit of Chinese currency, equivalent to the dollar. One yuan consists of 100 fen. Currently 1 yuan is equal to about 0.15 Canadian dollars.
Jie was not alone in denying cooking as work, despite the enormous amount of time and efforts she spent on cooking, and childcare. In the focus group with the Chinese immigrants, none of the women initially recognized housework as work. “I don’t think housework is work because it is unpaid,” said one woman. “I think it is my responsibility, my duty, to take care of my parents and to supervise my children,” another woman said. “Because by talking to your family or friends, you also enjoyed the talking,” was another reply. In fact, the Chinese group was the only one among the 11 focus groups in the Household Work Project who did not see housework as work until after a heated discussion and debate on what housework is (also see Eichler & Matthews, 2007). However, given their social-cultural background from socialist China where women have nearly universal employment and unpaid work is seen almost as equivalent to non-work, it is not surprising that none of women in the focus group, as well as some women in the interviews recognized unpaid housework as work in the first place (see Chapter 4). By participating in the Household Work Project, many of the women began to see housework in a different light and realized for the first time that unpaid work should be valued as “real” work.

Nonetheless, all the participants admit that this unpaid work is as demanding and time-consuming as, if not more than, their paid work and has affected their life in many ways after immigration. For example, Ping, a university administrator and mother of a 10-year-old son, recounted how exhausted she was, having to cook three meals every day for her young son while taking courses at a community college. Lisha complained that her life is getting harder as she juggles her feeding and sole childcare responsibilities and her paid job in a factory. “I don’t have time for anything else, just cooking, going to work, and doing housework. There is no
entertainment, nothing else.” Juan, another lone mother in my interviews who used to be a college professor before immigration, shared a similar sentiment about her life after immigration:

When we were in China, we used to go out on weekends. If we didn’t want to cook, we could go out to eat. But here we have to cook because that’s a good way to save money. Now, we always stay home. Before, we always went out, to different places to play. Now we have to stay home. So sometimes I feel life is so boring.

Of all the women I interviewed, Juan, Lisha, and Jie, though married, were all living alone with their young children in Canada because their husbands had returned to China (i.e. Juan and Lisha’s husbands went back to China shortly after they landed and Jie’s husband returned after he failed to get a job in Canada even with a Canadian degree). For Juan, Lishan, and Jie, the reduced quality of life was not only directly associated with their deteriorated economic situation, but also with their living-alone situation in Canada. In addition to all the hardships that most new immigrants have encountered, including doing manual labour in a factory or service jobs in a supermarket in order to support themselves and their children, the three women also have to shoulder the challenges facing single parents: taking sole responsibility for all the household work and raising their children on their own. For them, the impact of the double burden is most obvious when they said that they felt “life is boring,” and they had “no time for anything else.” In Jie’s case, increased food work and childcare coupled with pressure from her paid job also led to enormous mental stress and a serious health problem after she came to Canada.

Nonetheless, things did not change for the worse for everyone. Contrary to the many claims of increased housework, Hua, a 45-year-old woman who used to be a college professor in China but now works as a building superintendent in Canada, claimed to have less and lighter food-related housework after immigration:

Housework is much less here in Canada. In China, we had a big family, mostly my brothers and sisters. They all lived close by. If they didn’t feel like cooking, they all came to my house. I had to cook for them, even during weekdays. Later my parents-in-law came to live with us. Although we hired a helper (baomu), I still had to do everything. It’s very tiring, cooking and washing. Here in Canada, there is nobody bothering us, just the three of us. I feel housework is a lot easier than before.
Clearly, Hua’s decreased housework after immigration was closely related to the absence of her extended family in Canada. Compared with the heavy burden of cooking for her siblings and in-laws before immigration, Hua finds cooking for her own small family a pleasure. When asked if there is any change in the types of housework she did, Hua replied, “No, not much change. Only three of us here, no friends, relatives, it is easy.” But when I asked her if she had learned any new food and new cooking, Hua told me in vivid detail about her various experiments in making steamed bread, and gave me good advice on how to make it myself. When asked about the reason for her learning to cook steamed bread and many other foods, Hua simply answered: “to save money.”

6.3.2 “I Used to Cook Less and My Wife Cooked More. Now I Do More.”

—Food Work and Learning among the Chinese Males

Of the six Chinese men I interviewed, five of them reported that they are more involved in food work in their family than before. Zhong, a man in his early 40s, is a case in point. Since immigrating to Canada in 2002, Zhong, a chemical engineer, and his wife, a nurse, have been doing “labour” jobs in the factories. Zhong reported taking up two-thirds of the household work as a way of showing care and support for his wife.

In China, I cooked less and my wife cooked more. She did everything: cooking, cleaning, washing, everything. But here, seeing my wife coming home exhausted from her work every day, I feel quite guilty. I cannot let her do all the housework. Actually I do more now. I take 70 percent of the housework sometimes.

According to Zhong, most of his increased household responsibilities were in cooking. Through his involvement in food work, Zhong said that he learned meal planning (e.g., what to cook, how to cook it, and where to buy it), and time management so that he had enough time for cooking, job searching and helping his daughter with her school work.

Liang, a young man in his early 30s, told me that he does 90 percent of all the housework in his new home in Canada because his wife was pregnant and working full-time while he had just started going back to school at the time of interview. But unlike Zhong, Liang did not find cooking too much trouble, as he said he enjoys cooking although he rarely did it before immigration. For Liang, much of his food-related learning revolved around providing healthy food for his pregnant wife and her foetus.
I paid a lot of attention to my wife… what you [she] can eat, what you [she] can do about that. I read books, and learned something about pregnancy, [like] how to take care about pregnant wife, and how to take care of the kid [baby] in the future. When I cook now, I become more careful about that. For example, I don’t use garlic, and ginger any more, less chilli pepper… [because] I know she doesn’t like them. Also more fruit, like watermelon, less meat. We now eat almost only vegetables.

Guang, the only single young man in my interviews who used to live with his parents before immigration, reported that he became thinner the first year in Canada because he did not know how to cook and had to eat the same kinds of tasteless food for days before he had something else for a change. “Buying food is also a challenge,” Guang said. “Sometimes it looks good, but when I buy and cook it, it tastes too old (not fresh), or too hard (not tender).” Thus, learning to shop and cook the right staple foods was among the first things Guang learned in Canada. “When I first cooked rice, I failed many times. I didn’t know how much water it needs, so I tried, tried, and tried. And eventually, I succeeded.” After living in Canada for over a year, Guang learned to co-operate with his two roommates by sharing food expenses and food-work: taking turns in doing grocery shopping, food preparation and cooking, and cleaning up after meals. As a result, his health also improved.

It is worth noting, however, that although the male respondents in the interviews reported doing more cooking than before, they rarely attributed this increase to the need for economizing, but rather to the lack of the social support they used to enjoy before immigration. For example, Guang had to learn to cook because his parents were far away. Liang did most of the cooking in his family because his wife was pregnant and was working full-time. Zhong learned to cook simply because he could no longer expect his wife to do all the cooking after her long, exhausting days of physical labour.

6.3.3 “I Eat More Salads Because They Are Good for Health.”

—Learning New Food

Nearly all the people I interviewed talked about adding new foods to their diet and engaging in learning about new foods and new ways of cooking. Most of the interviewees, both male and female, talked about learning to cook traditional Chinese food such as steamed bread, dumplings, and regional dishes. Many women also now incorporate Western-style or other ethnic foods such as pizza, sandwiches, and sushi in their diet. For example, Fang said she learned to eat raw salads because they are good for health. Mei said she eats more shrimps than fish now because they are
easier to cook and taste better. Jie learned to make sandwiches for lunch as they do not take much time to prepare nor do they require heating. Hua talked about re-learning to prepare some of her staple foods, like steamed bread, by experimenting with yeast, baking powder, and baking soda, as the traditional way of making steamed bread does not work well here. Hong, a young mother with a one-year-old son, learned to cook healthy food for her son, but simple, fast food for herself and other adult members of her family, as she had to juggle her household responsibilities and her busy school studies. However, as a young mother without much English, Hong claimed that the foods she learned to cook are all Chinese.

Although she said that she was not used to Western foods, Ying showed a keen interest in learning about them and revealed to me some of the changes in her diet. “Now, on my table, we sometimes have some Canadian food, like salads. They are very easy and healthy. I didn’t like to eat potatoes before. Here, I like to cook and eat potatoes.” Ying also gave another reason for her change: to save time. “Because there is a lot of housework, such as cooking, and Chinese food takes a lot of time. I’d like to have a change, to learn to cook some Canadian food.”

Unlike the women, who talked about learning both Chinese and Western foods, the male respondents in my interviews reported that the foods they learned to cook are almost exclusively Chinese. This is probably because they had rarely cooked before and they are slow in adapting to a mixed diet. For example, Zhong, a married man in his early 40s, talked about learning from his wife to make noodles—his favourite food. Liang learned to cook what he considered good for his pregnant wife as well as what he liked best—different Chinese regional dishes (ts’ai) and desserts. “[M]y wife enjoys making some Western cookies, and cakes. But I don’t do that. My favourite is Chinese dishes and the Chinese snacks and cakes or sometimes Korean or Japanese (food).” Yong was the only man in my interviews who talked about learning to cook roasted turkey on Thanksgiving Day, and other ethnic foods that he learned after dining out with his colleagues.

6.3.4 “I Learned to Bake Because Stir-Frying Produces Too Much Smoke.”
—Learning New Ways of Cooking

When asked if there are any changes in the way they cook and prepare their food, several respondents replied immediately, “In China, we use gas, here we use electricity.” “Here they
don’t have the big fans in the kitchen to pump out the smoke.” “We don’t use the oven to bake things in China.” Some of them also noted the different cooking utensils they used before and after immigration. “In China, we use steeper pan for stir-fry,” said Lisha “but here I have to buy a shallow, flat pan, as the stoves are flat and are different from the gas stoves we use in China.” Thus, accommodating those changes in a Canadian kitchen makes up an important part of their learning and cooking experience. While Ying complained about the flat electric stoves not being powerful enough for the Chinese style of cooking (stir-frying), several other women, however, talked about the adjustments they have made in order to accommodate the differences. Here is an account from Lisha:

When I first arrived here, I was living in a basement. When I cooked, I tried to reduce the heat of the oil, as they don’t have the big fans in the kitchen to pump out the smoke. I had to put in the vegetables when the oil is lukewarm, so as to avoid the ringing of the smoke alarm.

For many women, lack of a powerful fan in the Canadian kitchen is a key factor for them to learn new ways of cooking. Fang, a 58-year-old woman who was a college professor in China, but a housewife in Canada, talked about a number of adaptations she has made in her new cooking practices in Canada:

I’ve changed a lot in my ways of cooking. I eat more salad, as it does not require cooking. I learned to steam fish. I used to enjoy fried fish. Now I eat steamed fish. When I cook green vegetables, I dip them in boiling water first and then dress them with sauce. If I stir-fry them, I will pour a little water first, then oil, before I put the vegetables in the pan, so that it won’t produce too much smoke. It’s good for health, and also improves the living environment at home. It’s much cleaner.

Several women talked about learning to use the oven to bake or roast their food, as the oven is not a common kitchen appliance in China. Fang shared with me her experience in experimenting with the oven in cooking different kinds of food: making cakes, baking bread, roasting chicken and yams, as well as for reheating food. Fang explained, “We just bought a new, small oven, because we learned that microwaved food is not good for health, so we stopped using the microwave, and bought a small oven, as the large one uses too much electricity.” Like Fang, Jie learned to use the oven to bake Western desserts and cakes. Xinyan, a live-in caregiver at the time of her interview, talked about experimenting with different sauces and spices to marinate chicken and beef before roasting them in the oven.
While most of the men talked about increased food work after immigration, none of them mentioned changes in their ways of cooking, partly because they did not cook much before immigration. Thus, their learning was mainly on how to make basic Chinese food, and where to shop for groceries, and they rarely talked about how to cook Western food or make their meals in the Canadian way.

6.3.5 “We Have to Learn to Be a Smart Shopper.”
—Learning New Ways of Grocery Shopping

Grocery shopping is an important part of food work. All the participants in my study who claimed doing housework also reported doing grocery shopping differently. According to Juan, “In China, I did grocery shopping every day because it (the food) was more fresh. Now, I do grocery shopping once a week or every two weeks.” Many women said that grocery shopping in China is much easier because there are grocery stores or markets in every neighbourhood, which are within walking distance or can be reached easily by bicycle. In Canada, grocery shopping becomes less frequent because most of the large supermarkets where people usually do their grocery shopping are located in the suburbs. Thus, for the new Chinese immigrants, finding the closest Chinese supermarket is often among the first things they had to learn upon their arrival. Before making a shopping trip, they also had to learn to plan as to what to buy, where to shop for the food items, and how to get to the supermarket, as most of the new immigrants did not know how to drive nor did they have their own cars. Juan, a sales clerk at a large Western supermarket, talked about how she managed her weekly grocery shopping, which usually involved more than one trip:

I buy some of the food in my own store [where she works]. It is cheap, too; but I usually go shopping on my day off. I have two best friends. When I am off and they are off, they will drive me to the Chinese stores to buy a lot of Chinese stuff. The vegetables and meat are cheaper in the Chinese stores, and some special food, like bean jam (jiang), sweet dumplings (yuanxiao), and xiangyu juice (a drink made of yam), are only available in the Chinese stores. Sometimes I go by bus to a Chinese store, if I need something special.

Many of the women I interviewed shared similar experience and some provided an explanation for their changed shopping pattern. Before immigration, they used to live close to their workplace, usually in apartments subsidized by their work unit. Grocery shopping was easy and convenient, because there are grocery stores or a market nearby where they could shop every day on their way home from work and buy only what they needed for the day. Once they are in
Canada, however, this type of lifestyle is no longer available. For many of the women, grocery shopping becomes less frequent, but more time-consuming and most physically challenging task of the week, especially during the long, cold winter. Ying, who lives close to her work in downtown Toronto, gave a vivid description of her new shopping experience after immigration:

In China, I worked in a hospital and lived next to it. There is a market nearby. So every day after work, I went to the market, and did grocery shopping on my way home. But here, I must go to Chinatown for grocery shopping. I cannot do it every day, but only once a week. It is not very far, but there is still a distance. I always walk to Chinatown to buy grocery. It wastes a lot of time, walk, walk, walk. But in China, I didn’t need to do that.

Several other women, especially the lone mothers, said that lack of adequate transportation to Chinese food stores is their biggest challenge in grocery shopping. For example, Lisha and Jie, who are both single mothers and live in the suburbs, talked about the difficulties of having to do their weekly grocery shopping on foot and to pull back their load of groceries in a cart, especially in the piercing cold of a Canadian winter. My interviews indicate that people who reported challenges in grocery shopping and who compared their grocery shopping experiences before and after immigration are usually those who do not have easy access to a supermarket, either because there is no supermarket nearby or because they do not have a car.

Some respondents said they learned new ways to cope with the changes in shopping. For example, several women talked about learning to make a shopping list of groceries they need for the whole week before making the trip. Others simply write down the food items to purchase as they cook. For example, Lisha learned to plan the meals ahead of time, such as what to have for breakfast and dinner, what vegetables and fruits she would have, and how much she needed to buy, so that the food could last for the entire week. “I have to shop for a whole week and put them in the fridge, as the fridge is quite big here.” Juan and Zhong learned to arrange for car pools with friends, neighbours, or landlords for their weekly shopping trip. Living alone here in Canada with her three-year-old son, and working a full-time job, Jie said that her weekends became shorter, with lengthier grocery shopping, and that she has to plan her weekends more carefully so that she can schedule some activities for her son.

As many respondents reported financial constraints due to difficulties in getting professional jobs, much of their reported learning around food work is economically driven. Fang, a
housewife during my interviews, explains how she learned to reduce the living expenses in her family:

As we are not a well-off family, just my husband working, so we are frugal. We never buy furniture. We brought almost all our clothes from China. We just buy food, and groceries. Now I have learned to read flyers. I couldn’t do that before. I also learned the Western way of shopping, usually once a week, and buy cheap things on the flyers. That’s different. In China, grocery shopping was very convenient. There was a store next to my house (apartment). I could shop any time.

Zhong reported a similar strategy in cutting down the monthly expenses in his family: bringing their clothes from China, cooking everything they eat, and shopping at different stores or supermarkets. “Except for the essential stuffs for life, we almost buy nothing else.” Zhong said. “We seldom buy bread, or get food from a restaurant. We always cook by ourselves, and make everything from scratch, (in a softer voice) scratch.” Zhong talked about learning from his neighbours and co-workers where to shop for cheap groceries:

Most of the time we buy from the Chinese food market, like Dazhonghua, because everything is fresh, and the prices are reasonable. But we also buy food from Food Basics. We buy rice and flours from Food Basics. And we buy some meat and flour and milk from No Frills. We have to learn to be a smarter buyer, smart shopper. Take milk for example, we drink milk every day, and the same product, the same quality, but the prices are different in different places. So we have to learn to be smart.

Xinyan, a young woman who was working as a live-in caregiver at the time of her interview, called her shopping activities “learning from experience.” “At first, I didn’t know the places well, and just shopped at the store near-by. Now I know every place, and by reading their flyers, I learned to compare the prices, and shop at the place where food is the cheapest, where something is better [of good quality]. This is all learned from experience.”

Although all of the respondents expressed a greater need for economizing after immigration, food prices are not the only criterion for shopping at different stores. For many of the new immigrants, shopping for ethnic food is “both a culturally embedded economic activity and an economically shaded cultural experience” (Wang & Lo, 2007: 685). Although there are many large Chinese supermarkets in Toronto, and getting Chinese food is not a big problem, getting access to Chinese supermarkets is a challenge for some of the new immigrants due to their lack of means of transportation. Contrary to Wang and Lo’s (2007) research on immigrant grocery-
shopping behaviour, in which the Chinese immigrants they interviewed in the Toronto area see grocery shopping as “a pleasurable activity for family members” or “a family trip with a considerable leisure component” (p. 290) because most of the respondents in their study had a car, my research found that many of the new immigrants viewed grocery shopping as a drudgery, because most of them did not have access to a car.

6.3.6 “Food Is My ‘Cigarette,’ a Medium to Communicate with My Co-Workers.”

—Emotional and Spiritual Dimensions of Food Work

In Chapter 1, I introduced a new definition of household work, which consists of “physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual tasks.” This is also true with food work. Cooking, food preparation, and grocery shopping not only require physical engagement, they also involve a lot of mental work such as planning, organizing, coordinating, and budgeting. Furthermore, feeding the family involves emotional work (DeVault, 1999: 229), as food and cooking have long been understood as highly emotion-laden tasks in which the preferences, the likes and dislikes, and the health and nutritional needs of family members, especially children and spouses, are taken into consideration when making decisions on what and how to cook. According to Fang, she does all the food work in her family so that when her husband comes home, he can have the meal right away and have more time for relaxation. Fang also talked about strengthening the emotional tie with her live-away daughters by either inviting them home for a big dinner on weekends or by visiting them and bringing along their favourite foods. Liang said that he is very careful in using spices and sauces when he prepares meals for his pregnant wife, and avoids cooking anything that he considers not good for her and her fetus. Zhong does more cooking as an emotional support for his wife who often came home exhausted after strenuous physical labour, and as a way to promote emotional connections between his family members. “When I cook, I always talk with my daughter and my wife about their study and work,” Zhong said. “In that way, I feel like two persons.” Zhong added, “Cooking time is also our family time, the happiest time of the day.” In addition, Zhong also revealed how he uses food as a way to communicate with his co-workers:

I found that in the workplace, it is easier for the smokers to make new friends than for the non-smokers. I think Chinese food is my “cigarette.” Although I don’t smoke cigarettes, I “smoke” Chinese food. We exchange food with co-workers from Europe, from Africa. Food is a medium. Food is not only something to fill your stomach with. It carries a lot of
information, your passion, your love, your respect to your co-workers. It [food exchange] gives me more knowledge about food, more topics, and more channels to communicate with my co-workers. It helps me to get along with my co-workers.

Food can also be an important means to express one’s good wishes, to promote spiritual well-being, and to connect with kin, living and dead, through food offerings. Adopting the Chinese traditional ritual of ancestor worship, Hua, a woman in her mid-40s, set up a shrine in her house, with food offerings and burning incense sticks in front of the shrine as a way of commemorating her dead father and father-in-law, and a way of expressing good wishes for her surviving mother and mother-in-law in China. Being physically away and unable to visit them in person, Hua will now pray in front of the shrine on special occasions (e.g., the Chinese New Year’s Eve, Chinese Memorial Day, the dates of their birth and death), or when she learned that they were not feeling well. “I never did this in China,” Hua said. “Now, as I live far away, and by performing the rituals I feel as if they could see me, or hear me [my prayers], as if they could understand what I said and eat the food I have prepared for them, so that they will recover sooner.” In doing so, Hua feels connected both emotionally and spiritually with her elders in China.

6.3.7 “You Don’t Have to Learn It. You Just Do It!” —Ways of Learning in Food Work

Apart from examining what people learn, my research also explores how they learn. Many respondents talked about using various sources to collect food information/recipes and to learn new ways of cooking: from friends, classmates, or co-workers, as well as from TV programs, newspapers, magazines, the Internet, and cookbooks. For instance, Yun reported learning to make pizza and sushi from her friends and from her classmates at the English class for new immigrants. Jie learned to make Western-style cookies and cakes from recipe books and the Internet. Ping talked about learning a variety of other ethnic foods (e.g., pasta, shushi, and sandwiches) from the community centre in her neighbourhood. Mei, Hong, and Zhong learned to cook by contacting or observing friends, family members, and colleagues. Fang collected recipes at potluck parties or other gatherings she attended. Zhong talked about learning to cook noodles from his wife, Liang learned from books about healthy food for his pregnant wife. Yong said that he learned about new foods by eating in different restaurants with colleagues and then trying them out at home. Almost everyone in the interviews talked about learning cooking through watching TV programs, and/or from cookbooks, newspapers, or magazines. Most of the
respondents reported the Internet as their most important means for information, including food-related information, such as obtaining recipes and nutritional information.

However, in food work, gender seems to be less a factor than ethnicity, class, and language skills in determining what new Chinese immigrants learn and how they learn it. As highly-educated professionals before immigration, nearly all the participants in my interviews talked about the Internet as their most important means to search for household work-related information, such as cooking recipes. However, those with limited English often turn to Chinese websites both in China and North America for information on food recipes and nutrition, and the foods they learned are predominantly Chinese.

Compared to what they have learned, which is fairly easy to identify, many respondents seemed to have great difficulty in recognizing how they learned, especially with some of the invisible tasks such as meal planning, time management, and food-work organization. Many simply said, “It happens naturally, you don’t have to learn, you just do it.” A few respondents rejected the idea of learning. Here is Lisha’s response to my “how did you learn” question:

I don’t think that’s what you learn to do, but what you must do. Time doesn’t permit you to do it the way you used to back at home (in China). You don’t have to learn, but you must arrange things like that, because time limits you and forces you to do it that way.

In another interview, when asked about how she learned to organize and plan her housework differently, Hong, a young mother who was attending adult high school at the time of the interview, showed me why rather than how she did it. “Housework is endless. There is always so much to do. If you don’t manage it properly, you won’t be able to complete all the work. You won’t have time for school.”

Most of the learning is informal, experiential, and often self-directed and self-initiated. While most respondents reported learning intentionally, what they have learned is sometimes quite incidental. For example, some participants reported learning English and Canadian culture through cookbooks and on-line recipes. Through food exchanges at picnics and potlucks or by eating at friends’ homes or dining out with colleagues, many of the new Chinese immigrants also learned about Canadian society, its customs and traditions, as well as its food practices.
6.4 Comparing Food Work and the Related Learning with Data from the WALL Survey

The 2004 WALL Survey indicates that, like their Canadian-born and other foreign-born counterparts, Chinese immigrants in the Survey reported almost universal participation rates in household work (99% for women and 97% for men). This proves to be true with the Chinese immigrants in the interviews, 95 percent of whom reported doing household work after immigration. While 56 percent of the Chinese women and 36 percent of the Chinese men in the Survey reported involvement in learning about food and cooking (see Figure 1 in Chapter 5), all the respondents who reported doing household work said that they are involved in food work and food-related learning (100%).

Consistent with the Survey on household work (see Table 3), the interviews with the Chinese immigrants also reveal a gendered division of labour, with women not only doing more food work, but also different types of work: women are more involved in more time-consuming but less visible tasks such as food preparation, especially of staple food, while men seem to be more involved in the more visible and rewarding part of food work—putting in the pan the food ingredients women have prepared for them and then getting all the compliments for the food they cook. Women usually do food work on a regular, on-going basis while men’s food-related work seems more selective, and optional, usually under special circumstances or based on their own food preferences and taste.

Compared to the Chinese immigrants in the Survey, nearly all the Chinese immigrants in the interviews (95%) reported an intensification of household work, especially in food work. Many immigrants, especially women, talked about devoting lengthier time in preparing and cooking their meals in order to cut down their food expenses, due to the decline of family resources, financially and socially.

However, inconsistent with the Survey on household work-related learning (see Table 4 in Chapter 5), my interviews do not show that Chinese immigrant men are more involved than women in learning household work, although they are equally active in learning to cook after immigration. On the contrary, Chinese immigrant women talked in greater length about the challenges in their food work, which include food choices, and the diverse ways they employed to acquire knowledge and skills to accommodate the changes in cooking, food preparation, and
grocery shopping. But, like the Chinese immigrants in the Survey, participants in my interviews talked about learning about food work in its various dimensions: the physical (e.g., less stir-frying to reduce the smoke), mental (e.g., food budgeting, meal planning), emotional (e.g., Zhong’s communicating with friends and co-workers through food sharing and exchange), and spiritual (as in the case of Hua who connected with her ancestors/elders through food rituals). In doing so, many of the Chinese immigrants also learned about the Canadian food customs and traditions, and the Canadian way of life. However, there are certain things that are not measurable in the Survey data but are clearly demonstrated in the interviews, such as the changes in their food choices and practices and some of the consequences of food work and the related learning on their gender roles and identities.

6.5 Changes in Food Choices and Practices

Like previous studies on Chinese immigrants’ dietary changes and acculturation (Chau, Lee, Tseng, & Downes, 1990), my interviews reveal that these new Chinese immigrants retain a predominantly traditional Chinese diet (especially for their staple foods, such as rice, steamed bread, noodles), but have incorporated a number of other ethnic foods (e.g., salads, sandwiches, pizza, and sushi), while rejecting others (e.g., cheese) in their diet. Nearly all respondents who reported doing housework also reported diversifying their ways of cooking, such as baking, boiling, and steaming instead of stir-frying in order to reduce smoke. Fang said she stopped using the microwave oven after she learned that it is not healthy.

Contrary to some studies which indicate that younger immigrants generally tend to change their food habits more readily than the older immigrants (Pan, Dixon, Himburg, & Huffman, 1999: 54), my research suggests that age and length of residence in Canada do not seem to influence food habits as much as exposure to the new cultural environment and fluency in the new language do. While the older women in the interviews seemed more concerned with healthy eating, those who had more contact with people outside the Chinese community, or had better English language skills or worked in an English-speaking environment, seemed to have more dietary changes and incorporated more other ethnic foods than those who were less exposed to the local culture. However, an interesting phenomenon not reported in previous studies on food acculturation is that, for those (mostly men) who never or rarely cooked before immigration, their learning about cooking often starts with staple Chinese food (for example, rice, noodles, steamed bread, etc.) and the foods that they were more familiar with (e.g., Chinese or other
Asian foods). For people (all women) who did most of the cooking for their family before immigration, their learning seems to go beyond the staple foods to include new dishes, either Chinese or Canadian. This gendered pattern of learning contradicts previous research on food habits among the Chinese in the United States (Pan, Dixon, Himburg, & Huffman, 1999), which suggests that men are more likely to change their food habits because they do less cooking and are thus less familiar with ethnic cuisines than women who have more experience preparing traditional food.

6.6 Doing Food Work, Doing “Gender”

Household work has long been viewed as gendered labour—that is, a set of tasks that convey meaning about what is male and what is female (Hochschild, 1989). Berk (1985) describes the family as a “gender factory,” which produces not only household goods and services, but also gender. “Simultaneously, household members ‘do’ gender as they ‘do’ housework and childcare” (p. 201). Thus, the division of household labour is the mechanism by which both the material and the symbolic products of the household are realized.

Consistent with a large body of literature on household labour (Coltrane, 2000), this chapter indicates that immigration does little to change the gendered pattern of food related household work, despite the dramatic changes in their social and economic status as well as in their food choices and practices. No longer having the social and economic resources they used to enjoy in their home country, most of the professional Chinese in my interviews reported doing more cooking after immigration. Nevertheless, both women and men continue to believe that food work is primarily women’s responsibility, regardless of their employment status.

Consistent with the theory of social construction of gender, this chapter indicates that gender is embedded in routine food work, and that doing food work is an important part of doing gender. The following examples demonstrate how changes in social and economic status after immigration exacerbate the division of household work, and contribute to the reconstruction of gender identity and power relationships between married women and men.

First, the loss of professional jobs for some women leads to declined social and economic status in the family, a widening gap in the division of food work, and an exacerbation of gender inequality in their households. For example, Fang, a woman in her late 50s, used to be a college professor in China. Before she joined her husband in Canada in 2001, Fang supported her two
young daughters all on her own for 10 years. However, once in Canada, Fang became a housewife and economically dependent on her husband, because she could not find a job due to her limited English. As a result, Fang took up all the routine housework in her family: cooking, cleaning, doing laundry, and grocery shopping. “My husband does not do any housework because he thinks he is supporting me,” explained Fang. In another case, Mei, a woman who had just turned 50 at the time of interview, shared a similar experience. As a senior gynaecologist in China, Mei used to hire a domestic help to do all the housework. But since she came to Canada along with her husband for his PhD studies, she became solely responsible for all the household work in her family, even though she was doing a part-time job during the daytime and attending ESL classes for new immigrants in the evenings.

For both Fang and Mei, beyond the obvious changes in the division of labour is a less visible change in their family dynamics— a reverse from their role as professional women to a traditional female role as wives and a more patriarchal gender relation. This new relation posits the husbands as the head of the household, whose work is associated with primary providership for the family, and the wives as the dependent, whose work is to do most of the household tasks and childcare (Sydie, 1994). Fang’s husband does not do any housework because he thinks that he is supporting his wife, while Mei’s husband, a PhD student at the time of interview, also refuses to do housework, even though he is not providing for his family. Apparently Mei’s sole earner-status does not give her the power to get her husband involved in sharing any household work nor is she accorded the same high status as Fang’s husband is. Here it is clear that different meanings are attached to the same activity—a paid job. It also suggests that “gender is created not just in the doing of particular acts, but in the meanings associated with them” (Deutsch & Saxon, 1998: 351). Similar to Komter’s (1989) invisible power, contradictions between the behaviours and the meanings attached to those behaviours reveal struggle over gender (Thompson, 1993). Expectation that domestic labour is the responsibility of the wife recreates male privilege and female subordination (Risman & Johnson-Sumerford, 1998). By doing all the housework, Fang and Mei are doing gender and female subordination.

Second, manifest power occurs, however, when women challenge the distribution of unpaid work within the home (Hartman, 1981). Hua, a woman in her mid-40s, feels the power of resistance as she attempts to negotiate or push her husband to share some of the food-related household tasks:
When we were in China, at first I did all the cooking, he [the husband] was responsible for the rest of it: cleaning and washing. Later, he worked far away from home, I had to do everything, cooking, cleaning, and shopping. When we came here, he is still in his former habit, not doing anything. …Sometimes, if I don’t feel like doing it, I refuse to cook. He has to do it himself when he’s hungry. Sometimes, I just say to him, “You must do the cooking today, as you are good at cooking this dish (ts’ai).’ He cooks occasionally, just once or twice, very little. … Sometimes I just force him to do some work. “I’ve done the cooking, you have to do the cleaning.” He will do the cleaning as he is a clean person, and likes to keep things tidy. …But the problem is that I am getting so used to cooking now that I am, often unknowingly, starting to cook in the kitchen even if I was telling him that I am not going to cook (laugh).

Apparently, Hua’s effort to engage her husband in doing more housework does not seem to make much difference in changing the status quo, which her husband manages to keep by turning a blind eye to her wish for a more equitable division of routine household work.

More frequently, women refrain from overt conflicts or even latent grievance for fear of disturbing the relationship. Invisible power is at stake when the status quo is seen as natural and inevitable (Komter, 1989). In fact, these power dynamics are so deeply embedded in the social fabric of society that participants themselves are unaware of them. This is the case with Hong, a young mother with an infant son. Unlike Fang and Mei, Hong does not see doing all the food work as problematic. “I think housework for a housewife is primarily cooking.” She said, “I do most of the cooking because my husband won’t cook.” Unlike Hua, Hong did not show any grievance nor did she attempt to change the status quo. Instead of pushing him to share cooking, she redirects him to something more enjoyable: playing with the kid while she is cooking. When asked if there was anything she used to do but no longer does, Hong said, “No, I don’t think so. There is only more to do, how can there be less?”

Third, compared to women, men have greater power to choose what they do in housework, and their involvement in housework is largely based on their personal preferences, or enjoyment of the tasks (Wong, 2005: 93). This is evident in Yun’s explanation of her husband’s involvement in cooking, which she attributes to his enjoyment of food and eating:

My husband likes cooking. He thinks cooking is refreshing (xiaojian), a means of relaxation. He is also fast in cooking. I always do wheat products (mianshi). He is good at cooking dishes (ts’ai) because he enjoys food and eating.
Unlike Hua who complained about her husband’s lack of involvement in cooking, Yun seems satisfied with the division of food work in her family:

> When we are both at home, we cook together in the kitchen. If I cut the vegetable, he will cook. I like the taste of food he cooks. We chat while we work. Sometimes, he says he’s busy, so I will cook. Sometimes I feel low from work, and do not feel like cooking, he will immediately ask what I’d like to eat. We (always) discuss about it together. My son used to wash the plates after meals. Now he is away to attend the university, my husband also does more dishwashing.

Yun’s story confirms that husbands’ tasks are more likely to correspond to what they enjoy doing while wives do not seem to have this choice. Even though she did the more time-consuming tasks such as making wheat products and preparing the vegetables and the meats, Yun gives more credit to her husband’s contribution in food work, which, in fact, is simply putting into the pan the ingredients his wife has prepared. Moreover, compared to her husband’s food work, which is highly visible, and is considered more skilled (e.g., the actual cooking), Yun’s food work is invisible, and is considered less skilled (e.g., chopping vegetables and cutting meat), and thus less valued.

Similar to other research on gender division of household labour (Wong, 2005:101), this chapter reveals that men’s contributions to food work, especially in cooking, are highly noticeable, mainly because food work is considered “women’s work.” As a result, men’s performance of one “feminine” task may be considered to be equivalent in effort to women’s performance of many tasks (Blain, 1994). In contrast, women’s performance of food work is viewed as part of her “natural” desire to care for her family, and the effort required of her is minimized. As a result, her contributions to the work are taken for granted (Robinson & Spitze, 1992) and remain invisible unless they fail to fulfil the expectation (Thompson, 1993). Furthermore, women also tend to view it as their wifely duty to do more food-related housework (as is expressed in Hong’s words “I think housework for a housewife is cooking”) and may feel guilty if they do less but are grateful if their husbands “pitch in” or help out (as in the case of Yun). This difference, in part, reflects the different social expectations of gender; that is, food work or cooking is optional or exceptional for men while it is obligatory for women.
Fourth, consistent with other studies on housework (Coltrane, 1996; Kiger & Riley, 1996; Marini & Shelton, 1993; Press & Townsley, 1998), this study also reveals that men tend to overestimate their share of housework while women tend to underestimate their efforts and work. For instance, Zhong claimed doing 70 percent of all the housework in his household, which, as it turned out after further probing, was the actual cooking part after his wife or his daughter had prepared all the ingredients for him. Furthermore, men’s increased food work also seems to be largely related to their preference of food and preferred ways of getting it done. For example, Liang estimated performing 90 percent of the household work partly because he enjoyed cooking.

Furthermore, as DeVault’s (1991) observed in her study on feeding work in some US families, men in my interviews seem to have considerable power to define their own contributions to housework. For Zhong and Liang, doing more housework was not seen as their responsibility but as their way of showing care for their wives, who were either too exhausted to do housework after a long day of physical labour (as in the case of Zhong’s wife) or were pregnant (as in the case of Liang’s wife). Men also seem able to refuse to participate in family work (e.g., as in the case of Kai, Mei’s husband), or to limit sharply the nature and extent of their participation (e.g., Hong’s husband chose to play with children and Hua’s husband preferred cleaning to cooking). But for women who desire more equitable share of household work, they often have to negotiate with their husband or sometimes even to push for it (as in the case of Hua).

6.7 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that, upon arriving in Canada, most of the new Chinese immigrants in my interviews faced a sudden increase in cooking and food preparation largely due to a dramatic decline in family resources and barriers in getting professional jobs in the host country. Consistent with the WALL Survey, and literature on household work in general and feeding work in particular, women continue to be responsible for food work and are involved in nearly all aspects of food-related activities such as food preparation, cooking, after-meal cleaning-up, as well as budgeting, meal planning, and grocery shopping.

Consistent with the WALL Survey, women in my interviews were not only more involved in learning about food work, what they learned was also more diverse than that of the Chinese men. Although their staple food remains predominantly Chinese, many of the immigrant women make
adaptations in their food recipes, in their ways of cooking, as well as in their meal planning and
grocery shopping. Compared to their male counterparts, Chinese immigrant women also seem
more active in learning intentionally to incorporate other ethnic foods in their diet, either for the
sake of health (such as salads), for convenience (such as sandwiches), for cultural integration
(such as cookies), or simply out of financial concerns.

My research also suggests that increased food work leads to increased learning, and that much of
the learning, which is often done informally, involves different dimensions of efforts. Apart from
their practical functions, food also has symbolic meanings, such as serving as a medium to
connect with friends, neighbours, and colleagues, as well as with other family members, near and
far, emotionally and/or spiritually. What we see here is that while for analytical purposes, the
boundaries of the different dimensions of work and learning are treated as separate, they overlap.
Furthermore, given the fact that cooking itself is often thought of as a physical activity done by
individuals, what is cooked, how it is cooked, and for whom it is cooked, contain mental,
emotional, and spiritual efforts and have significant social, cultural, and economic implications.

Like other feminist scholars on household work, I also argue that the unequal gender division of
labour in food work is not only an expression of female subjugation in a patriarchal society, it
also reflects the way in which women construct their femininity (Charles & Kerr, 1988; Furst,
1997). As we have seen in the interviews, many women are not happy with the unequal division
of labour in food work, yet few of them see this gendered work as unfair or take actions for
change. Instead, nearly all of the women accept this division of labour with little question. This
is especially true among those who are not, or only occasionally, involved in paid employment,
as they feel that the kitchen is the only domain where they can have some control. As Furst
(1997) argues, femininity seems to be so deeply involved in the cooking and giving of food that
women may hesitate to give up this aspect of their identity (p. 442). Thus, doing household work
for women is doing gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987), and the work of cooking and feeding
the family plays a vital part in the construction of a woman’s roles as wife and mother (DeVault,
1991), in the confirmation of feminine identities as well as in female subordination.
Chapter 7 Learning to Be a Good Parent in the Canadian Context

Before she came to Canada, my teenage daughter was never expected nor trained to do any household work. As the only child in the family, she was the “apple of the eye” of both parents and grandparents. Like many children of her age, she was always encouraged to focus on her school work, and hardly knew how to do her own laundry, wash the dishes, or clean her own room. Thus, getting my daughter to learn and share some of the housework became one of my household responsibilities. I remember I had to learn to be patient and tactical at the beginning for fear of irritating her, as she already complained about my cooking.

Time passes very quickly. In the past few years, I have seen many changes in my daughter, who, instead of relying on me to take care of her, began to show concern for me, trying to comfort me when I got frustrated with my academic work and helping me when I got stuck with some computer program. To my joyful surprise, she was also getting more involved in household work, such as doing the weekly house cleaning, the monthly expense budgeting, the yearly tax return, and very recently, taking up a more physically challenging task—doing our weekly grocery shopping, as I was getting busier with my thesis writing. What I did not expect, however, was that after completing some of the tasks, she would turn to me and ask for pay! She even learned to bargain with me if she was not satisfied with what I offered her for the work I have been doing all those years without pay!

7.1 Introduction

Childcare and parenting are an important part of household work. However, like food work, childcare and parenting are often subsumed embedded in literature on housework and family. Due to its unpaid and gendered nature, childcare continues to be performed by women, despite their increased participation in the labour market (Armstrong & Armstrong, 2002; Eichler, 2005). Furthermore, childcare, like housework in general, is often excluded from the definition of work and thus ignored by most of the studies on work (Eichler & Matthews, 2007). Similarly, childcare and parenting remain largely unexplored in lifelong learning literature even though it is
a well recognized fact that childcare and parenting are essential parts of mothering and that good practices in childcare and parenting have to be learned.

In this chapter, I examine childcare and parenting practices among the new Chinese immigrants by drawing on data from 20 individual interviews, a focus group, and a discussion group with the Chinese immigrants in the Greater Toronto Area. Divided into five parts, this chapter first provides an outline of this chapter and a rationale for including childcare and parenting in my research on household work and learning, followed by a brief review of pertinent literatures. In the main body of the chapter, I explore in detail how immigration influences childcare and parenting practices among the new Chinese immigrants, what they have to learn to overcome barriers in childrearing in the host country, and what adaptations they have to make in their childcare responsibilities and parenting practices. In my analysis, I will pay special attention to the gender differences in childcare and parenting by comparing the qualitative data with data from the WALL Survey. In the end, I summarize the major findings on childcare and parenting in my research. The goal of this chapter is to document the changes in childcare and parenting beliefs and practices, and to make visible the learning the Chinese immigrants undertake in childcare and parenting.

7.2 Literatures on Childcare, Parenting, and the Chinese Immigrants

7.2.1 Childcare and Parenting as “Women’s Work”

Both women and men participate in carework, but as in housework, women are predominantly responsible for caregiving, childcare in particular, in addition to their major responsibility for housework (Cook, 1988; Dressel & Clark, 1990; Hooyman & Gonyea, 1995; Stoller, 1993; Thompson & Walker, 1989; Van Dijk & Siegers, 1996). “[Women] do most of the cooking, washing, cleaning, toileting, bathing, feeding, comforting, training for daily living, shopping and planning for domestic consumption and care” (Armstrong & Armstrong, 2002: 44). However, gender division of carework does not remain the same. It varies across time and space, among women of different class, race, culture, age, marital status, and sexual orientation (Armstrong & Armstrong, 2002).

Studies on childcare in China indicates that, although Chinese women have one of the highest employment rates in the world (United Nations, 2000) and enjoy gender equality in paid work
due to the State’s policy of “equal work, equal pay,” they have not achieved the same level of gender equality in unpaid family work (Harrell, 2000; Jacka, 1997). Women are assigned by the State responsibility for promoting “spiritual civilization” through their nurturance of children and family (Robinson, 1985). Although the fertility rate was on a constant decline in the past three decades due to the State’s birth planning policy, demands associated with childcare and parenting grow, as children in China become ever more precious (Short, Chen, Entwise, & Zhai, 2002). So the double burden persists for the majority of Chinese women, especially mothers with young children (Honig & Hershatter, 1988; Jacka, 1997).

Similar to research on housework, studies on childcare, which is sometimes included in research on housework, focus mainly on the division of labour of childcare by looking at the time women and men devote to childcare and how the gendered work influences women and men differently in their domestic life and labour market participation (Doucet & Merla, 2007; Kitterod, 2002; Short, Chen, Entwise, & Zhai, 2002; Van Dijk & Siegers, 1996). Literature on parenting-related work focuses on the way parents nurture, train, as well as care for their children. Parenting is often associated with mother work or mothering (even when it is done by a man, see Doucet, 2006), as this work is predominantly performed by women (Crittenden, 2001; Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2003; Thompson & Walker, 1989). Usually research on parenting goes beyond the routine tasks of childcare to examine the social construction of the images and the meanings of parenthood as well as gender equality in parenting (Collins, 1994; Doucet, 2006, 2009; Glenn, Chang, & Forcey, 1994).

### 7.2.2 Childcare and Parenting among Immigrant Women

Literature on immigrant parenting focuses mainly on the changes and challenges that immigrant mothers face in childcare and in adjusting to new ways of parenting. For many immigrant mothers, one main difficulty in childcare is the lack of kin support due to the absence of extended family in their new home country (Man, 1997). In their studies on Korean immigrant women in the United States, Kim (2003) and Moon (2003) note that, as many immigrant families experience downward mobility in their social and economic status after immigration, many Korean immigrant mothers become co-breadwinners in addition to their major role in childrearing. As a result, Korean immigrant mothers develop their own social support network by sharing mothering responsibilities with female kin or by hiring child caregivers. Transnational arrangement of childcare is another salient feature of immigrant mothering.
Among many migrant women from the Philippines and from Latin America who seek employment opportunities in North America, their mothering experience is characterized as “transnational motherhood,” a mothering arrangement which allows the immigrant women to work and reside in the United States or Canada while their children remain in their countries of origin (Cheng, 2004; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Uy-Tioco, 2007). The involvement of grandparents in childrearing has also been documented in some Asian immigrant families in the West (Bhopal, 1998; Da, 2003; Salaff & Greve, 2004).

In addition to challenges in childcare, parenting in a new culture poses another challenge for immigrant mothers. Studies on Asian women indicate that immigrant mothers experience “double transitions” in performing their mothering roles and in trying to settle into their new home as an immigrant (Liam, 1999). In their study on Thai immigrant mothers in Australia, Liamputtong and Naksook (2003) show how the “multiple identities” of becoming a mother in a new environment leads to the multiple burdens of motherhood, as the basic beliefs and values of the mainstream culture are different from their own upbringing.

Many immigrants migrate for the future of their children (Anisef, Kilbride, Ochocka, & Janzen, 2001). Thus, for many immigrant mothers, providing a good education for their children is seen as an important part of being a good mother. Many immigrant mothers have to change their ways of mothering and bringing up their children in a new environment by relinquishing some of their old ways and adopting the ways of the new world they are now living in (Liamputtong, 2001). However, due to inadequate language skills and conflicting parenting beliefs and cultural values on childrearing and child education, immigrant mothers, especially those who perceive a larger acculturation gap with their children, find parenting in the new culture challenging, have more communication problems, feel more uncertainty about how to handle certain situations, and have lower parenting satisfaction (Buki, Ma, Strom, & Strom, 2003; Liamputtong, 2001).

7.2.3 Childcare among Chinese Immigrant Families

Studies on Chinese immigrant women’s household work reveal that there is a dramatic change of their domestic and caregiving responsibilities after immigration. This is largely due to a sudden decline of economic resources for paid domestic help, the absence of support from extended families, and a lack of an affordable, public childcare system like the ones those women used to
rely on for childcare in their home country (Liu, 2007b, 2008; Man, 1997; Salaff & Greve, 2004; Waters, 2002). In their studies on middle-class Hong Kong women in Canada, Man (1997) and Waters (2002) find that the loss of a support system of extended families and paid domestic help after immigration leads to an intensified workload of housework and childcare tasks.

Making new arrangements in childcare have been reported in studies on professional Chinese women. To cut the costly expense of childcare, it is not uncommon for Chinese immigrant mothers to send their babies back to China (Jimenez, 2007). Studies show that grandparents play an important role in childcare in many Chinese immigrant families (Salaff & Greve, 2004; Da, 2003). No longer able to find affordable childcare services in the host country, some career-oriented professional women mobilize their social networks transnationally by bringing over their mother or mother-in-law to “baby-sit” their young children in the host country or sending their children back to China to be taken care of by the grandparents, a phenomenon that Da (2003) called “transnational grandparenting” in her study of childcare arrangements among Mainland Chinese immigrants to Australia. The involvement of extended families such as grandparents, uncles, and aunts was also reported by Wan (2003) in her study on working-class Chinese immigrant women from South-east Asia in Toronto, Canada, a pattern which is similar to childcare in traditional Chinese society.

7.2.4 Chinese Parenting Style

Parenting styles vary with different cultures. The Chinese parenting style is deeply influenced by the Chinese culture which values collectivism and conformity to norms, and puts a strong emphasis on family harmony. Guided by the Confucian value of filial piety, which emphasizes parental authority and power and children’s obedience (McHale, Rao, & Krasnow, 2000), the Chinese parenting style is often depicted as “restrictive,” “controlling” (Chiu, 1987; Lin & Fu, 1990), or “authoritarian” (Chen, Dong, & Zhong, 1997). In some cross-country and cross-cultural studies, Chinese parents are also found to show greater overall involvement (e.g., concern, control, and intervention) in childrearing. They value education, and emphasize achievements very strongly, compared to their Western counterparts (Liu, et al., 2005). They often have high expectations and performance standards for their children’s schooling, and believe in the importance of hard work and efforts (Chao, 1996; Lin & Fu, 1990). Studies on ethnicity, parental style, and children’s school performance in the U.S. suggest that the outstanding school achievement among Chinese students is the outcome of parental beliefs
(Chao, 1996) and reflects the influence of the traditional cultural value of education/schooling on Chinese childrearing practices, especially among the first generation of Chinese immigrants (Chao, 2001), despite the influence of rapid social, cultural, and economic changes caused by relocation to another country (Lin & Fu, 1990).

### 7.2.5 Combining Gender, Childcare, and Parenting in My Research

Although childcare and parenting are inseparable parts of childrearing, they are rarely discussed together. Similar to food work, childcare is often embedded in housework literature, which focuses mainly on household chores that women perform in taking care of their children in their daily life. Parenting is often discussed in a separate literature which focuses mainly on the cultural beliefs, the styles, and the practices that the parents have in childrearing (Zhao, 1996; Lin & Fu, 1990; Shek, 2007; Stehlik, 2003).

Literature on immigrant parenting focuses mainly on women and their caregiving roles (Hochschild, 1989; McGraw, 2002), although men are also capable of and participate in childrearing (Doucet, 2006; Risman, 1987). This is not surprising given the fact that women are still considered the primary caregivers for both unpaid and paid carework and mothers are held responsible for child training. Little research has been done on the gender differences between immigrant women and men in what they do and learn in childcare- and parenting-related activities.

This chapter integrates childcare and parenting by highlighting the changes and the informal learning involved in these activities among the Chinese immigrant parents, both women and men. I explore how international migration intersects with gender and ethnicity in influencing childrearing-related work and practices, and what and how the Chinese immigrants learned to raise their children in the Canadian context. I will also compare my qualitative data with the data from the WALL Survey on childcare and parenting. The goal of this chapter is to document the changes and challenges in childcare and parenting and to make visible the learning involved in such activities.
7.3 Changes and Challenges in Childcare and Parenting

7.3.1 “I Spent Most of My Spare Time Taking Care of My Son.”
—Increased Work in Childcare

At the time of the interviews, nine of the 20 people I interviewed had children under age 18, four had children who were 18 and above, and seven did not have any children. All the women in the focus group, except one woman, had children under the age of 18. Most of the Chinese parents with young children reported a dramatic increase in childcare-related household work, largely due to a sudden decline in family income and lack of social support for childcare that they used to enjoy in their home country. Far away from their extended families who used to lend a hand in childcare, many of these parents found it a huge challenge balancing their paid work and unpaid childcare responsibilities. Ping, mother of a 9-year-old son, who used to be a university professor and administrator before immigration, recalled her childcare experiences when she first arrived in Canada.

The first half-year was the most difficult. Just coming from China, you know, you suddenly found—too much housework! Back at home [China], you had many people to help you, like parents or friends. I found it was quite easy, even though my son was younger. Here in Canada, just my small family, and my husband needs to go to work. I had to do a lot more housework and carework than before. I had to do grocery shopping, and the cooking every day. Unlike at home [in China], you know, we don’t cook often, only once or twice a week, eating out most of the time…When I arrived here, I wasn’t used to it at all that my son was with me all the time, wherever I went, because here, children under 12 are not allowed to be left home alone. Besides, he went to kindergarten for only two hours, only from 9:30 to 11:30 in the morning, then, I had to pick him up. So every day, the child was around, and I had to cook three meals a day… I felt so tired spending so much time cooking, doing grocery shopping, taking care of the child.

Childcare poses a triple burden for women who are taking sole responsibility for it: doing all the housework, taking care of children by themselves, while engaging in full or part-time employment to support the family or re-schooling at a Canadian university/college. Juan is a lone mother in Canada. Shortly after they landed in Canada in 2000, Juan’s husband returned to China, leaving Juan to take care of their young daughter all by herself in Canada. Unable to get a job in her trained profession—chemical engineering, Juan registered for a two-year accounting program at a community college, because she learned that it was easier to find a job in
accounting. Juan recalled how she juggled childcare and her study in the first two years after immigration:

> It was a big challenge. I was new here and studying at George Brown College. As children are not allowed to stay at home alone by themselves before they are 12, so every day, I had to ride a bicycle back home to cook (lunch) for her, to see if she was safe. Then, I rode the bicycle back to school. It was so stressful for me.

Despite two years of hard work on her studies, Juan still could not find a job in her newly trained field. After a year of fruitless job search, Juan eventually gave up and took a part-time job in a supermarket. She has been working on that job since then.

Like Juan, Jie, a woman in her late 30s, mother of a three-year-old son, and a computer engineer, is also a lone parent in Canada. Shortly after she gave birth to her son, her husband went back to China as he could not find a job in Canada, even after he got a degree from a well-known Canadian university. Like Juan, Jie has to take sole responsibility for childcare and to support herself and her son with a full-time job in an IT company. “Most of the housework I do now is cooking and taking care of my son,” said Jie, revealing that the triple burden of housework, childcare, plus a full-time job has led to a deteriorated quality of life, high levels of mental stress, and a serious health problem since she immigrated to Canada.

Increased childcare responsibility is also reported by male parents with young children. Ming, a father of a three-year-old son, who claimed to having never done any housework before immigration, reported a sudden increase of workload in childcare when his son was born:

> When we had the baby, I was still studying at York University. So, every day after studying for more than 12 to 15 hours, I still had to spare time to take care of my son and my wife because (in Chinese) she was in birth confinement. I did everything, cooking, changing the baby’s diapers…. You know, in China, when you have a baby, you can always find someone, like parents, relatives, to come over to help, right? You need not worry about anything. You can also hire people to take care of your baby. But here, we cannot. Our finances do not allow us to have more people to come over to help [us]…

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16 According to traditional Chinese medical beliefs, it is not good for a woman’s health if she does physical labour right after she gives birth. So a 30-day confinement is observed in order to avoid heavy physical labour, cold food and cold water.
According to Ming, attending to his baby son’s needs such as preparing baby food, washing the diapers, and sometimes interpreting the baby’s needs from his crying are both physically demanding and emotionally challenging. “For the cooking, you are not just cooking more, you also have to think about what the baby needs. It requires different foods and you have to prepare them differently,” Ming said. “When the baby cried, you worried that he was probably sick, or needed to change the diaper, or he was hungry. That gave you so much pressure, not just physical, but also emotional.”

As indicated in Chapter 6 on food-related housework, all the Chinese immigrant parents with young children attributed their increased carework to their reduced financial resources, and the lack of social support for childcare after immigration. For some parents, childcare is further exacerbated by the challenges in getting a professional job, as they have to spend a lot of time and energy looking for jobs. However, without Canadian work experience, many new immigrants either have to take low-skilled and low-waged jobs or return to school to get Canadian credentials for better job prospects. Furthermore, whenever there is a conflict between their paid jobs and family responsibilities, women often have to sacrifice the former for the latter.

7.3.2 “In China, Children Must Obey Their Parents. Here, He … Refuses to Listen.”
—Challenges in Parenting

Compared to the parents with very young children who complained about increased workload in childcare, more Chinese immigrant parents expressed their anxiety and frustration about not knowing the “right” way of disciplining their children or handling conflicts with their children in a “proper” manner in their new home country. For example, Wei, a woman in the focus group, who was taking care of her 10-year-old son alone in Canada while her husband was working in the United States, expressed her ambivalence as to what to do when her son refuses to listen or follow her instructions. “Children behave differently here,” said Wei. “In China, children must obey their parents. Here, he thinks we are equal and refuses to listen.” Tao, another woman in the focus group, found it a headache getting her daughter who was in Grade 2 to watch less TV and to do her homework on time. “Every day when she arrives home, she always watches TV, all the time,” Tao said. “If you say, ‘Stop, you need to do the homework,’ she’d just complain and say, ‘I don’t care. I have enough time.’ ” With lots of free time after school and more children’s
programs on TV, Tao feels short of any means to persuade her daughter to focus more on her study.

Many Chinese women indicated that their lack of proficiency in English poses a big challenge to their role as parents, in addition to it being one of the main barriers they encountered in the Canadian labour market. Most of the mothers, yet none of the fathers, indicated that inadequate English is their biggest barrier in accessing information on childcare and in helping their children with their studies. For example, Hong, mother of a one-year-old son, said that she relies on the Chinese language media, such as books, magazines, and the Internet, for information on childrearing, and her social circle is made up exclusively of Mandarin-speaking Chinese, as she rarely had any contact with people beyond the local Chinese community. Hong believes that her poor English has limited her access to information on childcare services in the neighbourhood, and on child benefits and support provided by the government for low-income families.

For some women, their inadequate English is also detrimental to their self-esteem and to their image as a “qualified parent.” Lisha, a lone mother with an 11-year-old son, and previously an engineer but now a manual labourer in a factory, said sadly, “My son doesn’t want me to show up in his school because he thinks I can’t speak good English, and can’t communicate with his teachers. That really hurts me.” On the other hand, Lisha also feels guilty for not being able to help her son in the same way her parents had helped her when she was a child:

> When we were growing up, my parents played a key role in our life, in getting us to know the society. I learned many of my language skills, words and expressions by listening to my parents. I also learned social skills from my parents. I am afraid my son can’t learn anything about the (English) language from me, anything about the Canadian culture, the Canadian society.

As an educated, intellectual woman, Yun, who used to be an accomplished engineer prior to immigration, feels extremely upset about the lost image and respect that her son used to have for her:

> In China, whenever I helped my son solve a difficult math problem, he would say, “Mom, you are wonderful.” Now he would say, “Mom, your English is not good, you are not good at this, you are not good at that.” In his eyes, I am not able to do anything. There is nothing good about me now (bitter laugh).
The change in her image from a capable mother to an “illiterate” woman was a big blow to Yun’s self-esteem. Here is another example which shows how badly she was hurt when her son rejected helping her in learning English:

Whenever I asked him “how do you say it in English?” He would just say it for me once. If I asked him the second time, he would get impatient, “I’ve told you once. Go and find it in a dictionary!” I hated to hear it. I sacrificed everything to come here just for him, for his education, and he refused to help me! I felt tears running down my face right away. Only then, he would teach me how to pronounce the word.

To Yun, her lack of English is clearly the cause of her emotional vulnerability and her reduced image from being a competent professional to being a semi-illiterate labourer. Thus, for some of the women, learning English is not merely to improve their job opportunities, but also to boost their self-esteem or to provide the support that their children need in their school work and in integrating into the Canadian culture. “That’s why I go back to school, to George Brown College,” said Ping. “It is not only to learn a new skill for paid work. It is also to improve my English language skills so that I can continue to ‘care for’ my son’s school work as he grows.”

7.4 Learning Involved in Childcare and Parenting

7.4.1 “We Share After-School Childcare with Our Neighbours.” —Learning New Strategies for Childcare Arrangements

To cope with the changes in childcare, the new Chinese immigrants have learned different strategies to accommodate their increased childcare responsibilities and their work/school schedules. For example, Hong, a young mother of a one-year-old son, mobilizes her social network transnationally for childcare. At the time of the interview, Hong was attending adult high school. In order to resume her studies after giving birth, Hong brought her mother-in-law from China to help look after her young son. Tao, a woman in the focus group, sent her five-year-old daughter back to China to be taken care of by the grandparent, shortly before she started a college program different from her previous profession.

However, not all parents with young children can afford transnational grand-parenting, either because they are constrained financially (as in the case of Ming) or because their parents are not available (e.g., parents either in poor health or deceased, as in the case of Jie). Lilian, a woman in the focus group who used to have her parents help with childcare in China, had to find new ways
for childcare by co-operating with her neighbours in after-school childcare arrangements for her pre-teen son:

When I was in China, my parents took care of my son most of the times. But in Canada, my husband and I must do it ourselves. So, it’s a big problem. … My son came home at 3:30 in the afternoon, but my husband and I, we finish our work or study at five or six o’clock, so nobody will take care of my son for us. So, we discussed this problem with our neighbours. And now, my husband or I pick up my son, and my neighbour’s son, every other day. And my neighbours, they pick up my son and their son every other day. So, we share the work. My husband and I also share the duty…..

Many other women also talked about using different approaches to handle their increased childcare responsibilities. For instance, Jie, a lone mother with a three-year-old son, limits her daily routine housework to cooking and taking care of her son. “I don’t spend much time cleaning, or keeping my apartment tidy. I don’t expect a high quality of life while my son is young,” Jie said. “I’ve also learned to plan ahead.” According to Jie, she used to make no plans for her week. But with increased housework and childcare responsibilities in Canada, she learned to plan her weekend more carefully so that she has enough time for grocery shopping, for weekly laundry, and for activities with her son. Even with the help of her mother-in-law in babysitting, Hong reported cutting back or stopping all the leisure time for herself and the recreational activities that she used to enjoy, such as going to a movie, going out with friends, or doing window shopping for fashions.

7.4.2 “I Learned New Rules about Childcare in Canada….”
—Learning to Be a Good Parent in the Canadian Context

It is believed that parents are the first teachers of their children, and that parents will guide and prepare children for life as they grow up. Indeed, children experience a whole world of learning long before they encounter formal schooling. What the young child learns about the world into which it is born, it learns from its significant kinship relations—parent or parents, siblings, and grandparents (Khoshkhesal, 1995: 14).

When asked about what they have learned in parenting, almost all the Chinese parents talked about the various efforts and strategies they learned in adjusting to the Canadian ways of childrearing and parenting practices. Hong, a young mother with a one-year-old son, talked about
acquiring new views of childrearing, as well as developing new ways of fostering and shaping “proper” child behaviours and habits:

I have learned something about how to educate children, how to be a mother. I found that children here are encouraged to do things by themselves, eating, for example, even when they are young. We should give them the opportunities to learn how to eat by themselves. In China, we care too much about keeping the child clean and keeping the room tidy. I found here people pay more attention to children’s independence and provide them with more opportunities for them to practice it.

Ping, mother of a 10-year-old son, said that she learned new rules about childcare when she arrived in Canada. “I learned from my LINC\textsuperscript{17} class, from daycare, from my kid’s school teacher, that it is against the law to leave children under 12 alone at home,” Ping said. “If my son makes a mistake or does something wrong, I can only talk to him about it. I cannot scold or spank him.” In addition to helping her son with his school work, Ping also took him to many extra-curricular activities, such as swimming classes and chess classes at the community centre, or sent him to a music school, to visit museums, exhibitions, and Wonderland on weekends. Despite all the efforts, Ping, nevertheless, still feels that she is not doing enough, as she constantly compares herself with her friends back in China. Ping also blames herself for neglecting her son’s academic work because she thinks her English is not good enough and because she has to go out to work.

While most of the parents focused on helping their children with their school work (especially the teenagers), or on their physical, and intellectual development (for very young children), Rong, a woman in the discussion group, talked about the strategies she used in training her 13-year-old son to get more involved in housework:

In China, if any family member does some housework, he/she never asks for pay. But here, if I want my son to help me with something, he always asks, “How much do you pay me?” So, it’s a little different. But, I want to train him to help with the housework, so, every month, I give him some work to do, like, helping me to wash the dishes, just once a day, and cleaning the bathroom one time per week. I give him ten dollars per month, just to begin with.

\textsuperscript{17} The Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) is a government-funded program that provides free basic French and English language training to adult permanent residents in Canada.
Rong was the only parent in my research who talked about asking the child to share housework as part of her child-training practice, as children’s involvement in housework is not emphasized in China. Due to fierce competition for academic achievements, few Chinese parents pay much attention to training their children, usually the only child in the family, on anything that has little to do with their academic work or does not contribute to their future career success. Housework for children, for instance, is often viewed as less important or a waste of time. Rong’s involvement of her son in housework indicates some changes in Chinese parenting style in the host country, which emphasizes more independence and responsibility rather than merely academic competitiveness.

7.4.3 “I Pay a Lot of Attention to My Daughter’s Education.”
——Parenting Practices and Learning among the Immigrant Fathers

One study on parenting in newcomer families in Ontario, Canada, indicates that most newcomer families, diverse as their ethnic backgrounds are, came to Canada for the sake of their children. They “sacrifice everything to come here” in order to give their children a better life (Anisef, Kilbride, Ochocka, & Janzen, 2001: 27). A similar reason for immigrating to Canada is also expressed by many of the Chinese parents I interviewed, as education for children in China is both competitive and expensive. Zhong, father of a 15-year-old daughter, was an engineer in China. But at the time of interview, Zhong and his wife, who used to be a nurse in China, were both working as factory labourers. “Apart from my job, my biggest concern is my daughter’s education,” said Zhong. “My daughter’s future means everything to us. That’s our main purpose of immigrating to Canada. (That’s why) I pay a lot of attention to my daughter’s education.” To help his daughter excel at school, Zhong makes it part of his daily routine to check with her about her school life and helps her with her school work. However, Zhong admitted that it was a big challenge for him at the beginning to learn to provide the right guidance for his daughter:

At the beginning, I didn’t know much about the Canadian educational system. For example, I didn’t know how to choose courses for my daughter, how to give proper advice to my daughter. I had to ask help from the teachers and I had to ask other students’ parents. I have to learn.

Zhong talked about how his learning benefited his daughter and himself: it helps him identify her problems in her studies, and gives him the opportunity to get to know her friends, her teachers, as
well as the Canadian school system. In addition, Zhong said that his engagement in his daughter’s school activities has helped him understand the Canadian culture and improved his relationship with his daughter:

I read every (text) book of my daughter’s. Actually, it’s a very good way for me to be a student, I mean, a free student. Before going to sleep, sitting in bed, under the light, I read my daughter’s books, like Canadian Geography, Canadian History…. Because the books are in ESL language, it’s quite easy. This is very helpful because it gives me the same topics to talk with my daughter.

Zhong’s story on how he helped his daughter to succeed in her academic work is not uncommon among the Chinese parents in my interviews. Similar stories on Chinese immigrants’ great involvement in their children’s education/school work have also been well documented in literature (Chao, 1994; Chen, Dong, & Zhou, 1997; Liu, et al., 2005). This is partly because the Chinese culture views school success as a key measurement of a person’s achievement and a crucial path to a successful career in the future. Failure in school is often viewed as a failure in life. In Mainland China, competition between children and between schools is very high. Parents are expected to supervise their children with their studies and to help them with their homework. A portion of the school work is often assigned as homework that requires parents’ involvement and supervision. As a mother myself, I remember reading my daughter’s textbooks, helping her with her homework, tutoring her in English during the summer vacations, especially when she was in elementary school.

After immigrating to Canada, many Chinese parents continue to emphasize good school work and academic success, partly because of the legacy of the traditional cultural value of education, but more importantly because it is a way for the immigrant parents to get away from their disappointment and frustration with their own, interrupted careers due to the structural barriers in the Canadian labour market (Liu, 2007a). This is especially true with the male parents in my interviews. Greatly disappointed by the dim future in his current non-professional job at a government agency in Canada, Yong, father with a 12-year-old son, who used to be a very ambitious and successful scientist in China, began to turn his focus in life from his own career to his family, in particular to his son’s future. Deeply influenced by the Chinese cultural belief that “it is the father’s fault if he only rears a child without teaching him/her” (yang bu jiao, fu zhi guo), Yong, a very committed father who used to help his son with his homework, continues to
be actively involved in his son’s education after immigration. However, Yong soon noticed that his efforts were not always appreciated nor his advice well followed, as his son now prefers to consult his teachers rather than his parents on issues concerning his studies at school. In the following account, Yong reflected on the changes and adjustment he has made in his parenting practices:

In China, you ask the kids to follow you. But here you need to understand them in order to let them follow you… That’s a big adjustment, trying to understand the children. In the Chinese way, you don’t care if they understand or not. If you think it is good for them, you just do it and believe they will understand you in time, in the future. But here you have to understand them, and then they will try to understand you.

Indeed, understanding the cultural differences helps Yong adjust his way of parenting. As a result, instead of focusing exclusively on imparting academic knowledge to his son, Yong now pays more attention to developing his learning skills and to training him to be an independent learner. When I asked him how he learned to understand and communicate with his son, Yong brushed away the idea of learning:

I wouldn’t say it’s learning, it’s just changing. This community, this society changed you, not that you want to learn, but naturally they changed you. You have no way to avoid this change because you are living here.

But after some thought, Yong gave the following response:

I learned from my work, from friends, neighbors, from my son himself, and from the school. I attended almost every meeting the school asks the parents to attend, like orientations, parent sessions, (there is) a lot of communicating meetings in the school. I attended them and tried to understand. I know, this is a new place, you need to understand how the school works. I think it’s different, so I tried to get all the information. You need to learn. Yeah, I think that’s what you mean by learning.

Both Zhong and Yong’s stories suggest that successful adaptation in parenting after immigration involves enormous efforts on the parents’ side in understanding their children’s needs, and in learning adequate knowledge of the Canadian school system as well as the Canadian cultural values on child education.
Great concern for their children’s future education was also reported by a male respondent who had young children and a man who was going to become a father. Liang, whose wife was pregnant, and Ming, who had a three-year-old son, talked about doing some research on what financial investments to make for their children’s future education by consulting professionals and friends, and by attending seminars on related topics at the community centre. Ming, who was managing a bar at the time of interview, said that he was looking for other business opportunities in order to save enough money to buy an RESP\(^\text{18}\) for his son. He also revealed how the birth of his son changed his attitudes towards life: “Before I had the baby, I did everything for fun. I didn’t care about money,” said Ming. “But now, I need to think about the future, I need to care about the family. I’ve got more responsibility.” Meanwhile, Ming revealed that he needed to learn more about how to discipline children properly in the Canadian context but did not know where and how to get that information. “What am I supposed to do if he misbehaves, without using physical disciplining?” asked Ming. “What if he smokes and even uses drugs when he reaches his teens? How can I educate him? What if you cannot persuade him or make him listen?” The worries Ming expressed in his questions are not unfounded. During the past few years, I have learned from the local Chinese media several cases in which the Chinese parents were charged with child abuse or murder due to improper childcare/parenting behaviours in Canada (Dianxin, 2008; Muran, 2006).

7.4.4 “I Used to Order My Daughter to Do This, to Do That. Now I Can No Longer Do It.”

—Parenting Practices and Learning among the Immigrant Mothers

Studies on immigrant parenting (Anisef, Kilbride, Ochocka, & Janzen, 2001) shows that immigration undermines the authority of parents and causes conflicts between parents and children because of the different values of the parents and the values of the host society in which the children are growing up. This was especially the case with the Chinese immigrant mothers in my interviews. While many of them in my interviews admitted that Canada provides a better environment for children’s growth and far more and better opportunities for higher education, they also have experienced challenges and conflicts in parenting, often caused by different

\(^{18}\) Registered Education Savings Plans (RESP) is a special savings plan for education subsidized by the government in Canada.
cultural expectations and values of children’s success and different perceptions on “proper” parenting practices. For example, after they had been in Canada for a little while, many mothers soon found that their children, especially teenagers, no longer obeyed their parents as they used to. Instead, they began to challenge their parents’ authority by demanding more autonomy in their life and studies. According to Ying, mother of an adult son who was attending high school when they first arrived in Canada,

In China, my son always followed my advice. But here, he thinks he’s independent. For example, in China, if he didn’t study, or do his homework, I could order him: “Study now. Don’t play all the time.” Then, he quickly went back to study. But here, even if I say it many times, he still won’t listen. He’d say, “I am a grown-up now. I don’t need you to tell me all the time what to do.”

Like many Chinese parents, Juan, a college professor prior to immigration and a lone mother with a 15-year-old daughter, is very involved in her daughter’s studying and helps her with her school work by tutoring and supervising her home assignments. Nevertheless, Juan found that some of her efforts were not appreciated, and some of her old practices challenged:

Before, in China, I always ordered my daughter to do this, to do that. Now I can no longer do it. I have to talk with her, discuss with her. Even with her homework, if she doesn’t like me to read it, I cannot do so. I have to ask her for permission.

Juan’s authority as a parent was further contested when she tried to exercise parental surveillance over her daughter’s on-line chatting with friends:

I always ask her to study. You know, here children use a lot of computer, and the internet. My daughter likes to chat on the computer (the Internet) with her classmates, and friends. Of course they are all girls. So I always check, “who you are talking with?” My daughter would say, “Don’t look!” (laugh). Sometimes she talked on the Internet too late, even until midnight. So, I was concerned about it and argued with her. She yelled back at me, “Leave me alone. I am talking.”(laugh).

When asked how they solved the conflicts with their teenage children, Juan and Ying said that they did it through compromises. “I changed,” said Ying. “I think he is a grown-up now. I don’t need to speak to him like that. I may be wrong. I only need to advise, not too much supervision.” Juan also admitted that she became less rigid with her daughter’s going out with friends. “I think
she’s old enough. Now she’s taller than me, so I think she can go anywhere she wants.” Both Juan and Ying said that they learned to show more respect for their children’s autonomy and privacy and become more tolerant with their children’s demand for independence.

However, for Juan, the conflicts in parenting are not only between her and her teenage daughter, sometimes it is also between her and her husband. Although working in China all those years, Juan’s husband keeps a very close eye on the daughter and inserts his parental influence indirectly through his daily, long-distance “instructions” to his wife, such as asking her to urge the daughter to focus more on her study or to go to bed earlier:

As I have been here for quite a long time (several years), I’ve changed a lot, my way of thinking. But my husband is in China, and sometimes we have conflicting views about my daughter’s study. You know in China, the parents are more involved in children’s study. So my husband often said, “You have to tell her to do this, to do that.” But I said, “No, I cannot.” We always argue about this matter. My daughter even got upset with me. “You said that several times. That’s enough.” So, I just leave her alone. “Just do (what) you want.” Sometimes my husband said, “You have to say something.” I said “No, that’s enough for me. I don’t like to be upset.”

Interestingly, in contrast to Juan’s “authoritarian” husband, Lisha’s husband, who was also working back in China, “spoils” her son by promising to buy whatever he wants. According to Lisha, a lone mother with an 11-year-old son,

My husband used to be very strict with my son. So my son didn’t have much feeling for him as he was often away on business trips, and my son spent most of the time with me. But now, I feel he’s much closer to his father, and he even said his father is better than me because no matter what he asks for, his father will promise to get it for him. “I will get it for you when I come.” So, now he thinks his father is better than me.

The different attitudes of the women and their husbands towards their children reflect the social and cultural locations they are in, and the gender differences in parenting style among the Chinese immigrants. As a mother with a teenage daughter, Juan is not only concerned about her daughter’s studying but also about her safety and the people she socializes with. Although living and working in China, Juan’s husband inserts his influence as a “legitimate” parent by urging his wife to exercise the parental control on his behalf. Caught in the middle of the two opposing parties of her husband and her daughter, Juan, on one hand, has to adjust and modify her parenting style according to the Canadian context and standards, often through compromises, but
on the other hand, she also has to learn to say “no” to some of her husband’s requests for her intervention and regulation of her daughter’s behaviour based on his traditional view of good parenting. However, contrary to the Chinese belief of “strict father, and lenient mother,” Lisha’s husband is very kind to his son. Yet, his “lenient” behaviour may have little to do with the culture, but more to do with the fact that he is working away from the family most of the time. His leniency may likely be a compensation of a guilty father to his neglected son. The stories of Juan and Lisha, though not uncommon among split Chinese immigrant families, are inconsistent with literature on parenting, which indicates that fathers are usually stricter with sons, and more “gentle” with daughters (Anisef, Kilbride, Ochocka, & Janzen, 2001; Shek, 2007; Shek & Lai, 2000).

7.4.5 “We Used Some Real Cases to Persuade Her…”
—Handling Conflicting Views on Teen Dating

Teen dating was brought up as a source of conflicts by women with teenage daughters. Rufen, a divorced woman with two daughters, talked in the focus group about the adjustment she has to make in parenting her 14-year-old daughter. “After living here for some time, my daughter has got some new concepts, which I cannot accept,” said Rufen. “For example, teenage girls have a boyfriend. I think it will affect their studies, but my daughter thinks it is normal and they may help each other with their studies by working together.” Although she does not agree with her daughter, Rufen, nevertheless, learned to accept it, realizing that she will not be able to convince her daughter.

Different views on teen dating, according to Loya, a woman in her late 40s, is also a source of conflicts between her and her 18-year-old daughter, which she has to learn to handle after immigration. Like many Chinese parents, Loya believes that teenagers are “immature” and that dating is “harmful,” especially for girls. Thus, she always urges her daughter to focus on her studies instead of thinking about dating boys, or at least to postpone her dating until she graduates from university. “We don’t want her to have a boyfriend early,” said Loya. “We just hope she will study hard and have a boyfriend only after graduating, and becoming more mature.” However, as a young girl who attended high school in Canada, Loya’s daughter has a very different view on dating among teenagers. Like Rufen’s elder daughter, she also views teen dating positively and insisted that she should be allow to do so, as “Everybody’s doing that, why can’t I?” When asked how she learned to solve the conflict, Loya pointed to a joint effort with
her husband in dissuading their daughter. “We used some real cases to persuade her… from
some friends, from the news, newspapers, and also from some of her friends, some people
around her, and also from our own experience,” said Loya, while admitting some gender
differences in their approaches. “Maybe she like(s) her father better than me,” said Loya gently,
“because my husband gave her more (in Chinese) daoli (reasons or rational explanations) to help
her. But I just want to push her, give her some pressure.”

7.4.6 Parenting as a Lifelong Vocation

Consistent with Stehlik (2003), this study reveals that parenting-related knowledge and skills are
acquired mainly by experience—that is, learning by doing, as well as learning by observing and
taking advice from other parents, by following role models from childhood, by learning from
books or other “expert” sources, and by taking non-formal educational programs.

Furthermore, I join Stehlik (2003) and Schmidt-Brabant (1998) in arguing that parenting be
treated as a vocation. In his book The spiritual Tasks of the Homemakers (1998), Schmidt-
Brabant compares parenting to a spiritual task, a vocation (p. 10). He argues that if vocational
training is linked to a work-specific job role, then, parenting as a vocation also requires the
acquisition of work-related skills and knowledge. However, he also notes that, so far, parenting
is not recognized as a vocation or acknowledged as a skill to be taught during the compulsory
years of school. In his study on parenting and lifelong learning, Stehlik (2003: 378) criticizes the
dominant paradigm of adult education for focusing only on formal, facilitated learning,
excluding the family from the possibility of being an adult learning setting. He points out that,
although parenting is the single most important and responsible role an adult could have, and that
it is a self-evident fact that parents are their children’s first teachers (Stehlik, 2003: 375),
parenting is rarely compared to teaching as a profession, but rather more associated with the
status of “homemaking”—non-paid, non-professional, and not recognized as real work. Stehlik
argues that parenting is a lifelong task which does not come to an abrupt end when their children
reach adolescence or even after they leave home.

Despite the importance these scholars have attached to parenting, they fail to see the gender
differences and gender inequality involved in parenting and the related learning. My research on
gender, childcare and parenting, and the related learning contribute to this group of literature by
making visible the gendered work as well as the gendered learning involved in childcare and
parenting. In addition, this study also demonstrates that there is a shift in power between parents and children after immigration.

7.4.7 Gender, Childcare/Parenting, and Learning

As is indicated in Chapter 5, Chinese immigrant women, like women in the other subgroups in the WALL Survey, devoted more than double the weekly time (33 hours) on childcare than their male counterparts (16 hours) (see Table 3). This result is echoed by my qualitative data from the interviews and the focus group, in which women with young children reported a dramatic increase in childcare responsibilities due to the lack of social support for childcare after immigration. As a result, many of the Chinese immigrant women, especially the lone mothers, experienced triple burdens, juggling housework, childcare, and their paid jobs or studies, especially in the initial period of their arrival in Canada. In some cases, women’s increased load of household responsibilities, including childcare, affected women’s health and paid work. For instance, one important reason that Juan stayed in her minimum-wage job as a sales clerk after she completed her accounting program at a college was that the supermarket where she worked was very close to her home, thus making it easier for her to accommodate her childcare responsibility and her job. While men with young children also reported an increase in childcare after immigration, they often did it under special circumstances. For instance, Ming said he did more housework in cooking and laundry after his son was born, first when his wife was in birth confinement and later when she went out to work or when she was ill. By contrast, women’s carework is performed on an on-going and day-to-day basis.

In contrast to the WALL Survey, which indicates very low involvement of the Chinese immigrants, women in particular, in learning involved in childcare and parenting (21% for men versus 17% for women) (see Table 4 in Chapter 5), all the Chinese parents in the interviews and the focus group, both women and men, reported some learning involved in childcare and/or parenting (100%). The contradictory results from the Survey and the interviews may partly reflect the devaluation of unpaid work, including childcare among the Chinese immigrants, who either view it as their responsibility or as a natural expression of motherhood that requires little or no learning. This may also be associated with their non-recognition of unpaid work as work, as expressed by all the women in the focus group (also see Chapter 7). I remember it was not until the end of the focus group that some women began to see housework as work, which was achieved only after a long discussion and debate.
My interview data suggest that, despite their universal involvement in learning about childcare
and parenting, some gendered patterns in parenting practices persist among the Chinese male and
female parents. Inconsistent with most of the literature on Chinese parenting style, which
portrays the fathers as more strict and more involved in disciplining children, and the mothers as
the more lenient parents who often “spoil” children (Shek, 1998, 2007), most of the new Chinese
immigrants I interviewed do not fit into the traditional model of “strict father and lenient
mother,” probably because all of them are well-educated professionals, who hold more liberal
views on parenting and prefer child guidance to child disciplining. In contrast to the male
parents, for example, Yong and Zhong, the two fathers with teenage children, who view
themselves as “understanding,” and “supportive” fathers, the female parents (for example, Loya,
Juan and Ying) portrayed themselves as pushy, strict mothers. Compared to the male parents
who reported making intentional efforts in adjusting their parenting practices, women, however,
talked about being forced to change their views of “proper” parenting, usually after strong
protests from their children. To a large extent, this finding is consistent with the Ontario study on
newcomers’ parenting (Anisef, Kilbride, Ochocka, & Janzen, 2001) in that immigration has
created major changes in family dynamics and relationships, language barriers, as well as
employment-related difficulties, which all had negative impacts on Chinese immigrant women,
especially on their roles as parents.

What draws my attention, however, is not merely the gender difference in parenting styles, but
also the ways in which the Chinese women and men portrayed themselves. By focusing on their
involvement in the child’s school life and work after immigration, both Yong and Zhong view
themselves as well-qualified fathers, while the women devalued their mother role through the
negative language they used about themselves in parenting (such as “order,” “pressure,” and
“push” their children to follow the parent’s instruction), thus making them less an “authority”
than the fathers in child training and disciplining. Inconsistent with the Ontario study which
found that financially constrained newcomer fathers had less self-confidence and lower esteem
as parents (Anisef, Kilbride, Ochocka, & Janzen, 2001), the Chinese fathers, directly or
indirectly involved in my interviews, all presented themselves as “authoritative” parents, despite
their low-paid jobs.
7.5 Conclusion

This chapter has explored childcare and parenting practices among the new Chinese immigrants in Canada. Concurring to other studies on Asian immigrant women (Kim, 2003; Man, 1997; Salaff & Greve, 2004), data from the interviews and the focus group reveal that childcare increased dramatically after immigration due to a sudden decline in family resources and social support for childcare. Great challenges and adjustments were reported and informal learning on child support and child education was highlighted by all the immigrant parents. However, what remains the same is the gendered pattern in childcare, with women continuing to be the primary caregivers in their new home country, although men with young children also reported increased responsibility in childcare and parenting. This finding is consistent with the WALL Survey results and literature on childcare (Armstrong & Armstrong, 2002; Kitterod, 2002; Short, Chen, Entwise, & Zhai, 2002; Thompson & Walker, 1989; Van Dijk & Siegers, 1996). This study shows that childcare remains largely gendered. To cope with the changes in childcare, women have developed different strategies, such as getting grandparents over to look after their newborn or sending their children back to China to be taken care of, or arranging cooperative childcare among neighbours after their children came home from school.

However, inconsistent with the WALL Survey is the sufficient evidence suggesting that women are equally, if not more, involved as their male counterparts in learning how to take care of and parent their children in the Canadian context, even though they may not be fully aware of the knowledge and skills they have learned and the various ways and strategies they have used to acquire that learning. Like the work itself, parenting-related learning also seems to be gendered. While the Chinese fathers emphasized their roles and their learning involved in their children’s education and children’s disciplining in the Canadian way, the Chinese mothers reported involvement and learning that go far beyond the aforementioned areas. They learned to cook healthy food for their young children, and to train them to be independent from a very young age. They took their children to extra-curricular activities, and trained them to share housework as well as helping their children with their school work. They also explored different strategies to handle or solve conflicts with their rebellious, teenage children on parental surveillance over their children’s studies, school performance, making friends, teen dating, and so forth. Unlike their male counterparts with teenage children who emphasized the support they provided for their children, the Chinese mothers gave more detailed accounts of the challenges and barriers
they encountered in childcare and parenting in the Canadian context, the conflicts they encountered, and the compromises they made in childcare and parenting in the host country, thus, making themselves less an “authority” in child disciplining than their male counterparts.

Compared to the gendered pattern in what they do and learn about childcare and parenting, how they acquired the knowledge and skills they needed seems less gendered, with both women and men emphasizing learning by doing, often through trial and error, in both childcare and parenting. Both women and men talked about learning to tutor their children in some science courses by reading their children’s textbooks or books borrowed from the public library. However, men seem to focus more on learning from the school and from friends about the Canadian educational system, and learning from professionals for financial advice on investment for children’s future education. Women, in contrast, seem to rely on a variety of sources for information about a variety of childcare-related issues. Mothers with young children talked about learning from parents, family doctors, and other young mothers about children’s health and nutrition, from books and magazines for tips on childrearing/parenting, from the Internet for information on child benefits, and from the community centres for information on childcare services. Consistent with literature on parenting-related learning (Peterson, 1984; Stehlik, 2003), parenting practices in some cases also promote or stimulate the parent’s own cognitive, emotional, and social growth towards higher levels of maturity.
Chapter 8 Emotion Work and Lifelong Learning in a Transnational Context

I remember the day when I left for Canada, my mother insisted on seeing me off at the railway station. Among a group of cheerful young people on the platform, my mother looked so tiny and frail, her face wrinkled, and her hair grey. As the train started to move, I waved goodbye to her while tears streamed down my face....

In the past few years, finding an affordable way to call my parents has been an important part of my transnational kin maintenance. I have tried many types of calling cards, and learned to use various kinds of computer software for on-line or computer-to-phone communication. I have switched different telephone companies in order to find the one that best accommodates my need for a weekly long-distance call to China.

Every time I called and asked about their health and life in the past week, my mother, who usually picked up the phone, gave me almost the same response: “We are fine. Don’t worry about us.” Then, she would turn the focus on me and on my daughter, and asked about our life and study in Canada. Every time I called, at least half of the time I would be listening to her telling me how to take care of myself and my daughter, as we are alone here in a far-away country. Sometimes when I called, she picked up the phone right away and said, “I am sitting by the phone. I know it is your call.” Sometimes, if I called a day or two later or during a non-regular hour, she would say, “I have been worried about you. Is everything alright with you?” Every time I got some health supplements back to her, she would say, “Please don’t waste that money on me. Hearing your voice and caring words is the best health supplement, and learning that you are doing well in Canada is the best care you give me.” To me, emotional support for my parents is reciprocal, learning that everything is well with my parents and hearing their loving, tender, caring words for my daughter and me.
8.1 Introduction

Family and home have long been considered a place of feeling, and emotion work is embedded in many household activities such as listening to another’s problems or worries, giving advice or guidance, showing warmth and appreciation, and taking the load off a partner such as sharing housework and childcare (Strazdins & Broom, 2004: 357). Emotion work acts as the “glue” that holds families together (Larson & Richards, 1994; DeVault, 1999), and helps build intimacy and closeness between spouses/partners and between parents and children (Seery & Crowley; 2000; Strazdins & Broom, 2004).

Scholars have demonstrated that providing emotional support for family members is an important aspect of family work (Hochschild, 1989; DeVault, 1991). However, efforts and activities for emotional caretaking and emotion management are frequently ignored in housework literature (Coltrane, 2000; Erickson, 2005) which has mainly focused on instrumental tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and shopping. Similarly, literature on carework also concentrates mainly on the instrumental tasks and the time devoted to caregiving (Kitterod, 2002; Spitzer, et al., 2003), leaving out an important aspect of family life: emotion work, or the provision of emotional support, and the enhancement of others’ emotional well-being (Erickson, 1993: 888). Erickson (2005) criticizes the functionalist view of housework for producing the gendered symbolism of “instrumental” and “expressive” tasks (also see Osmond & Thorne, 1993), and for ignoring the inequality signified by this initial characterization (p. 337). In her pivotal study on emotion work, Erickson (1993) urges that family work should be reconceptualised to include emotion work as well as housework and childcare, as emotion work is an integral part of the work done in the home (p. 888). Erickson (1993) argues that “it is undoubtedly an artificial separation to differentiate housework, or instrumental tasks, from emotion-work tasks” (p.898), as emotion work is more closely linked to the social construction of gender than are housework and child care. Thus, in her study on emotion work and the division of household labour, Erickson (2005: 348) suggests that emotion work, as an integral part of family work, should be incorporated into measures of household work, as it helps us understand how gender influences the meaning and allocation of family work.

However, emotion work is often rendered invisible because it is embedded in and woven into the physical and the mental aspects (the instrumental or material aspects) of housework and
carework. According to Erickson (1993), “[t]he invisibility of emotion work persists despite clear indications that providing emotional support is as much embedded within women’s daily family routine as is the performance of housework and childcare duties” (p. 890).

In previous chapters, I have demonstrated that housework and carework are two inseparable components of household work, and that household work consists of four dimensions of efforts: physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual (see Eichler & Albanese, 2007 in Chapter 1). In this chapter, I will focus on emotion work involved in food work, childcare, and kin work (emotional care of the elderly). I will also examine the learning involved in emotional support and care for other people and for oneself, as well as emotion management. I join Erickson in arguing that emotion work is an indispensable form of household work, as many household tasks are closely associated with the emotional feelings of or for family members.

The goal of this chapter is to make visible both the emotional work and the informal learning involved in the emotional dimension of housework and carework, such as food work, childcare, and kin work (or transnational emotion work for the elderly), as well as in conflict resolution and crisis management. In my analysis, I will pay special attention to the gender differences in what women and men do, in how they learn in providing emotional support and in resolving conflicts, and in the strategies they use to cope with the changes in their lives, unpaid work, and their gender identities. I will also draw on the WALL Survey data on learning on intimate relationships and spirituality.

8.2 Literatures on Emotion Work and the Emotional Dimension of Learning

8.2.1 Defining Emotion Work

It has long been noted that emotion work is important in order to maintain harmony in families and to improve their well-being, and that time and effort is required to meet emotional needs of family members. As emotion work is rarely included in research on housework and carework, it is thus worthwhile to take a moment to look at how emotion work was conceptualized by previous scholars and how I define emotion work for the purpose of this study.

First introduced by Hochschild (1979) and later defined in her classic work *The Managed Heart* (1983), emotion work was originally conceptualized as “management of feeling to create a
publicly observable facial and bodily display” (Hochschild, 1983: 7), by which she meant the intentional effort a person makes in managing and displaying her/his own feelings, usually undertaken in order to influence the feelings of others. Although Hochschild (1983) used the terms “emotion work” and “emotional labour” to refer to emotion management in the private and public domains respectively, few scholars follow such a distinction strictly. Subsequent scholars either used the two terms synonymously or redefined them to fit their study by adapting or elaborating on their meanings (Seery, 1996: 15).

Over the years, the term “emotion work” seems to have gained popularity in research on work, whether paid or unpaid, that involves the use, management, and display of emotions (see Bone, 1997; Hart, 2006; Strazdins & Broom, 2004; Wharton & Erickson, 1995; Seery, 1996). For example, in their study on household work and employment, England and Farkas (1986) use the term “emotional work” and define it as “efforts made to understand others, to have empathy with their situation, to feel their feelings as part of one’s own” (p. 91). Strazdins and Broom (2004) adopt the same term “emotional work” and provide a similar definition—the actions and the intention to improve psychological well-being in others (p.357)—in examining the impact of the gendered emotional work on women’s psychological distress. In her study of women’s emotion work as mothers, Seery (1996) defines emotion work as “any intentional or deliberate attempt to manage another’s emotion” (p. 64).

In her studies on emotion management in family work and marital relationship, Erickson defines emotion work as “the management of one’s feelings to create an observable facial and bodily display…activities that are concerned with the enhancement of others’ emotional well-being and with the provision of emotional support” (Erickson, 1993: 888). Compared to the definitions provided by other scholars, Erickson’s conceptualization of emotion work is closest to Hochschild’s original definition, as it emphasizes both emotion management and emotional care and support.

So far, the most detailed and complex description of what emotion work entails was by Christine Delphy and Diana Leonard in *Familiar Exploitation* (1992: 21):

> Emotion work is work which establishes relations of solidarity, which maintains bonds of affection, which provides moral support, friendship and love, which gives people a sense of belonging, of ontological strength, of empowerment, and thereby makes them feel good. This too requires efforts and skills. It is not just a question of thinking about someone, but
doing activities: talking to them about things that interest them, fetching them things that
give them pleasure, smiling at them, cuddling them, and stroking their bodies and their

Delphy and Leonard’s definition not only outlines the goals and strategies for doing emotion
work, it also highlights the “instrumental” rather than merely the “expressive” aspects of emotion
work, pointing to the fact that emotion work involves “doing actual activities,” not merely
“thinking about someone.” Delphy and Leonard reveal the multi-faceted nature of emotion work
by giving concrete examples of emotion work, such as efforts at “arranging entertainment and
relaxation” (p.232), efforts to “make a house a home” (p. 232), to create a warm, comfortable
environment, efforts at cooking “more complex meals with a variety of forms of cooking and
courses” (P. 81), and efforts at maintaining kinship (kin work).

For my research, I chose the term “emotion work” as it is most widely used by scholars. I view
emotion work as consisting of both emotional care and support, and emotion management. I use
the term “emotional work” only when citing authors who used this term in their studies. Drawing
on definitions provided by various authors mentioned above, I view emotion work as any
activities and efforts to provide emotional care and support, to understand, manage, or influence
emotions and feelings, whether others’ or one’s own, in order to improve the physical, mental,
emotional, and spiritual well-being of other people and/or of oneself.

In accordance with Erickson (2005), I will show how emotion work is intertwined with and
embedded in instrumental tasks of food work and childcare, and how the gender division of
emotion work creates, maintains, and perpetuates gender hierarchy and gender-appropriate roles
and identities in the Chinese immigrant families. Like Delphy and Leonard (1992), I will
emphasize the instrumental aspect of emotion work, that is, what they actually do, rather than
merely what they are thinking about.

8.2.2 Emotion Work is Work and Gendered

It is noted (McGraw, 2002) that, of the various types of unpaid work in which women
participate, housework is the most frequently researched (Oakley, 1974), followed by childcare
(Arendell, 1997). Less attention has been given to other types of family work such as emotion
work (Erickson, 1993) and kin-keeping (Rosenthal, 1985).
Studies show that emotion work, like housework in general and carework in particular, is a highly gendered activity. Women not only do more emotion work than men (DeVault, 1999; Erickson, 1993, 2005; Hochschild, 1989; Wharton & Erickson, 1995; Zimmerman, Haddock, Current, & Ziemba, 2003), they are also expected to do different types of emotion work. Erickson (1993) notes that emotion work holds a central place in conceptualizing women’s gender roles, because an important part of their household work is to provide emotional support to their partners and other family members, just as they are the ones primarily responsible for other household tasks.

While it has largely been an accepted argument that housework and childcare are work, it has been more difficult, notes Erickson (2005), to see comforting, encouraging, and facilitating interaction as characterizing a work role. This is mainly because these activities are closely associated with women's "natural" or "feminine" tendencies and with culturally based assumptions about love and intimate family relations (DeVault, 1991; Erickson, 1993; Thompson & Walker, 1989). Women themselves often discount the time and effort involved in caring work because it is expected to be a spontaneous expression of love which does not require any efforts. As a result, “behavior that makes others feel cared for and loved has been characterized as an aspect of marital intimacy and support rather than as a specific form of family work” (Erickson, 2005: 338).

In her classical essay on “invisible work,” Daniels (1987) was among the first to apply the concept of work to the performance of emotion work. Subsequent scholars also argue that emotion work is work, as it requires time, efforts, and skill, and that women’s emotional caretaking responsibilities are not spontaneous expressions of their essential nature, but rather their culturally prescribed roles (DeVault, 1991, 1999; Erickson, 1993; Hochschild, 1990). Challenging the assumptions that emotional work is either easy or natural, England and Farkas (1986) and Strazdins and Broom (2004) argue that emotional work involves intentional efforts and work, which is time consuming as well as physically and emotionally demanding in building positive emotions and closeness or to repair and regulate negative feelings and interpersonal conflict (Strazdins, 2000). In her study on the strategies that women use to provide emotional caring for their children, Seery (1996) argues that doing emotion work is a multi-stepped process that entails either doing or intentionally not doing a multiplicity of physical, verbal, mental, and emotional tasks (p. iv). O’Brien’s (2007) study on mothers’ involvement in their children’s
education suggests that mothers’ emotional caring or support of their children is an inalienable part of carework which is often rendered invisible largely because such activities are viewed as natural expressions of a mother’s love for their children and are closely associated with a mother’s identity (p. 173).

Study on emotion work indicates that, just as the performance of emotion management at work may result in emotional exhaustion (Hochschild, 1983), roles that include more informal provision of emotional support, such as the marital role, may also result in feelings of emotional burnout (Kessler, McLeod, & Wethington, 1985). Thus, Erickson concludes that emotion work is work as gestures of warmth and caring are not merely expressed but must be managed, focused, and directed so as to communicate the appropriate and intended emotion (also see Daniels, 1987; Hochschild, 1983). Erickson (1993: 890) criticizes the current conceptualization of emotional support as intimacy for overlooking the fact that marriage and family as institutions do not just spontaneously occur. A marriage does not exist merely because a ceremony has been performed, nor does a family arise merely through the birth of a child—there is work that goes into the achievement and maintenance of both.

Emotion work has great influence on family life and on the health and well-being of those who perform such work. A study on dual-earner couples indicates that equal sharing of housework and emotion work, as well as mutual and active involvement in childcare, can lead to successful balance of family and work (Zimmerman, Haddock, Current & Ziembia, 2003). In their study on the emotion work and couple relationship, Duncombe and Marsden (1995) note that many men overvalue breadwinning and fail to recognize or share emotional contributions to family life. Zimmerman and colleagues (2003) suggest that equal sharing of emotion work is one of the preconditions for a successful balance of family and paid work. In their studies on emotion work among dual-wage couples, Erickson (1993: 896) and Wharton and Erickson (1995: 288) reveal that emotional support can be a source of satisfaction for women who perform such work and women who say that their husbands share emotion work report more happiness in their marriages. Strazdins and Broom’s (2004) study on emotional work and health suggests that gender imbalance in emotion work diminishes women’s sense of being loved, increases their feeling of conflicts in the marriage, and induces psychological health risk such as depression to women who do more of the emotional work (p.373).
8.2.3 Emotion Work is Part of Household Work

Household work has long been recognized as a highly gendered, emotion-laden job that women perform for their loved ones within families. In her work on *Reconceptualizing Family Work* (1993), Erickson notes that while the work of maintaining a family’s physical environment and caring for its children are assuredly two of the most essential and pervasive familiar tasks, there is one aspect of family life that is conspicuously absent from current empirical research on the distribution of family work: that of providing emotional support, or emotion work (Erickson, 1993: 888). In his review of over 200 studies on household labour between 1989 and 1999, Coltrane (2000) notes that there is a continued failure among investigators to include emotion work in their studies, which he sees as “a major shortcoming of research on housework” (p. 1210).

In her study on gender division of labour in emotion work, Erickson notes that, despite advancements in the understanding of the gendered division of household labour over the past three decades, examinations of how emotion work may contribute to this literature remain scarce, although emotion has historically held a central place in conceptualizing women's family roles (e.g., Parsons & Bales, 1955). Thus, bringing emotion work back to the center of family-work scholarship may help feminist scholars in their attempts to debunk the myth that women's family work emanates "naturally" from within (Daniels, 1987; Erickson, 2005; Hochschild, 1989; Oakley, 1974). In a longitudinal study of divorced and married couples, Kitson (1992) notes that, compared to the instrumental tasks, it is more difficult for spouses to provide affectional support for one another (see also Goode, 1963; Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1990; Wills, 1985; Winch, 1971). These findings suggest that emotion work is integral to the stability of marital relationships, and that couples establish a division of emotional labour in much the same way that they construct a division of housework and childcare.

In her empirical studies on the gender division of emotion work, Erickson (1993, 2005) urges family researchers to move beyond the simple dichotomy of instrumental (housework) and expressive (emotional) support in an effort to explore what each behaviour or task actually means to specific family members. She notes that men’s instrumental work in the family is often seen as an expression of their caring and concern (Erickson, 1993: 898). For instance, if a man in
an egalitarian household cooks dinner when it is not his turn to do so, this behaviour might easily be interpreted as emotional support as opposed to instrumental support or merely the completion of a specific housework task. In her study of the caregiving of children with disabilities, Traustadottir (1991) identifies two components of carework: behavioural and emotional, which she characterizes as caring for and caring about. *Caring for* refers to the behavioural component of carework and *caring about* refers to loving the child—the emotional component of caregiving. Erickson (1993: 898) also suggests that researchers who studied the performance of childcare tasks to rethink the complex interrelationship between the task-related aspects of childcare and the more emotionally charged components, in an effort to conceptualize and measure this aspect of family work more adequately.

Di Leonardo’s (1987) study on kin work further expands the scope of emotion work. Di Leonardo notes that research on domestic labour focuses almost exclusively on women’s responsibilities within nuclear households, missing a key element of domestic labour—cross-household kin maintenance or kin work (p. 443). According to Di Leonardo, kin work is

the conception, maintenance, and ritual celebration of cross-household kin ties, including visits, letters, telephone calls, presents, and cards to kin; the organization of holiday gatherings; the creation and maintenance of quasi-kin relations; decisions to neglect or to intensify particular ties; the mental work of reflection about all these activities; the creation and communication of altering images of family and kin vis-à-vis the images of others, both folk and mass media. (Di Leonardo, 1987: 442-423)

Di Leonardo argues that it is kinship contact *across households*, as much as women’s work within them, that fulfills our cultural expectation of a satisfying family life. Like housework and childcare, kin work is largely women’s work. But unlike housework and childcare, it is difficult for men to substitute hired labour to accomplish kin maintenance tasks in the absence of kinswomen (Di Leonardo, 1987: 443). Like scholars on housework and childcare, Di Leonardo (1987) argues that kin work is work, as the creation and maintenance of kin networks, this sense of family, takes time, intention, and skill (p. 443).

In her study on emotion work in family life, DeVault (1999) argues that adjusting to an unequal gender division of housework and carework is also a form of emotion work. In addition, DeVault’s list of emotion work also includes some extra-household activities such as *advocacy* (e.g., for better public services for disabled children), *survival identity work* (e.g., for people of colour to cope with racism, and for new immigrants to adjust to or survive in a new culture and
society), and passing (or ignoring) and resistance (e.g., among lesbian and gay couples against their stigmatized identities) (p. 55).

In her book *The Second Shift* (1989), Hochschild shows that negotiating the household division of labour requires not only work but also feelings about it. In her study on emotion management, Hochschild (1990) suggests that women and men, both individually and as couples, develop “gender strategies” with emotional components that allow them to negotiate their domestic responsibilities and their paid employment.

### 8.2.4 Emotion and Learning

Literature on lifelong learning suggests that human learning consists of three dimensions: the cognitive, the emotional, and the social (Illeris, 2002). While the cognitive refers to the knowledge and skills acquired, the emotional indicates the feelings, motivations, and attitudes involved in learning, and the social refers to the external interaction, such as participation, communication, and cooperation. According to Illeris (2003), all learning involves the interaction between the cognitive and the emotional on the internal level and the integration of this internal psychological process with the learner’s social, cultural, or material environment on the external level (p. 398). While cognitive learning builds up the understanding and the ability of the learner, the emotional aspect of learning controls the dynamic of learning, that is, the motivations, and thus has a significant influence on the cognitive/learning result. Meanwhile, the emotions and emotional patterns are also influenced by the newly gained knowledge, insight, comprehension, and perception. Illeris (2004) also argues that all learning is situated, as it takes place in a specific situation or context that is co-determinant for both the learning process and its outcome (p. 434).

In his theoretical research on human learning, Jarvis (2006) suggests that emotions, which involve both the physical and the cognitive, play a major role in our behaviour and learning. Jarvis argues that emotions can be learned, and learned emotions, in turn, can affect our learning in many ways and influence our life to a considerable extent in both positive and negative ways. For example, research shows that positive emotions such as confidence and optimism can improve our learning results or even help us bounce back from failure and give us a sense of self-worth and self-esteem (Goleman, 1995). Being in a good mood enhances thinking, especially creative and flexible thought, while being in a bad mood may lead to non-learning, as negative
emotions such as anxiety may hinder thinking and undermine learning itself (Jarvis, 2006: 177-182).

### 8.2.5 Integrating Emotion Work in Household Work and Learning

Researchers on family work have been criticized for their continued failure to include emotion work in their investigations (Coltrane; 2000:1210; Strazdins & Broom, 2004: 357). In her article *Why Emotion Work Matters: Sex, Gender, And the Division of Household Labor* (2005), Erickson urges the expansion of the traditional operationalization of family work (i.e., housework and childcare) to include emotion work. In her study on kin work, Di Leonardo (1987) suggests that family researchers go beyond the boundaries of normative households to examine cross-household work of kin maintenance. Di Leonardo notes that, like emotion work, kin work embodies both love and work, and the results of kin work enhance feelings of intimacy and family happiness, but like emotion work, many kin maintenance tasks such as making phone calls, sending cards to kin, or organizing holiday gatherings are not recognized as work but rather leisure activities (p. 443). Despite the claim that emotion work can be done by self upon self, self upon others, and others upon oneself (Hochschild, 1979:562), almost all subsequent researchers have focused on emotion work done by self upon others, ignoring the other two types of emotion work: that done by self upon self and that done by others upon oneself.

There is very little research on the emotional dimension of learning (Jarvis, 2006: 177), or emotional learning (Illeris, 2002). Illeris (2003: 405) notes that traditional learning theories focus solely on the cognitive aspect, ignoring the emotional, social, and societal dimensions of learning. He also criticizes the dominant discourse on lifelong learning for its overemphasis on knowledge and skills, i.e., the content and quantity, and its lack of attention to the quality of what is learned (Illeris, 2003: 405). Research on lifelong learning involved in emotion work is also lacking.

In the following sections, I will examine emotion work and the related learning embedded in routine tasks, such as food work and childcare, and the strategies used in conflict resolution and crisis management. I will examine emotional care and support provided for spouses and children, for friends and for oneself. I will also focus on one type of kin work—transnational eldercare. By comparing relevant data from the WALL Survey, this study explores the influence of household work, including emotion work and the related learning, on the Chinese immigrants’ emotional
and spiritual well-being, on their behaviours, attitudes, and views about family, work, self, and the meaning of life, as well as on their family relations and gender identities after immigration.

8.3 Emotion Work and Learning among the Chinese Immigrants

8.3.1 “I Learned to Show More Concern for Other People.”
—Emotion Work Embedded in Daily Household Activities

Transnational migration poses emotional challenges for Chinese immigrants in Canada: an immense mental pressure induced by the loss of their professional jobs, and a sudden increase of housework and childcare due to lack of social support and economic resources they used to enjoy in their home country. They need to overcome the challenges in the Canadian labour market, to adjust to the Canadian culture, and to rebuild their new social network, which may lead to great anxiety, frustration, and stress as well as create the need to learn new knowledge and skills to cope with the difficulties and to maintain their emotional and spiritual well-being. Thus, providing emotional support and learning to meet the emotional needs of the family members, close and extended, and to manage and control their negative emotions such as frustration and loneliness constitute an important part of the Chinese immigrants’ emotion work in their new homeland.

Nearly all the women in the interviews talked about providing emotional support as part of their routine household tasks. Food work is one of the areas where many of the Chinese immigrants demonstrate their emotional care and support. For example, Hong, a young mother with a 13-month-old son told me that she did all the cooking and most of the childcare-related household work as an emotional support for her husband so that he can concentrate on his paid work. Ying, a woman in her mid-40s, talked about cooking less fatty food for her son as a way of helping her son control his weight. Hua’s concern for her husband’s health starts with her weekly grocery shopping. “I choose different types of green vegetables for this week and other kinds for the following week, just for nutrition’s sake.” Hua also carefully monitors his weight through the food she cooks. “My husband likes to eat fatty meat. But I will stop buying meat when I see him starting to gain weight. I will stop cooking anything fatty for him, if his weight continues to rise.” In a casual conversation later, Hua also talked about the strategies she used to reduce her husband’s cigarette smoking, as she considered it bad for his health.
Hua, who used to be a college professor but now works as a building superintendent together
with her husband, revealed another aspect of her emotion work: finding her husband his current
job. “At the beginning, he couldn’t find a job and was very depressed. So, I got a job first,
working at a Chinese food factory. Then, I helped my husband find this [superintendent] job.
Now he is okay.” In her detailed account of the various challenges she went through, what stands
out is the great effort Hua made in maintaining her husband’s emotional well-being: getting him
out of depression by helping him find a paid job.

Several males also talked about providing emotional support for their families in their own ways.
For example, Yong, a man in his mid-40s, said that he provided emotional support to his wife,
who had language barriers and could not find a job, and to his son, who had difficulty adjusting
to the new life and educational systems when they first arrived in Canada. “In the first one and
two years, I tried to help my wife and son to adjust because I had been to the United States
before,” Yong said. As a self-employed small business owner, Ming keeps his business crises to
himself or shares them with his friends instead of with his wife for fear of getting her worried too
much about him. Consistent with Erickson’s (1993) findings, some males in my research
consider doing more instrumental housework, especially “feminine” tasks such as cooking, as
their way of providing emotional support for their wives. For example, Zhong and Liang, the two
males who reported doing the major part of housework in their families in the interviews, said
that they increased their share of housework in cooking as a way to show their love and care for
their wives (see Chapter 6). Zhong, who was doing a “labour” job in a factory together with his
wife, said he would feel guilty if he continues to let his wife do all the housework as she used to
in China. In addition to doing most of the cooking, Liang said that he also showed great concern
for his pregnant wife by cooking what he believes is good and healthy for her and her foetus.

Fang, a 58-year-old woman with two adult daughters, talked in detail in the interview and in the
subsequent discussion group about the emotion work and the emotional dimension of her newly
found “occupation”—a full-time housewife. Fang takes up all the household work in her family
so that her husband, the sole provide in her household, can have more time for relaxation after
work. She cooks his favourite foods and serves them in a timely manner so that when he comes
home, he can have the meal right away. Fang’s emotion work became intensified when her
husband had a minor surgery, and later when he broke his leg in a workplace accident. “I took
special care of him, his daily life, and his food,” Fang said. When he went back to work after the
surgery, Fang brought his lunch to his workplace everyday so that he could have warm, freshly made meals at noon. “I’ll call him at work, to see if he needs anything, so that I can bring it along,” said Fang. Later, when he broke his leg, and stayed in a hospital for rehabilitation, Fang not only brought his meals to the hospital everyday (as, according to Fang, he was not used to the food provided in the hospital), she also went out of her way to comfort him when he was in pain and encouraged him when he felt depressed.

Fang’s emotion work goes beyond her own household. From her contact with people in the church, Fang said that she learned to show more concern for other people as well. “I find people in the church are very warm and friendly. They helped me in learning English, in searching for a job,” said Fang. “From them, I learned to show more concern for others.” For example, if someone in her taiji (Chinese martial art) class or in her singing and dancing club for seniors did not show up for their practice at the community centre, she would call and check with them to see if everything was well. Whenever she met newly arrived immigrants, she would share her experience with them on how to adjust to the new environment and where to find information about jobs. She would also invite them to go to the community centre or the church for emotional support and social networking. “I would like to help other people the way I was helped,” said Fang. Through her contact with the church, Fang said that she expanded her understanding of love, “not only the love of one’s family, friends, but also the universal love of mankind.” In addition, Fang said, “I also learned from the church that you don’t expect returns when you help others.”

Inside her home, Fang said she also learned to express her love more overtly to her husband than before:

In the past, we used to think we needn’t say any warm words to each other, as we are an old couple. Now I’ve learned to express my concern for him. I will say “Drive carefully” when he is going out, and “you must have had a hard day” when he comes back home. I will remind him to go to bed earlier as he likes to stay on Internet late. I’ve also learned to show greater concern for my children about their marriage, their study, and their future jobs.

Fang’s expressiveness of her love to her family and to other people was echoed by Ling, the only single, young woman in my interviews, who said that she learned the Canadian ways of expressing her good wishes and emotional support to friends by sending them gifts or cards on
their birthdays or when they got a new job, and by throwing a party for friends when they moved away.

8.3.2  “I Helped My Daughter to Adjust to a New Life Here.”
       —Emotion Work and Learning Involved in Childcare and Parenting

Emotion work involves attending to both the physical and emotional needs of others (Baber and Allen, 1992; Fisher & Tronto, 1990). Some scholars (England & Farks, 1986) make a distinction between childcare and emotion work in that childcare pays more attention to the “instrumental” tasks, while emotion work focuses on the “expressive” aspects of childrearing (p.94), such as “making a child feel loved and secure,” and “interpreting the meaning of a child’s unusual behaviour” (p. 91). This distinction of carework and emotion work is similar to Traustadottir’s (1991) concept of “care for” and “care about” —the behavioural and the emotional components of childcare. In Chapter 7, I discussed the more “instrumental” or the “behavioural” aspect of childcare, here I will focus on the more “expressive,” or the “emotional” dimension of childcare, with the understanding that there is no clear-cut distinction between the two dimensions.

My research shows that emotion work and the related learning prevail in childcare and parenting. Many parents with teenage children reported providing emotional support for their children to reduce their stress in adjusting to the new culture and the school system when they first arrived in Canada. For example, Hua showed in the discussion group the emotional dimension of care she provided for her teenage daughter in overcoming language barriers when they first arrived in Canada:

When we first came here, my daughter couldn’t understand English. So, sometimes, she was very nervous, and anxious. It was very hard for her. She just cried. So I talked to her. I helped her learn English. I also spent a lot of time helping her with her school work. Sometimes we discuss about how she is doing and how we can help her to do better. Sometimes I just grab some books from the library for her. My husband also helps her.

Rong, a woman in the focus group and a mother with a 14-year-old son, talked about how she helped her son adjust to the new school culture when they first arrived in Canada. As a medical doctor and a senior administrator of a hospital in China, Rong used to spend most of her time on her paid work and had her parents taking care of her son after school. When she came with her small family to Canada, Rong found that the challenges her son encountered were no less than
those facing an adult. “In China, when the teacher is talking, the students just listen. But in Canada, the teacher encourages students to provide their personal opinions.” Rong remembered that in China her son was criticized for being overactive in his class, but in Canada, he was seen as too quiet, not talking nor participating in class activities. At first, Rong was encouraged to take her son to see a psychiatrist, a suggestion Rong rejected. As a mother and a paediatrician, Rong knew that the problem with her son was more cultural rather than psychological. To help him adapt to the new culture, Rong first adopted a cat for her son, then she hired a tutor to help him with his French, and later enrolled the whole family in a badminton club. By feeding the cat, and by communicating with neighbours on how to raise a cat, her son gradually opened up and became more active. Through the weekly family activities, Rong saw her son regaining his confidence, and improving his school performance remarkably. Although she was disappointed about not being able to practice in her trained profession in Canada, Rong was happy to see some of the changes in her family life: having more time and activities with her family, and improved family relationships:

Both my husband and I were (medical) doctors in China. We used to be very busy and come home very late. When we came to Canada, I was not used to it in the beginning, finding my son so naughty, and having dinner with my family every evening. But now I am quite used to it. It is actually very nice. I feel the warmth of the family, the love and care of me from my husband and my son. Once I was ill, my son brought me a glass of hot water, and said, “Mom, I will take care of you.”

Ying is a mother with an adult son attending university. In the discussion group, Ying talked about providing emotional support for her son when he felt frustrated by the language barrier he encountered in his studies and when he failed to pass his oral examination for medical school the first time. Ying also helped her son when he had difficulty in choosing his major and then in switching to a different field of study. Fang, mother of two adult daughters, recalled how she helped her younger daughter to adapt to the new environment and new lifestyle when she first arrived in Canada. Without any friends, Fang’s daughter, who was a little over 20 at the time of the interview, felt very lonely and unhappy, and insisted on going back to China. Although she herself felt isolated for not having any friends and felt stressed for having difficulty finding a job, Fang attended to her daughter’s emotional needs first by encouraging her to work hard in her study, by discussing with her the job prospects in Canada, and the benefits and gains of getting a Canadian college education. Through long conversations, and by showing her some newspaper
articles on study and employment, Fang gradually cheered her daughter up. In addition, Fang also talked about the emotion work she did for her elder daughter in helping her maintain her marital relationship with her husband, as they lived in two distant cities in North America due to their work and study.

At one time, I felt that there was a problem between my daughter and her husband, because they did not see each other often. I tried to help them by calling them regularly and by inviting them to Toronto. I also urged my daughter to call or visit her husband in the U.S. more frequently, as long-time separation may lead to emotional gaps between the young couple.

The stories of Fang and many other women in their efforts to help their children in time of difficulty suggest that emotion work involved in childcare and parenting is highly gendered, and that women are predominantly responsible for providing emotional support and care for their children. Although they are also involved in childcare and parenting, men’s focus is more on the instrumental tasks rather than on the affective dimension of childrearing. That’s probably one of the reasons why they reported less conflicts and compromises as women do in their childrearing account. As we have seen in Chapter 7, the Chinese immigrant fathers talked mainly about how they learned to be more understanding and supportive of their children in adjusting to the Canadian educational system, whereas immigrant mothers focused more on the conflicts they encountered in childrearing and the compromises they have made on a number of issues concerning their children’s study, making friends, and dating.

8.3.3 “Life Is Not Easy Here. I Want to Make My Family Happy and Harmonious.”
—Learning to Resolve Conflicts Differently

Studies on Asian and Latino immigrant women have indicated that increase in immigrant wives’ economic role and the persistence of their husbands’ traditional patriarchal ideology as well as the concomitant decline in their earning power and social status have caused marital conflict and tensions (Hongdagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Kibria, 1990, 1993; Lim, 1997; Mahler, 1995: 107; Min, 2001; Park, 1997; Pessar, 1995b; Rubin, 1994; Sluzki, 1979). In her study on Dominican immigrant families in New York City, Pessar (1995b) comments, “Prolonged male unemployment, combined with men’s insistence on maintaining the perks of male privilege in the household, can also lead to marital discord....” (p. 58). In her study on Chinese immigrant
women in the United States, Zhou (2000) notes that, while it is true that many Asian women experienced more autonomy and equality in the United States, this is in part because the racial and cultural barriers in the American society prevented Asian men from regaining their middle-class status upon migration. While those studies help us understand the causes and consequences of marital conflicts among immigrant families, little attention has been given to the ways or strategies immigrant women employed to resolve their marital conflicts. Furthermore, immigrant groups are so diverse that it is not plausible to attempt to generalize their experience. It is, therefore, too simplistic to view all Third World women as traditional, given their diversity in national origins, their social and cultural backgrounds, as well as their gender norms and beliefs (Zhou, 2000: 446).

Unlike women from other Asian countries, women from Mainland China, especially women from urban China, had enjoyed full-time employment, economic independence, and improved social and family status, although gender relations are far from equal and women are still expected to do more housework and carework than men. When they immigrated to Canada, the Chinese women experienced a shift in their gender relation from “revolutionary comrades” to gendered partners, due to the loss of their professional jobs and of the powerful support of the Party-state for gender equality. Many professional women are forced to take low-skilled jobs and some women become housewives because of barriers in language and age or family responsibility (e.g., childcare). Subsequently, many women experience a decline of their position in their households, and a weakening of their bargaining power for a more equal share of household work and equal gender relations with their husbands. Although Chinese immigrant men have also experienced similar downward mobility in their social and economic status, the changes affect women much more than men in their gender relations and in the ways they perform household work, including emotion work, especially emotion management, in resolving spousal conflicts and marital crises. For example, some women reported a loss of bargaining power for an equal share of household work with their husband and a lack of voice in family decision making, due to the loss of their professional jobs. Many women said that they learned either to compromise when a conflict arises or to manage their emotions differently, such as having more patience, or thinking more from the other’s perspective or standpoint. Men, however, rarely reported similar changes on their side. Here is a quote from Xinyan, a 35-year-old Chinese woman who moved to Canada in 2000: “I used to be very independent and confident, but now I feel very vulnerable and helpless. I used to be able to speak up for myself, but now I feel like I have no voice in the family. I used to be able to manage my emotions, but now I feel like I am losing control.”
old woman who was previously an accountant, but now is a live-in caregiver in Canada, indicating the changes in her life after immigration:

I think housework is not just cooking and doing laundry. It can also be communication between you and your spouse when you disagree with each other. For example, my husband sometimes doesn’t understand why we moved to Canada when we had a good life in China, so I have to explain to him the benefits of living here.

Changing their ways of handling and resolving spousal conflicts was reported by several women I interviewed. For example, Yun, a woman in her mid-40s, recalled that she used to choose to go away and stay with her parent as a way of resolving conflicts with her husband. But now she has to do it differently, as there is no longer any extended family around to turn to:

When I was in China, I used to go to stay at my parents’ place if I had a fight with my husband. Then, my husband would come, apologize, and take me home. Now, I don’t have a place to go. I have to stay home and face the problem. I am becoming more tolerant with him now and showing more respect for his self-esteem. Whenever there is a conflict between us, I would give in, just to save his face. I would say, “Okay. If you don’t change, then I will change.”

Relying on themselves to solve the problem and making compromises in order to avoid overt conflicts were echoed by several other women, either because they do not have the resources they used to have or because they are afraid of jeopardizing their marital relationship. For example, Mei admitted that she used to yell at her husband for not doing any housework, but now she has learned to control her temper by staying silent, not speaking to him, or by redirecting her attention through chatting with friends on the phone. Jie, a woman in her mid-30s, used a similar strategy for emotion management and offered an explanation for the change in her conflicts resolution: “I used to shout at him [her husband] when I didn’t feel happy. Now, I just keep quiet. It is because there is more life pressure here than in China. I think I become more understanding of his situation, and his feelings.”

Several women also claimed that they have learned to cherish family more than before, and want to have a harmonious spousal relationship, as they have to depend on each other for mutual emotional support. In the following example, Ying compared the changes in her attitudes towards spousal relationship and the reasons for her observed changes:
I used to be a strong-willed woman, and did whatever I wanted to do. For example, when I was in China, I often fought with my husband because he often went out drinking with friends after work and came home late and drunk. That was very bad for his health. But here I always make good relationship with my husband because I think we are far away from our home country. Life is not easy here. I want to make my family happy and harmonious.

The above examples suggest that women used different strategies to resolve marital conflicts, to lessen the life pressures and stresses of their husbands in the Canadian society and labour market, and in turn, to enhance the surviving capacities of their families as a whole. Meanwhile, it is also evident that the changes and compromises that women made in conflict resolution was in part related to shifted gender power relations after immigration.

According to Fang, a woman in her late 50s, learning to cherish family life helps both her and her husband to reduce conflicts by making compromises and by developing mutual understanding for each other. “Because we were separated for 10 years, we now cherish this unification, our time together. If there is a conflict, one of us will compromise a little,” said Fang. When asked which one of them compromised, Fang said, “I think it is both of us. If one gets angry, the other will just try to avoid direct conflict, not irritating the person further or increasing the tension by pointing out the problem afterwards.”

However, not all the changes are positive, nor can all conflicts be resolved easily through compromises and sacrifices. For some of the respondents, increased household work after immigration, particularly the unequal gender division of housework and childcare, triggers new conflicts and tensions among couples as to who should do what in their family. This is especially the case with those who did not do much housework before immigration. Ming, who used to hire people to do all the housework in China, said that the sudden increase in housework and carework after immigration, especially after his son’s birth, caused tension between him and his wife because his wife was unhappy with him for not taking up more housework and for the extra housework he created by inviting friends to dinner at home on weekends.

Compared to the other male participants in my interviews, Ming was the only one who talked about marital conflicts. This is probably because he had a very young child in his family and experienced a more dramatic increase in his housework and childcare responsibility. Influenced by the traditional gender ideology that housework and childcare are women’s work, Ming found
his wife’s demand of him doing more housework unacceptable, because he thought he was already helping her a lot with housework and childcare when she was in birth confinement (the first month after giving birth, also see Note 16) and later when she went out to work. In contrast, he identified with his gender role as the family’s primary provider and as the authoritative father of his young son, which was clearly demonstrated in my interview with him through his discussion of his financial responsibility for his family and his great concern for his son’s future education. It is evident that Ming’s traditional gender ideology about men as the primary provider and women as the principal caretaker plays a key role in his refusing his wife’s request for him to do more than what he is doing in housework and childcare.

Consistent with literature which indicates that women are more responsible than men for emotional care (Erickson, 1993, 2005; Thompson, 1993), the findings on Chinese immigrants indicate that women view it as their obligation or as part of their wifely duty to provide emotional care and support for their families, especially for their husbands, and to compromise or change themselves in order to avoid conflicts or to “save the face” of their husbands. In contrast, men’s emotion work is minimal, and selective, which can be one of the reasons why few of them talked about emotion-related household work such as conflicts resolution or crisis management. For some men, increasing their share of housework is viewed as an emotional support for their wife. But Erickson (1993) shows that it is the husbands’ performance of emotion work that is more important to their wives’ marital well-being than is the husbands’ performance of housework and childcare (p. 896).

While quite a few women talked about providing emotional support to their friends who were going through a marriage crisis, Xinyan, a live-in caregiver at the time of interview, was the only person who talked about how immigration shifted the power relations between her and her husband and how conflicts between her paid and unpaid household responsibilities led to her marital crisis:

I came to Canada as a live-in caregiver three years ago. My job is to take care of an old man with diabetes. The job is not a big deal for me, but it is very constraining, and I don’t have my own time and my own life. But I stayed because I wanted to immigrate, and I wanted to bring my husband here. However, when he came last year, this became a huge problem. My husband is very unhappy with the [live-in] arrangement. From the very beginning, he complained and asked me to quit the job. We quarrelled a lot about it. He even threatened me with a divorce if I don’t quit the job.
Xinyan’s conflicts with her husband over her paid job clearly demonstrate the power imbalance between her and her husband: she was pressured to quit her paid job even though she was the sole provider of her family. But on the other hand, she also felt the need to compromise by giving up her paid carework for her unpaid family responsibilities. However, despite all her efforts to save her marriage, Xinyan eventually ended up splitting with her husband a year later and went to look for a job in the U.S.

Like Ming who keeps his business trouble away from his wife, Xinyan keeps her marital crisis a secret from her aged parents in China as she does not want them to worry about her:

I don’t want my parents to worry about me. Every time I call them, I always tell them the good things. Whenever I feel bad, I call my elder sister in the U.S. She came over last year and talked to both of us. I also read a lot, books, magazines, and newspapers, whatever I can get hold of, on immigrants’ life. I also talk to friends about my marital problem.

Xinyan’s case indicates that emotion work, especially emotional support, is not limited to one’s own household (Di Leonardo, 1987), and that emotion work is not unilateral, that is, it is not always done by self upon others, it can also be done by others upon oneself or by self upon self (Hochschild, 1979: 562).

8.3.4 “In China, I was a College Professor, but Here I am a Housewife.”

—Learning New Gender Roles and Gender Identities

In her discussion of emotion work and the gender division of household labour,, Erickson (2005) points out that, compared to housework and childcare, emotion work is more closely associated with women’s “natural” or “feminine” tendencies and with culturally based assumptions about love and intimate family relations, and thus, a more important way in which women and men construct gender-appropriate roles and identities. Many other scholars have also demonstrated how the traditional gender ideology about femininity and masculinity reinforces a gendered division of labour in the home (Presser, 1994; Shelton & John, 1996), and how the gendered allocation of household labour, in turn, legitimizes the cultural assumptions about love and work(Daniels, 1987; Erickson, 1993), and constructs what it means to be a “real” woman, wife,
and mother or a man, husband, and father (Berk, 1985; DeVault, 1991; Hochschild, 1989; Twiggs, McQuillian, & Ferree, 1999; West & Zimmerman, 1987).

Feminist scholars (Ferree, 1991; Shelton & John, 1996) have shown how the emotional symbolism underlying family work shapes the way we conceive of ourselves as men and women, and construct our identity. Using gender construction theory in her reconceptualization of family work to include emotion work, Erickson (2005) shows that being an emotional caretaker is not something women are but rather something women do, as caregiving, in whatever form, does not just emanate from within, but must be managed, focused, and directed so as to have the intended effect on the care recipient (p.349). Erickson’s study on emotion work informs our understanding of the complex relationship between "doing gender" and "doing family" (Erickson, 2005; Thompson & Walker, 1989).

Consistent with feminist theory on gender construction, my research indicates that performing domestic labour for women is not only a demonstration of their love and concern for family members but also a crucial means of constructing their gender role and identity. The following stories about Fang and Mei illustrate how changes in paid work have widened the gaps in the gender division of household labour, the imbalanced power in marital relations, and a reversal to traditional gender roles and identity for some of the professional women.

Fang was a woman in her late 50s, and mother of two adult daughters. Before she joined her husband in Canada in 2001, Fang supported her two daughters single-handedly for 10 years while her husband was away. “Immigration has changed my life completely,” said Fang comparing the dramatic changes in her life, her paid and unpaid work, and in the power relations in her family before and after immigration.

In China, I was a college professor, but now I am a housewife.

In China, I worked outside. Housework was only a minor part of my life. But since I came here, my major job is to do housework.

In China, I was a math teacher, a professor. But here, I felt I was an illiterate. My English is not good. I had no job, no friends. I encountered a lot of problems, the cultural shock…. 

When I was in China, I was financially independent. I could support myself and even my two daughters. When I came here, I don’t make any money. I am totally dependent on my
husband. I feel quite depressed psychologically. I feel myself incapable of supporting myself, and have to rely on others for a living. It is a big blow to my self-esteem.

Not knowing much English, and not having a job, put Fang at a disadvantage in her marital relationship with her husband. Fang felt the power balance is tilting in her husband’s favour, as her position in her family declines.

In my family, my husband works, so he thinks that he is supporting me and expects me to do all the housework—cooking, cleaning, shopping, laundry, everything! He didn’t do any housework and believes that he earns money outside and deserves a good rest at home.

In addition, Fang also observed a number of other changes resulted from her reduced social and economic status in the family: her loss of power in decision-making, in financial matters, and the constraints it has put on her social activities:

Since I came here, I do not have a say in money matters. My husband only gives me money for food. I don’t have a say in making decision about big-item purchases.

Apart from doing housework, I want to go to the community center, to play Taiji, and to join a dancing and singing club. But I often feel so embarrassed with any activity that needs money. Sometimes, my husband does not like me to go out and participate in those activities. He wanted me to prepare the meals, warm and ready, and wait for him when he comes home.

Fang’s experience of downward mobility in her family position is not unique among professional immigrant women from Mainland China. Several women in my interviews talked about experiencing varying degrees of imbalance of marital power in their households, as they see their husbands becoming more dominant, and they themselves give in more often than before in face of conflicts. Obviously, loss of a paid job and intensification of household work contributes to women’s subordination in their households—a reversal to a more traditional gender role and patriarchal family relations, which many Chinese women of Fang’s generation have fought so hard to get away from in their home country. No longer having a career which they used to be

\[19\] Taiji is a traditional Chinese martial art. It is a popular exercise in China, especially among senior people. Singing and dancing in groups are popular social activities among the seniors in China.
proud of, many women began to focus their attention on the family life, and gradually become more identified with their family role than with their low-skilled and low-paid jobs. This finding conforms to research on working-class Latina women in the United States (Pessar, 1995a). However, this finding is inconsistent with studies on other Asian immigrant women, which indicate marital conflicts and power imbalance occur when women gain more bargaining power in their marital relation by engaging in paid work and by becoming more economically independent after immigration (Min, 2001; Lim, 1997). In a way, Fang’s experience conforms to the relative resources theory which indicates labour market participation and economic independence contribute to a fairer share of household labour (Brine, 1994) and more balanced marital power relations in the immigrant family (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994: 195), and to women’s emotional and psychological well-being (Erickson, 1993; Hochschild, 1989; Strazdins & Broom, 2004).

Consistent with the social construction of gender theory, Fang’s experience in household work also indicates that gender is not what people are, but what people practice, or do. As West and Zimmerman put it, “it is not simply that household labour is designated as ‘women’s work,’ but that for a woman to engage in it and a man not to engage in it is to draw on and exhibit the ‘essential nature’ of each” (West & Zimmerman, 1987: 144). Thus, people may be designated female or male at birth, but “doing gender” is the process by which they endorse their membership in a gender (Bowlby, Gregory, & McKie, 1997: 346).

Different power dynamics are demonstrated in this study. Manifest power surfaces when Fang’s husband legitimizes his refusal to do housework, because he feels he is entitled to be served at home after work as he is the sole provider for the family. By accepting her husband’s rationale for her sole responsibility for housework, Fang is doing subordination while her husband is doing dominance. Although she does not feel it right, Fang does not raise her voice against it partly because she does not want to cause any conflicts, or she anticipates she will not be able to win or make any change in her situation. But more importantly, due to her previous exposure to socialist ideology which emphasizes the value of paid work, Fang herself may not feel her unpaid housework valuable or important, although she sees how her unpaid work contributes greatly to the sustenance of her husband’s labour power. Fang’s silence about the unequal power relations between her and her husband reflects the invisible power embedded in her beliefs about
female gender roles and identity, which, in turn, perpetuate gender inequality and legitimize the power discrepancy between women and men (Komter, 1989: 211). As Frye (1983) notes,

For efficient subordination, what’s wanted is that the structure does not appear to be a cultural artefact kept in place by human decision or custom, but that it appears natural—that it appears to be quite a direct consequence of facts about the beast which are beyond the scope of human manipulation. (p.34)

Mei, another older woman in my interviews, serves as another example of how the loss of a professional job results in an imbalanced division of labour and power relations in her household. Like many professional women in Mainland China, Mei, a senior gynaecologist in a well-known women’s hospital in China, was highly career-oriented, and identified more with her role as an independent, professional woman than with her gender role as a wife. She hired a nanny all year round to do the housework, such as cooking, cleaning, and grocery shopping, and to take care of her mother-in-law, who had been living with her after her marriage. Mei’s major household task was to manage the household and supervise the nanny’s work.

However, Mei’s life was turned upside down after she came to Canada with her husband for his PhD studies at a Canadian university. Not only did she lose her professional job, but also the identity and social and economic status attached to her previous profession. Due to her lack of language skills in English and her transnational eldercare responsibilities for her sick parents, Mei was not able to do any full-time job. During the time she was in Canada, Mei worked on and off in a small company run by a Taiwanese Chinese. Apart from doing a part-time job during the day, and attending ESL classes at community centres and colleges in the evenings, Mei took up all the housework in her household, despite her repeated claim of dislike doing it, especially cooking (see Chapter 6 on food). When asked if her husband does any housework, Mei said, “nothing,” which was confirmed later in a separate interview with her husband. When asked if she had tried to get her husband to share the housework, Mei gave the following explanation:

I do almost all the housework, because I don’t like the housework he does. I showed him once or twice but he wouldn’t listen. That’s no way for him to change, given his age. He’s been like this, lazy, all his life…. If he washes the dishes, I have to do it all over again. So why should I waste the time teaching him?
But at the same time, Mei was extremely unhappy being solely responsible for all the housework, as she complains about it in the following paragraph:

I think unbalanced share of housework triggers many conflicts between the husband and wife. You got so irritated by doing more, and so tired of it. The more tired you are, the more you would think, “What’s the point of having a family? I would be probably enjoying more freedom if I were living by myself now.

Furthermore, with a limited social circle, Mei feels isolated for lack of compatible friends, as her co-workers are mostly Cantonese-speaking and less well-educated Chinese. Mei admits that it is harder for her to make friends in Canada, as her English is not good, and she does not want to befriend her lower-class co-workers. Mei feels very resentful when she talked about the sacrifices she made for her husband: giving up her professional job, and losing her identity as a respectable medical doctor.

Mei’s resentment and frustration was accentuated when she talked to me a month later, complaining about yet another sacrifice she had to make for her family: cancelling her newly registered courses in medical technology at a community college because her husband had completed his PhD studies and went back to China. Although unwilling to sacrifice her career again, Mei said she would join her husband soon and go back to China once she closed all her bank accounts, sold the car, returned the keys to her apartment, and most importantly, got his diploma for him!

Despite her complaints and resentment, Mei reiterates that family is the most important thing to her, and that she sees it as her wifely duty to follow her husband wherever he goes. Mei’s life story conforms to the gender ideology theory, which indicates that people with traditional gender ideology are more likely to accept a patriarchal gender relationship and an unequal division of household labour. Brought up in a traditional family, Mei was greatly influenced by the Confucian ideology that “men are superior to women,” and that it is a virtue for a woman to be submissive and self-sacrificing for the success of the husband in his career, or to ensure his authority and dominant position in the family. Meanwhile, Mei’s complaints about doing all the housework and her resentment of having to give up her own career for her husband’s (first for his study in Canada, and then for his job in China) are a form of manifest power (Komter, 1989)—a display of her dissatisfaction and an expression of her strong desire for a change.
However, her frustration and powerlessness to change her situation clearly indicate that her attempt is not successful, as her husband ignores it either through his strategic “incompetence” to learn to do housework or through his self-centred decision to return to his previous job in China after his graduation. On the other hand, by doing all the housework and by claiming the home as her domain, Mei seems to be able to reclaim some of her lost power through her “irreplaceable” roles: a caretaker, a house manager, a cook, a housecleaner, and a chauffeur. Although she may not want to be identified with any of the roles she performs, they can at least compensate for her lost social status outside of her home, and provide justification for the sacrifice she made for the family.

Feminist scholars have argued that the home is the site for the creation, reproduction, and maintenance of patriarchal relations. Due to great changes in their life and paid work after immigration, the Chinese immigrant women learned to re-do gender and relocate their gender identity through their increased household responsibilities. Consistent with feminist literature on household labour (Bowlby, Gregory, & McKie, 1997), this study indicates that accepting the unequal gender division of household work helps perpetuate patriarchy and gender inequalities within the family and in the society. But unlike most housework literature which focuses on the negative impact of unpaid work on women’s paid employment (Wong, 2005), my study on Chinese immigrant women shows how the loss of paid jobs after immigration resulted in a reversal of traditional gender roles among professional immigrant women, and how doing all the housework in some cases can help women gain some control in their households (Furst, 1997: 442).

8.3.5 “I Call My Parents Every Week.”
—Learning Kin Keeping in a Transnational Context

Kin work in this section is limited to transnational elderly care and support. I call it kin work rather than eldercare mainly because it is performed in a similar way to kin-keeping. Due to the restrictions of Canadian immigrant policy, all the Chinese immigrants in my qualitative research came to Canada with their nuclear families, leaving their elderly parents in their home country. Thus, the focus of kin work discussed in the individual interviews and the focus group are mainly around emotional care and support for their elderly back in China. As a result, the learning they reported on transnational eldercare is more emotional in nature, and thus is less associated with the physical tasks that people actually do in a “real” eldercare scenario.
Chinese culture emphasizes filial piety (xiào) that requires young children to obey their parents and adult children to support their parents when they get old, both physically and financially (Zhan, 2004). Traditionally, eldercare, an essential part of filial piety, was primarily carried out by women, daughters-in-law in particular, with sons as the ultimate financial providers (Zhan & Montgomery, 2003). Recent studies suggest that daughters are getting increasingly involved in parent care both physically and financially (Davis, 1993; Xiong, 1998), due to the social changes and economic reforms (e.g., one-child policy, domestic/national and international migration) which have changed family structures in China over the past two decades.

Researchers also find that the cultural norm of filial responsibility toward elderly parents can also migrate. A recent study involving Chinese immigrant women in Canada (Spitzer, et al., 2003) found that cultural values such as filial piety remain at the core of women’s caregiving activities, and that gender and ethnicity are more significant than social class in determining obligations felt toward caring for parents. Even in households with adequate resources, the immigrant women refuse to outsource their caregiving work/responsibilities in order to maintain their cultural values and culturally appropriate role and identity (Spitzer, et al., 2003: 268-269). The study also reveals that with fewer options to renegotiate caregiving responsibilities, women report exhaustion, ill health, anxiety, and the enormous strain of juggling the competing demands of paid employment and unpaid domestic responsibilities. However, most of the immigrant women reject the notion of caregiving as a burden. Instead, they focus on the rewarding aspects of caregiving obtained through cultural role fulfilment (Spitzer, et al., 2003: 278, 282).

Unlike the Chinese women in Spitzer et al.’s study who live in extended family households, all the Chinese respondents in my interviews, like other recent immigrants to Canada, were only allowed to immigrate with their nuclear families, leaving their elderly parents in their home country. As a result, many new immigrants find that eldercare takes on a new form, as much of the physical tasks of eldercare have diminished. Instead, transnational emotional care of the elderly, usually conducted through long-distance phone calls or emails was reported by nearly all the respondents in the interviews and the focus group. Mei’s experience in transnational eldercare well illustrates this point. During the two or three years prior to the interview, Mei had travelled back and forth several times between Canada and China, first to take care of her seriously ill mother, and later her father who had lung cancer. However, a big chunk of her eldercare responsibilities was conducted through her regular telephone calls.
I often call my brother and ask him about my father’s condition and make arrangements for his surgeries, check on the medicines they use on him and the treatment they give him. I flew back immediately whenever I learned that his condition was getting worse. That’s why I kept going back to China in the past few years, at least once a year.

For Mei, transnational eldercare involved physical, mental, and emotional efforts. According to Mei, part of her weekly routine phone calls to China also includes instructions to the live-in caregivers looking after her sick father and her mother-in-law about the housework tasks they need to complete during that week. Compared to his wife’s extensive involvement in transnational eldercare, Kai, Mei’s husband, said in a separate interview that his eldercare involvement is a daily phone call to his widowed mother to check on her situation, as she is living alone by herself in Beijing. It seemed to me that Kai’s emotion work for his mother was probably the only type of household work that he did on a regular basis, as he claimed during the interview that he did not do any other housework.

Indeed, for many of the new immigrants, calling their aged parents regularly, usually once a week, to check on their living and health conditions is an important part of their emotion work for their elderly, a way to fulfill their filial piety in a transnational context. Ying, a woman in her mid-40s and a medical doctor before immigration, talked about calling her mother every week as she had heart disease. “In China, I took (physical) care of my mother. But here I can’t. But I am worried about her. My niece is looking after my mother now. If my mother has some problem, I will call back home right away.” Ming, a man in his late 30s, described how he provided emotional support for his elderly father:

My father is old. He is living with my sister in Shanghai. He is old and has got some mental illness. Every time I call, I will talk to him. That makes him feel very happy. I always try to encourage him to do exercise to keep healthy. [I’d say] “If you cannot keep healthy, you cannot come to visit me in Canada.” That’s the way I encourage him to keep doing exercise and to overcome his illness.

Many interviewees said they called their parents regularly also because it is much cheaper to do so from Canada than from China, “I call my mom in China every weekend,” said Hua in the discussion group. “If I forget to call her, she will be just waiting there by the phone. She doesn’t want to go anywhere, just waiting for my phone call so I can talk to her.”
Guang, a 27-year-old single male, said that, rather than providing emotional support to his parents, he is on the receiving side of it, as his parents are more worried about him, as he is living alone far away from home. As a computer engineer who was unemployed at the time of the interview, Guang talked about sending text messages to his parents’ cell phone through the Internet everyday in order to keep his parents at ease and free from worrying about him. Guang’s story is another example indicating that emotion work can be done by oneself upon others as well as by others upon oneself (Hochschild, 1979).

The above examples well illustrate the non-traditional means of performing eldercare among the recent Chinese immigrants. As fewer people can afford regular visits to their parents or bringing their parents over to Canada due to financial constraints and the immigration policy, much of the eldercare activities are emotional care or support conducted through telephone calls or the Internet. In most cases, phone calls are made to aged parents and relatives who are living with or taking care of the parents, while emails and Internet chat are used more frequently for communicating with younger people, such as cousins, nephews and niece or friends.

Consistent with Di Leonardo’s (1987) research on kin work, eldercare in a transnational context requires time, energy, and skills. Like housework and childcare, eldercare is often considered women’s work (Dorazio-Migliore, 1999; Frederick & Fast, 1999), and women are thus more subject to guilt than men for not being able to provide physical care for their aged parents. Sometimes, women have to sacrifice their paid work in order to fulfill their filial responsibilities (as in the case of Mei). In the interviews, nearly all the women but none of the men expressed their sentiment of missing their parents more than before, as well as their guilt for not being able to visit and take care of them in person as they used to. “As I am so far away from my parents, there is nothing I can do for them,” said Yun, a woman in her mid-40s, who claimed not having seen her parents since she left China about five years before the interview. “I feel so guilty, so sorry for my parents who are getting older, and are in need of care from their children now,” Yun sighed. “You won’t be around when something happens to them. Everything I do is just lip-service, just phone calls.” The sentiment that Yun expressed and the ways she used in providing eldercare were not uncommon among the new immigrants in my interviews. While it may be true that women are better at expressing their emotions, it may also be highly likely that they feel more responsible than men for taking care of the elderly, which is clearly demonstrated in the
way they talked about eldercare and the many details they provided in describing the “instrumental” aspects of emotional care and supports for their elders.

8.3.6 “Calling Family and Friends Has a Therapeutic Effect on Me.” — Emotion Work for Oneself

Literature on emotion work focuses mainly on spouses and children. Little attention has been given to efforts involved in taking care of oneself or in maintaining one’s own emotional well-being. My interviews with the new Chinese immigrants suggest that while most participants learned to provide emotional support for other people, a few also tried to do so for themselves. Hong, a young wife and a new mother, said that one of the things she learned after immigration, especially after giving birth to her son, is the importance of self-care and the strategies she used to take care of herself both emotionally and physically:

Before I got married, I was like a kid, and would talk to my parents whenever a problem arose. I could also weep to myself if I felt sad. Here, nobody cares even if I cry. Sometimes, when I feel depressed, or tired because of too much housework, I will go on the Internet and read something for a change. I try to get relaxed by going to a movie, watching the TV, or by going out with my family on weekend. Sometimes I relieve my stress by reading the newspapers, or by chatting with friends on the phone.

Apart from learning emotional management, Hong also learned to reduce her stress and replenish her energy by doing physical exercises, by playing with her child at home, and even by doing housework. “Housework is a good physical exercise. It relaxes the mind and helps you forget your troubles,” said Hong. Unable to find the time to go to the gym, Hong said her regular self-care exercises include walking up the stairs instead of using the elevator when she is at school, or standing instead of sitting when taking a bus.

For Mei, who reported heavy involvement in transnational eldercare, emotion work is not a one-way effort, but reciprocal. Apart from fulfilling her filial obligation, Mei’s regular calls to China are also her major way of seeking emotional care and support from her kin whenever she feels lonely and frustrated with her life and job in Canada. “Calling families and friends back in China has a therapeutic and soothing effect on me. I spend a lot of money on telephone cards,” said Mei, who expressed strong dissatisfaction with her life after immigration as a result of quitting her professional job as a gynaecologist, and ending up doing odd jobs all the years in Canada, partly due to her transnational eldercare responsibilities:
Whenever I feel depressed, I will call my best friends, my relatives in China or elsewhere. For example, I am very close to my little aunt, my mother’s younger sister, and I call her almost every day, not only because I am lonely here at the moment, but also because I feel so disappointed with my life here and so indecisive about what to do next.

However, many of the new immigrants talked about lacking the support network they used to rely on for emotional support. Ying talked about having fewer friends to turn to for support or to release stress in time of emotional challenges. “In China, I used to talk to my friends when I felt sad. But here I don’t have many friends I can turn to for emotional support,” Ying added. “In China, when a crisis happens, I look to my friend(s), my family, my brother, my sister to help me. But here, I must rely on ourselves, my husband and me, to overcome it.” Zhong also talked about the importance of self-reliance in solving problems they have encountered in Canada. “As we are living away from parents and close friends, we have to solve our problems on our own. Sometimes, when we have problems about the job, about our future, we always recall the happy times we had in the past, or we just discuss it open-mindedly.” In addition, Zhong also mentioned releasing his life pressure and the stress from work by going out, meeting and sharing his experience with other new immigrants from different cultural backgrounds. In contrast, Yong talked about releasing or reducing his stress and life pressures by sharing them with other family members:

I used to think that it is my responsibility to take care of the financial crisis, the parents and spousal relationships. Now I’d think it’s the family’s responsibility, everyone’s responsibility, everyone involved. So I learned to do more talking, communication. I learned to express myself. Before, if I had argued with my wife, I always tried not to show my anger. I always told myself: “I can’t behave the way my wife (did). I can’t cry like a woman.” But here, I think it’s not fair. Everyone has the right to be angry, happy, or sad. It’s not a big deal [to have these emotions]. It makes me feel better to speak it out.

Learning is meaning-making and in the process of learning, the Chinese immigrants not only learned to understand and manage their own feelings they also learned to understand their own emotional needs and ways to maintain their own emotional well-being.

8.3.7 “I Learned to Enjoy Life More Than Work.”
—Learning to Improve Emotional and Spiritual Well-being

As an integral part of people’s being, feelings, thoughts, and actions (Ahmed, 2004; Goleman, 1995), emotions have a direct influence on a person’s well-being. For many new immigrants, the
process of immigration and relocation itself causes great stress, anxiety, and fears of the unknown, which may have a negative impact on emotional well-being and psychological health. Furthermore, due to structural barriers in the Canadian labour market and the Canadian society, new immigrants to Canada are faced with great difficulties in getting professional jobs equal to their levels of education, training, and work experience. As a consequence, many new immigrants experience a dramatic downward mobility in their economic resources and social status, which has repeatedly been documented as an inducing factor for a number of social and health issues, such as domestic violence, and depression (Erickson, 1993; Min, 2001; Rubin, 1983; Strazdins & Broom, 2004).

Many participants in my research talked about learning different strategies to reduce the frustration entailed in the immigration process, and to cope with the social injustices and discriminatory practices in the Canadian society and the Canadian labour market in order to achieve peace of mind and emotional balance and to maintain their emotional and spiritual well-being.

8.3.7.1 Developing New Views about Family and Work

In the 2004 Canadian Survey on Work and Lifelong Learning, there is one question related to emotion work—learning about intimate relationships. Over a third of the Chinese immigrants reported involvement in learning about intimate relationships, with men reporting slightly higher involvement (39%) than women (34%) (see Figure 3 in Chapter 5). Can we thus infer that Chinese immigrant men were more involved in doing emotion work than women? The answer is unlikely, based on my interview data. Just because they are more involved in learning about intimate relationships, it does not necessarily mean that men are more involved in doing emotion work. The slightly higher involvement of Chinese immigrant males in learning about intimate relationships may likely be associated with their increased need for mutual support and their changed view of family and work after immigration.

Nearly all the respondents in the interviews reported some changes in their views about family and work, but it was the women who talked about making efforts to strengthen intimate relationships with their spouses. Lack of a social network for emotional support from extended family and friends, coupled with the loss of a professional job, force many new immigrants to rethink about the value of family life and the meaning of paid work. Most of the women said that
they tried to maintain a good family relationship with their husbands by spending more family time together, instead of spending most of their leisure time socializing with friends and colleagues as they used to do in their home country. The following explanation from Ying, who used to be a paediatrician but now is a lab technician, is quite typical among the women in my interviews:

In China, I didn’t care much about that [family life], because everybody was busy: I was busy, my husband was busy, my son was busy. But here, as my husband does not have a job yet, we have a lot more family time together and we communicate more.

It is apparent that the increased family time is a result of a diminished social life and social network rather than an intentional effort to strengthen family relationships or to improve the quality of family life. Nonetheless, with only their nuclear families here in Canada, and with fewer friends and reduced social activities, several women see this change in their family life in a positive way. Yun, a woman in her mid-40s, commented, “In China, my husband rarely came home straight after work, but now he comes home directly from work because he does not have other places to go.”

When asked what she had learned through household work, Ling, a single, young woman in her late 20s, talked about her newly developed attitudes towards interpersonal relationships:

I didn’t do much housework before. So, I didn’t realize how time-consuming it is. Now, I’ve learned to show respect for the person who does that job. Whenever there is a conflict, I will try to put myself in their position and try to understand their action.

Despite her worry about getting a job, Ling, who had just completed her Master’s degree when I interviewed her, expressed the following changes in her view on paid work:

After I lived here for around one year, I began to change my view of life, by watching TV programs, and through my contact with the local people. I would like to enjoy life, no matter what kind of job I do. I will still try my best to do a good job, but I would like to spend the rest of my time enjoying life such as travelling and getting together with friends. But in China, even when I did a best job, I still wanted to do it better. I always focused on how I could do better in my job.

While Ling attributes her changed perceptions on work to the influence of the media and her contact with the local people, Juan claims that she has become less ambitious, and has lower
expectations for a paid job after many failed attempts in getting a professional job. As a college professor prior to immigration, Juan said that she used to think more about her career, her position, and her professional title. But now, working as a part-time sales clerk at a supermarket despite a diploma from a Canadian college, Juan said what she wants most is just a stable job and a simple life. Ying, a medical doctor and professor in China, but a lab technician in Canada, shared a similar view. “Before, I used to focus more on money and fame. But in Canada, I think health and enjoying life are more important.” After many vain endeavours and a couple of odd job experiences, Fang describes to me her new understanding of what a “decent” job is in the discussion group:

In China, my husband and I were university and college professors. When we came here, we could only find some menial jobs, because our language is not good. My husband worked as a maintenance person (in a Chinese church). I did some odd jobs, like cashier, and paid housework, such as cleaning, taking care of disabled people. Now, I have changed my view of work. For example, it would be unimaginable if I worked as a street sweeper in China. Now, I don’t care about it that much. I do my job, get my pay, and live the way I want. Now, I have the freedom to choose my job and friends. I don’t have the pressure to do the “right thing.”

While Fang’s newly acquired perception about paid job, especially about blue-collar jobs, may be influenced by the less discriminatory view about menial labour in Canada, it may also be closely related to her dim prospect of getting a professional job after immigration. Based on what she said in the above quote, it is doubtful that she has the “freedom” to choose her life and her job. To me, the only freedom of choice she has is either to do household work for other people for pay or to stay at home doing all the household work without pay. However, the seeming freedom and choices expressed by Fang may likely be her strategy to cope with her disappointing situation after immigration. In the following section, we are going to see more about the ways/strategies professional immigrants have used to cope with their disappointment and frustration with their surviving jobs and their helplessness to change the current situation due to structural barriers and discrimination in the Canadian labour market against immigrant professionals.

8.3.7.2 Learning to See Oneself Differently

The challenges of getting stable, lucrative jobs equal to their education and professional training have led some of the new immigrants to emphasize the need to work harder, and others to view themselves differently, often in a negative way, with regard to their ability and self-esteem. This
is what Ying said in the discussion group, “In China, I was proud of myself because I had a good job. But here I am nobody. I must work harder, and start from the bottom.” Zhong, who used to be an engineer, mocked his new identity as a menial labourer. “In China, I was a well-educated person. But here I am nothing. A PhD? It just means ‘Pizza Hut Deliverer’ (laugh). It’s nothing.”

According to Jie, a computer engineer, “Immigration is like a revolution,” as it has dramatically changed her life, her belief about fate, and her view about herself and about the meaning of life. Graduated from one of the top universities in China, and having lived in Japan for several years and worked in an international company in Shanghai before coming to Canada in 2001, Jie strongly believed in meritocracy and was confident about her ability in her work. However, Jie was greatly shocked and her self-esteem deeply hurt when she was laid off shortly after she landed her first job after immigration:

I used to think I could control everything. I could do whatever I wanted to do. But here, after I immigrated, I find I even have to learn (English) from my kid. Life is not as easy as before, especially the job. You never know when you will be laid off again. Before, I thought I am capable, I am in control of myself, and that I can do whatever I want to do. But here it’s different. I cannot get the job (laugh) even if I want it. I have no control over my life.

Jie’s changed views are not hard to understand given a series of incidents that happened in her life after immigration: her husband, who was also a computer engineer, went back to China because he could not find a job in Canada, her mother died one year before the interview, she was diagnosed with a serious health problem after her son was born, and she had to juggle her sole-household responsibility and her demanding job in an IT company. As a consequence, Jie became very pessimistic about life, and turned to the church for consolation and sought the meaning of life through religious faith. Her pessimism about life can be felt in the following quote:

Believing in God, and from the experiences, I kind of think maybe we are just the worms, a small part of God’s big plan. Before [in China], I thought myself important and wanted to realize my value. But now I think I am not that important because I cannot control my life by myself. I don’t think I am worth anything. Now, I am more concerned about my son’s life and how my life will affect his life.
Clearly, Jie’s negative view about life and about her intellectual ability came from the challenges she experienced in her daily life and in her paid and unpaid work. Jie’s newly developed faith in God, and her reliance on the church for comfort and solutions to all her troubles, is not uncommon among new immigrants. Research on immigrants’ religious participation indicate that new immigrants often turn to church for emotional support when they come to a new culture, and many also use the church as a venue to connect with other immigrants from their own culture, to get information about jobs and settlement, and to attend programs and classes offered by the church (e.g. ESL classes, Bible study groups) (Han, 2007; Min, 1992; Ng, Man, Shan, & Liu, 2007). Often women are more likely than men to be involved in religious participation (Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2000, 2002; Lin, 1996; Min, 1992, 2000; Warner & Wittner, 1998).

Consistent with the literature on immigrants’ religious participation, findings from the WALL Survey indicate that, compared to their Canadian-born, white immigrant, and other non-white immigrant counterparts, Chinese immigrant women and men show the largest discrepancy in learning involved in spirituality and religion, with women reporting much higher participation rates (54%) than men (29%) (see Figure 3 in Chapter 5). However, my qualitative data does not seem to support this finding. My interviews indicate that Chinese immigrant males are equally, if not more, involved as their female counterparts in learning about new meaning of life, and in improving their spiritual well-being through contact with the church, although they may not be as actively involved in church activities as women do (Lim; 1997; Lin, 1996; Min, 2000, 2001).

8.3.7.3 Searching for New Meanings of Life

Compared with Jie, who became very pessimistic about life and fate due to a series of events and changes in her life, most of the new immigrants, nonetheless, are optimistic about their future, and hold positive views about themselves and the meaning of life. Here is a quote from Yong, talking about what he has learned about himself and about the meaning of life:

Before immigration, I always thought that, if I try hard enough, there is nothing I cannot do and there is no goal I cannot achieve. Now, I realize it’s totally not like that. You need the opportunity, the patience.... In China, I believe that the value of my life is to work and I try to show my ability and my worth through my work. Now, I’d say life is to understand yourself, what you are, who you are and what you want, and what you like. Life is learning. But before, I thought I had learned enough.
Several other new immigrants talked about going to church in search of new meaning of life after immigration. Here is a quote from Zhong:

Now I am reflecting on my life, looking back, and looking forehead [forward], what I am, what is the purpose of my life, of my family. Sometimes I go to church, to learn more about the Bible, about Jesus, about life.

Several respondents also offered an explanation for the changes in their views. Just as Yong and many other respondents revealed in the interviews, paid work used to be the centre of their lives before immigration. Their social lives were work-oriented and they found the meaning of life and self-actualization through their paid work. However, when they came to Canada, particularly after they have experienced all the challenges in the Canadian labour market, and/or have had more contacts with the local people, and got to know more about the Canadian culture, they gradually shifted the centre of their lives from the public sphere of work to the private sphere of home and family. This shift is partly due to their efforts to integrate into the mainstream culture, but largely due to their inability to get a professional job in Canada. Many Chinese immigrants feel that, despite the huge efforts they have made in overcoming challenges in language and culture, there are certain structural barriers in the Canadian labour market, such as non-recognition of foreign credentials and foreign work experiences, which are far beyond their control. Frustrated and powerless as they are, many respondents find it easier to change themselves and their views about paid work and the meaning of life rather than to change what seems to them “the impossible”—changing for a professional job in their trained field.

8.4 Gender, Emotion Work, and Emotional Learning

Research indicates that emotion work was more closely linked to the construction of gender than were housework and child care, and that husbands and wives perform family work in ways that facilitate culturally appropriate constructions of gender (Erickson, 2005: 348). For a woman, providing emotional support to her husband was an integral part of her family work role. In contrast, men construed their performance of emotion work as merely part of their interpersonal relationship with their wives, not as part of how they constructed themselves in agentive terms (Erickson, 2005: 348).

Compared with the WALL Survey, which indicates that Chinese women and men are close in participation rates in learning about intimate relationships, my interview data indicate that it was
almost always the women who talked about providing emotional support to their husbands and children, while the men rarely mentioned anything directly related to emotional support for their wives. While two male respondents viewed doing more housework as a means of emotional care for their wives, women were more likely to view it as their duty to take up more housework and child care responsibility after immigration. Women talked about becoming more aware of the importance of mutual emotional support between spouses in the absence of kin and friends in a new country. They also talked about changing their attitudes and behaviours towards their husbands, such as becoming more tolerant with their husbands, and giving more consideration to their husbands’ feelings and self-esteem as a way to avoid and resolve conflicts. While a couple of the males talked about spending more time communicating with their wives, none of them talked about learning emotional management as a way of resolving spousal conflicts. Actually, one male respondent said he learned to express his anger after immigration instead of hiding it as he used to, whereas a female respondent said her husband became less easy-going, and more demanding of her to improve her English and to learn a new trade, as she could no longer find a job in her field of computer engineering.

In contrast to the large gender differences in emotion work for spouses, nearly all the Chinese immigrants in my interviews, both males and females, reported involvement in some forms of eldercare despite the fact that nearly all of them live far away from their parents (the only exception was Hong, who had her mother-in-law in Canada for about six months, taking care of her baby son). This finding differs sharply with the WALL Survey in which only 19 percent of the Chinese immigrant men and 15 percent of the women reported involvement in eldercare. Although many women in the interviews talked about reduced work in eldercare, due to the absence of extended families in the host country, none of the males made a similar claim, probably because they had rarely been as involved in the physical care of their elderly as their female counterparts had prior to immigration. As eldercare takes on new forms, that is, as eldercare becomes more emotional in nature (or “lip-service”), and is conducted mainly through long-distance phone calls, learning involved in the emotional dimension of eldercare also becomes obscured and less visible, especially for those (mostly women) who used to be more involved in the physical care of their parents. This may partly explain why fewer Chinese immigrant women in the WALL Survey reported learning about eldercare than their male counterparts (23% for men versus 14% for women) (see Figure 1 in Chapter 5). That is also the
reason why I chose the term “kin work” or “kin-keeping” to address the care for the elderly in a transnational context.

As a result of the non-traditional nature of eldercare, learning involved in emotional eldercare becomes obscured. As most of the interviewees were not directly involved in eldercare, their learning, therefore, was not directly related to the specific tasks of eldercare, either. Among those who talked about learning about eldercare, their focus was often on learning to find various kinds of affordable ways to cut down the cost for international calls, for example, where to buy cheap phone cards, which phone cards have better voice quality, and which software is easier to use for Internet-to-telephone calls. In one instance, a woman talked about expressing her good wishes for her parents and in-laws by setting up a shrine in her own home, where she performs rituals to commemorate the deceased and prays for the survivors whenever she learns that they are not feeling well (also see the spiritual dimension of food-related work in Chapter 6). These findings from my qualitative data may help explain why Chinese immigrant women in the WALL Survey reported much lower participation rates (14%) in eldercare related learning in comparison to the rates of their female counterparts in the Canadian-born (25%), the white immigrant (29%), and other non-white immigrant subgroups (35%) (see Appendix VI).

Similar to learning involved in food and childcare, emotion work-related learning is informal, experiential, and gendered, with men reporting more involvement in learning emotional care and support for the elderly, and with women involved in both emotional control and management in conflict resolution, in addition to emotional care support for spouses, children, and the elderly. While many of the women attributed the changes in conflict resolution to immigration, a few others gave more credit to getting older in age for their changed behaviours. Overall, women’s learning is closely related with their gender roles and identities as wife and mother, and as the primary caregivers in eldercare, even when their elderly is physically absent from their daily life.

Gender and power relations play an important role among the immigrant couples in their family decisions on who is going to stay in Canada to take care of the children, and whose career should be prioritized. My research shows that if the decision and the application for immigration were done by the women, nearly all the husbands returned to China after their landing (as in the case of Juan, Lisha, and Jie, the three lone mothers in my interviews). If the husbands were the principal applicants for immigration, which was the case with most of the participants in my
qualitative research, their wives all came and stayed, no matter how reluctantly some of them did it and how unhappy they were with the consequences of the immigration—the loss of their career. Furthermore, whenever there is a conflict between paid and unpaid work, it is usually women who sacrifice their career for their family responsibilities (as in the case of Mei and Fang), whereas men usually do the opposite—they sacrifice their family life for their career (as in the case of the three lone mothers in my interviews).

8.5 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the emotion work among the new Chinese immigrants in Canada. It highlighted the fact that emotion work is deeply embedded in the daily routines of food work (e.g., cooking, meal planning and grocery shopping) and carework (e.g., childcare, parenting, and eldercare) and thus is inseparable from them. This chapter examined both the work and learning involved in emotional care and support, and the management of undesirable emotions. My research expands on the current literature on emotion work by including emotion work for oneself, in addition to emotional care and support for spouses and children. In this chapter, I also examined another type of emotion work performed by the immigrants—transnational kin work or kin maintenance, by focusing on the emotional care and support for the elderly who were left behind in their home country. I have shown that emotional care and support is not unilateral, but reciprocal, which contributes to the mutual emotional well-being of those involved in such work.

In my examination of marital relations and the coping strategies for conflict resolution, I have shown how traditional patriarchal ideologies about femininity and masculinity, coupled with the loss of social and economic resources, leads to a power imbalance and widening gaps in the gender division of household work among some immigrant couples.

Consistent with literature on emotion work, this study demonstrated that emotion work is a highly gendered process. Due to their position of social subordination, women perform the bulk of emotional care and support for their spouses but are less likely to receive equal spousal support in time of need. While men talk about doing more housework as a means of emotional support for their spouses, women consider it their duty to take up more domestic labour and child care. Women tend to compromise as a means of emotional support, while men do not seem to make similar efforts/attempts on their part. Furthermore, women are more likely to sacrifice their career for their family responsibilities, whereas men often sacrifice their family for their career. Thus, like other scholars on emotion work (Hochschild, 1983; Field & Malcolm, 2009), I argue
that the way women perform emotion work and the “soft” skills they learned and used in emotion management are not “naturally” feminine in nature, but rather they arise from gendered processes of socialization as well as from the process of doing gender through daily household work. For some women, the process of learning to do emotion work is also a process of learning to do gender and to do subordination. Due to the loss of a professional job, women learned to accept the consequences of an imbalanced power relation in the family—becoming economically dependent, losing the bargaining power for an equal share of household work, as well as losing the high social status and respect they used to enjoy in their home country.

My research with the Chinese immigrants has also made visible some of the strategies they used in coping with the social injustices they encountered outside their home—the larger Canadian society. Many of the participants talked about developing new views about work, family, and the meaning of life, as well as learning new insight about themselves, their values, and their capacity to maintain their emotional and spiritual well-being. However, much of the learning and the changes in attitudes towards family, work, and the meaning of life are largely the result of structural barriers (e.g., sexism, racism, and un-recognition of foreign credentials and foreign work experience, etc.) that prevent new immigrants from full participation in the public sphere. Learning to enjoy family life more than paid work, and learning to lower one’s goals for life achievement may be partly a result of new immigrants’ desire and effort to integrate into the Canadian culture, but to a greater extent, it is a compromise to the reality of life, and to the social injustices they encounter in the Canadian society. It is also an expression of their helplessness in changing the situation. Thus, developing a more philosophical view of life in order to maintain their emotional well-being and spiritual health and well-being is vital for their survival in their new home country.
Chapter 9 Conclusion

9.1 Introduction

This dissertation began with my own story on how I got involved in the research on household work. At the beginning of the three qualitative data chapters, a personal narrative related to the topic of the chapter was added, which illustrated some of the changes and the learning process I went through as a researcher and as a new immigrant woman in my own household responsibilities in food work, childcare/parenting, and emotion work.

Guided by a new definition of household work developed by the research team of the Household Work and Lifelong Learning Project, this dissertation explored the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of household work and the related learning. Mixed methods, both qualitative and quantitative, were used in my data collection, and complementary data were obtained from a National Survey on Work and Lifelong Learning (WALL), individual interviews, a focus group, and a discussion group with new Chinese immigrants in the Greater Toronto Area. A gender-based analysis was conducted in order to understand and explain the household work, the learning attached to it, and the various ways to acquire that learning. In addition to a general review of the literatures on Chinese immigrants in Canada, household work, and lifelong learning, I also provided a review of literatures specifically related to food work, childcare/parenting, and emotion work within each of these chapters. I made a special effort to include discussions on Chinese immigrant women in related literatures. In doing so, I intended to bring together the voluminous but diverse and separate literatures to inform my multidisciplinary research on Chinese immigrants, household work, and lifelong learning.

This dissertation documented some of the changes the Chinese immigrants experienced in three areas of household work: food work, childcare/parenting, and emotion work, as well as the learning they engaged in while adapting to the changes in their new home country. In doing so, it highlighted the influences of gender ideology, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and social-class status on the gender division of household work and on the content and means of learning. Through the examination of the changes and the learning involved in household work, this dissertation unveiled an important aspect of immigrants’ life and settlement experience: unpaid
work and informal learning, which have so far been undervalued and underexplored in immigrant literature. By focusing on both the unpaid work and the learning, this study took a step further to a different, broader, and more comprehensive understanding of household work and lifelong learning. By examining three different types or areas of household work: housework (food-related), childcare, and emotion work, this study demonstrated the inseparability of work (unpaid), care, and emotion, which had often been segregated and treated by researchers as if they were independent of one another (Eichler & Albanese, 2007). By exploring the various dimensions of work and the related learning, this study sheds light on the interconnections between the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of efforts involved in performing each aspect of household work. However, these interconnections have not received equal attention, as researchers focused more on the physical or “instrumental” tasks, ignoring the less visible, or “expressive” aspects of human life and activities (Erickson, 1993, 2005). By making visible both the work and the related learning, this study also helps make visible the value of the unpaid work and the learning involved in it. In doing so, I join other feminist scholars in arguing that household work is work (Daniel, 1987; Di Leonardo, 1987; Ferree, 1990; Oakley, 1974; Erickson, 1993; Thompson & Walker, 1989), and that the learning involved in household work is lifelong as well as lifewide (Gouthro, 2005; Eichler, et al., 2010).

This chapter summarizes the methodological and theoretical approaches and the major empirical findings of this dissertation. At the end of this chapter, I discuss the significance and limitations of my research, followed by some suggestions for future research.

9.2 Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Research Methods

In the past few decades, two major methods have been used to collect data and to measure household work: a. quantitative methods, usually through large-scale surveys or time diaries, that measure the time devoted to a list of selected household activities such as cooking, laundry and cleaning, shopping, childcare, gardening, home repair, etc. (Baxter, 1997; Brines, 1994; Candler, 1994; Coltrane, 1996; Ironmonger, 1996; Shelton & John, 1996; Sullivan, 1997); b. qualitative methods, often through in-depth interviews or direct observations, that provide more detailed description and analysis of the interconnections between household work, family life, and social relations (DeVault, 1991; Hochschild, 1989; Luxton, 1980; Wharton, 1994). While each research method contributes to our understanding of the nature of household work, each has its
limitations. While large-scale surveys make possible the comparisons of large numbers of people and statistical investigations of patterns and correlations, in-depth interviews are effective in eliciting considerable depth and complexity. However, these methods are rarely used together despite appeals from feminist researchers for combining the two methods in order to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of gendered work and its impact on the construction of gender and gender relations (Luxton, 1997; Luxton & Corman, 2001; Peters, 1997).

As part of a large research network on The Changing Nature of Work and Lifelong Learning (WALL), this dissertation used mixed research methods, both quantitative and qualitative, by drawing on data from a large-scale Canadian Survey on Work and Lifelong Learning (n=9,063), semi-structured individual interviews (n=20), and group interviews (one focus group and one discussion group) with new Chinese immigrants (within five years of residence in Canada) in the Greater Toronto Area. Unlike the monolithic method used in most of the research on household work, the mixed methods approach gave me both breadth and depth in my research on household work and lifelong learning among the Chinese immigrants. It allowed me to examine my research questions from multiple perspectives and positions. By comparing the Chinese immigrants with their Canadian-born, white, and other non-white immigrant counterparts in their weekly hours devoted to household work and the related learning, the WALL Survey data helped situate my qualitative research on new Chinese immigrants in a larger picture of the Canadian context. It also permitted me to compare the similarities and differences between women and men within the Chinese group in what they do and learn through household work. The qualitative data through individual and small group interviews, in contrast, enabled me to explore in-depth the process of work and learning involved in food work, childrearing, and emotion work, which can hardly be measured by the quantitative method. Furthermore, the multiple sets of data complemented each other in expanding our knowledge and understanding of the complexity of household work and the related learning involved in its various dimensions: physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. More importantly, it allowed me to explore the causes and consequences of changes in household work after immigration, the knowledge and skills they learned to adapt to the changes in the Canadian society, the various ways and strategies they employed to acquire the learning, as well as the new views and identities they developed through food work, childcare/parenting, and emotion work.
9.3 Bringing Together Household Work, Lifelong Learning and Chinese Immigrants

Literature on housework has so far mainly focused on the gender division of labour. Different theories (e.g. gender construction; economic and exchange perspectives, socialist-feminist theories, etc.) have been developed to explain the causes and consequences of the imbalanced division of labour between women and men and social relations (West & Zimmerman, 1987; Brines, 1993; Hartmann, 1981). Different methods (e.g., time diaries, surveys, in-depth interviews, and participation observations) (Coltrane, 2000; Luxton, 1997) have been used to measure gender disparities in various types of household activities (e.g., cooking, cleaning, and shopping, childcare) based on a number of factors, such as women’s employment, ideology, earnings, as well as age, marital status, and children. Different types of households have been studied and compared, with most of the research focus on married, heterosexual couples in industrialized countries (Baxter, 1997; Coltrane & Ishii-Kuntz, 1992; DeVault, 1991; Hochschild, 1989).

However, only limited research has incorporated race, ethnicity, and immigration into the gender division of labour. Research on race/ethnicity and housework in the United States has compared black women and men with their white counterparts (John & Shelton, 1997; Orbuch & Eyster, 1997). Studies have also been found on household work in working-class Latino immigrant families in the United States (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992; Pessar, 1995a). Canadian studies on ethnicity and housework are sparse compared to the proliferation of literature on housework research. Research on recent Chinese immigrants has grown rapidly over the past decades, but most of the studies concentrated on immigrants’ economic performances (Li, 2003b; Li & Dong, 2007; Wang & Lo, 2005; Zong, 2004), the structural barriers to accessing the Canadian labour market (Han, 2007; Man, 2004; Ng, Man, Shan, & Liu, 2007; Zhu, 2005), and the redress of discriminative laws against earlier Chinese immigrants to Canada (Li, 2005).

In the dominant discourse of lifelong learning, learning is almost equivalent to credential-related formal education or training, and knowledge and skills are implicitly understood as the knowledge and skills required by the labour market for economic competitiveness (Collins, 2003; Edwards, 2000; Field & Leicester, 2000). Learning taken place outside of educational institutions for non-paid work, such as informal learning in the homeplace (Gouthro, 1998, 2005).
and through unpaid household work has largely been ignored and undervalued (Eichler, 2007; Eichler, et al., 2010).

My research is among the few case studies that focus on the Chinese immigrants, unpaid household work (Man, 1997; Salaff & Greve, 2004; Wan, 2003; Waters, 2002). It is also among the first of its kind to combine housework, carework and emotion work in its examination and to explore extensively the learning involved in each of these household activities. This section summarizes some of the empirical findings from my research on Chinese immigrants, unpaid household work, and lifelong learning.

9.3.1 Household Work Is Not Static but Constantly Changing

Unlike most of the empirical studies on housework, which assume that housework remains relatively stable across time by focusing on a set of repetitive, low-skilled tasks (see Eichler & Albanese, 2007 for a critique of empirical studies on housework), my research with the Chinese immigrants suggests that household work is not static but changes with major life transitions such as international migration. Although performed on a daily basis, and often considered mundane, household work changes dramatically after immigration, not only in quantity but also in quality. For example, the Chinese immigrants in the interviews reported not only cooking more, but also cooking different types of food and in different ways. There is even a big change in where, what, how, and how often grocery shopping is done. Similarly, significant changes are also reported in practices of childcare and parenting, and in ways of performing emotion work, largely due to the sudden decline in their social and economic situations for paid and unpaid work, and the lack of social support for housework and carework. By exploring the changes, it helps make visible the enormous amount of work, the content of learning, as well as the forms of learning the new immigrants used to cope with the changes and to make the needed adjustments in their new home country.

9.3.2 Household Work is Work and thus, the Learning is Work-Related

Feminist scholars have long argued that housework is work in order to make the work and the value visible and recognized (Delphy, 1984; DeVault, 1991; Oakley, 1974; Eichler & Matthews, 2007; Eichler & Albanese, 2007). This dissertation contributes to this body of literature by demonstrating and arguing that household work is work, although many people, especially
women, do it without pay. Highlighting this point is of special significance to the new Chinese immigrants because most of them, unlike other women in the Household Work Project, initially failed to see their unpaid household responsibilities as work but rather as part of their wifely duties. Due to the State’s emphasis on paid work to gender equality and to women’s emancipation and the significant social meanings attached to paid work in their home country, unpaid household work was devalued, and the person who performed it discriminated against. By participating in the household work project, and by discussing their unpaid work with the researchers and their fellow immigrants, many of the Chinese women realized for the first time how vital their unpaid work is to their family’s survival and well-being and to the reproduction of their culture and ethnic identity.

By arguing that household work is work, my research takes a step further to argue that learning involved in household tasks is and should also be regarded as work-related. I believe this argument is important in helping make visible the unpaid work, its social value and worth, and the learning involved in it. As Butler (1993) notes, “women cannot attempt to claim credit or reward for competence which they do not even know they possess” (p.80). Furthermore, by blurring the boundary of paid and unpaid work, it also helps to legitimize the recognition of unpaid work-related skills, such as organization and management skills, and to pave the way for knowledge transfer across the work and non-work boundaries. For instance, in my interviews, some immigrant women said their experiences and skills in caring for a paralyzed in-law at home in China and in taking care of their own children helped them land paid jobs in nursing homes, or in daycare centres in Canada (which are usually highly gendered, racialized, and immigrant-centred occupations, though). Two Chinese immigrant males said that their improved cooking skills may broaden their job opportunities and that they may think about opening their own restaurant if they cannot find a job in their trained profession or if they lose their current jobs.

Despite learning specific skills useful for paid jobs, many Chinese immigrants reported learning patience, compassion, optimism, and positive attitudes in emotion management, in handling challenges they encountered in the process of settlement, and in getting along with their colleagues of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Many women, especially those with young children, reported learning organizational and time management skills as well as prioritization and self-care skills, which were also echoed by many other participants in the Household Work Project (Eichler, forthcoming). In contrast to the currently prevailing view that
unpaid household work has a negative impact on paid work, this study provides evidence that knowledge and skills acquired through unpaid work may have potential positive benefits for the paid labour market, which awaits further exploration.

9.3.3 Learning is Lifelong and Lifewide

In this dissertation, I have demonstrated through the WALL Survey and the individual and small group interviews that learning is embedded in a variety of household activities, from the routine tasks of cooking and childcare, to the less visible tasks of meal planning, budgeting and financial management, and to organizational and management skills. Through household work, many Chinese immigrants also reported learning new knowledge and skills about food and cooking, new beliefs and practices about childcare and parenting, and new ways of emotional care and support and emotion management. More significantly, through their household work-related learning, many Chinese immigrants gained new insights about family, work, self, and about the meaning of life.

By examining the learning involved in household work among the Chinese immigrants, I join a few other researchers (Eichler, et al., 2010; Gouthro, 2005) in arguing that learning is not only lifelong, but also lifewide, taking place in the private home, and through unpaid tasks and activities. In addition, my research concurs with a few other studies in revealing that what people learn and how they learn is influenced by gender, class, and ethnicity/culture (Leathwood, 2006; Mojab, 2006). By exploring the learning involved in unpaid household work, my research expands the scope of lifelong learning from its narrow focus on formal education and learning for credentials and the labour market to informal learning or learning in informal contexts, as much of the learning in the homeplace, through unpaid household work, is self-directed, and experiential, that is, learning by doing. While some of the learning was intentional and voluntary—driven by personal interests or motivation to integrate into the Canadian culture and society, other learning was done involuntarily—compelled by a downward mobility in social and economic situations after immigration.

9.3.4 Making Visible the Diverse Ways of Learning

Mainstream literature on lifelong learning has been criticized for its neo-liberal agenda that overemphasizes knowledge and skills, that is, the content and quantity of learning, for economic gains (Leathwood, 2006; Mojab, 2009), and for its lack of attention to the quality of what is
learned (Illeris, 2003: 405). One shortcoming I found with lifelong learning literature is the lack of attention to how people learn, especially in informal learning for unpaid work. An important effort I made in my research was to explore the diverse ways the new Chinese immigrants employed to acquire the learning involved in food work, childcare/parenting, and emotion work.

While many of them could easily tell me what they learned in their unpaid household activities, the Chinese immigrants had great difficulty in recognizing how they learned what they learned. In many cases, they simply said, “You don’t have to learn, you just do it.” In other cases, they would say, “It is not what you learn, but how the society makes you do like that.” Very often, it was only after some probing that the Chinese immigrants began to see the various ways in which they gained the knowledge, skills, or understanding they had reported. Here is a summary of their reported ways of learning:

- Learning from friends, colleagues, neighbours, or roommates for daily routine work such as cooking, cleaning, shopping, home maintenance/repair, childcare.
- Learning new foods through social gatherings such as picnics, or potlucks, by dining out in restaurants, by following recipes from cooking books, newspapers, TV programs, and magazines. Many Chinese immigrants also talked about acquiring information on food as well as spreading Chinese food culture through the Internet.
- Learning from professionals, friends, seminars, and the community centers for tips on budgeting and financial management.
- Learning from TV, newspapers, the Internet, magazines and/or books for social, political, and environmental issues.
- Learning from schools, classes, friends, and the public media for improving English language skills, and for information on educational systems and cultural traditions and customs.
- Learning from personal experience, the people around them, as well as the media for new ways to maintain contact with distant family members or friends, to provide emotional support, and to solve conflicts/crises.
- Learning about a new meaning of life through the contact with the church or faith groups.
- While some said they learned from workshops about time management, and from their colleagues about ways of planning and organizing things, others simply said “It happened naturally, just by doing it.”
It is worth noting that all my respondents were well-educated professionals in their home country. Many had science and engineering backgrounds. As a result, the ways they learned in unpaid housework and carework were diverse, and relatively hi-tech. The Internet, for instance, has been mentioned by nearly all my respondents as one of the most important sources of information on child benefits and health, for cooking recipes, for news, entertainment, job search and job applications, as well as for maintaining contact with family and friends back in China.

By exploring the various strategies they used to cope with their deteriorated social and economic resources for food work and childcare, and to adapt to new situations for parenting and transnational eldercare, this study indicates that learning is not an option but a necessity for the new immigrants. They need to develop their knowledge about the Canadian society and culture and Canadian ways of childcare and parenting. Knowing where and how to find this information are essential skills for the new immigrants to survive in the new culture. Thus, learning through unpaid work should be treated as equally important as learning for paid work, because knowing how to survive the challenges and difficulties in their domestic world is fundamental to any other learning for the labour market.

9.3.5 Gendered Learning Involved in Household Work

So far, feminist researchers on lifelong learning have mainly focused on the cost and unequal accesses for women to participate in job-related, formal training and education (Leathwood & Francis, 2006). Research on learning for unpaid work, especially empirical research on unpaid work-related learning, is scarce. My research on Chinese immigrants, household work, and lifelong learning is part of a joined group effort in unveiling the invisible learning involved in a highly gendered field of work (Eichler, et al., 2010).

Concurring with other feminist research on lifelong learning (Leathwood & Francis, 2006), this dissertation showed that learning through household work is gendered. For instance, in the WALL Survey, Chinese immigrant women reported higher participation rates in learning some of the “female” tasks such as food and cooking and organizational and management skills. Chinese women also reported more involvement in learning health and well being, language, and spirituality. In contrast, Chinese men reported higher involvement in learning some of the “male” tasks such as home renovation and gardening, home repair, as well as in learning about computer, and science and technology.
Interviews with individuals and the focus group indicated that gender, as well as class and ethnicity, played a role in what people learned and how they learned. Although both women and men reported an increase in food work and childcare, women were more involved in learning the more time-consuming, less visible, tasks of food preparation and feeding the children, while men were more involved in learning to cook their favourite food, and in learning new ways to help their children with their school work. As highly educated, middle-class professionals, many immigrant parents were very concerned about their children’s education and were very much involved in their children’s school work. However, more women than men found language a big barrier in finding jobs, in helping their children with their school work, and in accessing the mainstream sources of information about childrearing, child benefits, and childcare services. Women relied more on friends, extended family, and the Chinese media for information and help, and reported more compromises or changes in themselves as a way to avoid or solve conflicts with other family members and with people outside their community. Men, on the other hand, felt more ambivalent as to how to discipline their children properly in a Canadian context, and resorted more to professional help for financial advice on investment for old-age and for future child education. Apart from the above differences, however, no other marked gender differences were found in the overall pattern of how men and women know and learn, given the unpaid, feminine nature of household work and the homogeneous ethnic and educational backgrounds of the participants in this study.

In addition to gender, this dissertation also shows that age, language skills, and contact with the local people also seemed to play a role in what people learn. Older women and mothers with very young children seemed to be more concerned about food and nutrition, and more involved in learning about healthy food and healthy ways of preparing food. People who are more fluent in English, or have more contact with people outside the Chinese community, reported more diversity in their diet, more involvement in their children’s education, and said they felt more positive about what they had learned than those who had limited English, and little or no contact with people beyond their own ethnic community.

9.3.6 Things That They Should Not Have Learned

This dissertation provides ample evidence that much of the household work-related learning that these Chinese immigrants undertook is closely associated with their declining economic situation and lack of a social support system after immigration. Although most of them were engineers,
medical doctors, university/college teachers, or administrators before immigration, none of the Chinese immigrants, women or men, were able to find professional jobs equivalent to their education. Many ended up doing manual labour in factories or earning minimum wage in the service sector. Several interviewees were re-schooling themselves in a field unrelated to their previous professions. A few were unemployed at the time of their interviews.

The sudden increase in household work and carework added new challenges and prompted new learning among the new Chinese immigrants in order to adjust to their changed social and economic situations in the host country. Nonetheless, some of their learning should not have happened. For example, what if their foreign credentials were recognized? If so, many of these new immigrants would not have to go back to school to be re-trained in a completely different profession. They would probably be able to get more lucrative jobs rather than minimum-wage employment so as to maintain a standard of living similar to that in China. This would include the ability to afford to buy prepared foods, or to eat out in restaurants when needed, thus reducing their burden of food work, and allowing more time for them to explore other ethnic food, and to learn more information on healthy food and practices. Without having to worry about making ends meet on meagre wages, these new immigrants, especially women, would feel less pressured and less stressed to economize. If they did not have to spend much time on learning to cook everything from scratch, the new immigrants would have more time for themselves, their children, to learn English, and to become more familiar with Canadian culture and society. They would probably have more resources for leisure activities such as going to the movies/theatre, travelling with family, or learning new hobbies and sports (e.g., skating, skiing, and camping), which are part of the Canadian dream for many new immigrants to Canada.

If the new Chinese immigrants were given equal job opportunities, there would be fewer “lone mothers,” whose husbands would not have to leave Canada to look for jobs elsewhere. The “lone mothers,” therefore, would not have learned to raise their children on their own or to buy the cheapest groceries available, which might not be healthy for their children and themselves. Finally, many of the professional women who sacrificed their careers to come with their husband to Canada would not have to learn to accept their reversed traditional gender roles as housewives; or to accept the unequal division of domestic labour as “natural,” due to their loss of status and power in the family.
9.4 Significance and Limitations

9.4.1 Significance

My doctoral research on recent Chinese immigrants and their lifelong learning experience through unpaid household work is significant in the following aspects:

First, this study contributes to the WALL project and its sub-project on household work by providing a unique perspective through the eyes of the recent immigrants from Mainland China. By focusing on food work, childcare/parenting, and emotion work, this study expands the scope and dimensions of research on household work, with no intention to glorify it. By exploring the knowledge and skills involved in household work, this dissertation takes a step further in making both the unpaid work and the related learning visible, recognized, and valued. In doing so, it bridges the gaps in literatures and contributes to a broader and more comprehensive understanding of household work and lifelong learning.

Second, this study demonstrates that cross-cultural immigration is an important learning process, and that household work involves learning knowledge and skills essential to cope with changes in the new culture and society. By focusing on informal, self-directed, and experiential learning involved in various dimensions of food work, carework, and emotion work, this study indicates that learning is both lifelong and lifewide, and that learning to adapt to changes in household work, especially in food work, childcare/parenting, and emotion work, is an inseparable part of immigrants’ learning experience in their new home country.

Third, by focusing on their personal experiences of work and learning in the domestic sphere, my research gives a voice to the recent Mainland Chinese immigrants, the largest immigrant group to come to Canada in the past decade. By showing that housework is work and that household work-related learning is work-related, this study helps raise the awareness of the social value of unpaid work among the Chinese professional immigrants, who used to view their domestic roles as trivial, due to the overemphasis of paid employment in their home country. This study enriches literature on Chinese immigrants by demonstrating that household work and the related learning make up an important part of immigrants settlement experiences and thus deserve equal attention as paid work and employment-related learning in studies on immigrants’ settlement experiences.
Fourth, by making visible the gendered nature of learning, as well as the different challenges the women and men immigrants encountered in adapting to changes in their new home country, this dissertation may provide empirical evidence in helping scholars and policy makers in their efforts to find ways to facilitate immigrants’ learning. These ways may include providing ethnic-sensitive information about food nutrition and food safety and about childcare services and parenting in different ethnic languages. In addition, providing more resources and venues, such as workshops and publications (video or visual, in different ethnic languages) that offer helpful and practical advice, and tips on emotion management (e.g., anger, anxiety, frustration, and depression) would enhance immigrants’ emotional and spiritual health and well-being.

Finally, making visible the knowledge and skills involved in performing household work may benefit both immigrant professionals and their potential employers. On one hand, it may help immigrants to become more aware of their transferable skills when applying for jobs, and thus, improve their job opportunities in the Canadian labour market. It may also help employers who are hiring to recognize and accredit new immigrants’ prior learning experiences, especially knowledge and skills acquired through unpaid labour before and after immigration.

9.4.2 Limitations of This Research

Despite the rich, complementary data from qualitative and quantitative research, my dissertation has its limitations.

Given the small number of Chinese immigrants in my individual and group interviews, from which this dissertation draws most of its data, my doctoral research provides only a snapshot of the living and learning experiences of some recent immigrants from Mainland China. As well-educated, middle-class professionals who came to Canada after 1998, mostly under the “skilled worker” category, my research findings may not be representative of the living and learning experiences of all immigrants from Mainland China, especially those coming from different social, economic, and educational backgrounds (for example, investors, entrepreneurs, or refugee claimants). Living in the Greater Toronto Area, which has the largest Chinese community in Canada, and many ethnic-based social and cultural facilities, stores, and supermarkets, my research participants may not share similar experiences with those residing outside of the Metropolitan area. Neither can my research results be used to generalize the living and learning experiences of Chinese immigrants from other parts of the world, such as Hong Kong, Taiwan,
South East Asia, and the West Indies, given the diversity of their social, political, economic, and geographical locations before and after immigration.

9.5 Directions for Future Research

So far, most of the research on lifelong learning focuses on the content and quantity of learning—knowledge and skills acquired, and how much. Little attention has been given to the quality of learning—the effectiveness of the learning. Thus, more research is needed to evaluate the usefulness and effectiveness of the learning in improving the quality of life, health, and well-being, and the extent of acculturation and integration into the Canadian society.

Most of the research on lifelong learning tends to overemphasize the cognitive aspect of learning, while little attention is given to the influence of the emotions (i.e., the feelings, motivations, and attitudes) on the content, the ways as well as the results of learning. Thus, further research is needed to evaluate the impact of the emotional dimension of learning on household work, and emotion work for oneself, as the literature has mainly focused on emotional care and support for other people.

Research is needed to examine the transferability of some of the knowledge and skills from unpaid to paid work, and vice versa. Further research is also necessary to identify the information gaps and the educational needs of the newcomers regarding childcare and parenting, and to explore some effective ways to narrow the gaps and meet the needs of the new immigrants of non-English-speaking, ethnic minority groups, including the Chinese immigrants.

Comparative studies of immigrants of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds may shed light on the diverse experiences in what they learn and how they learn through household work.
Bibliography


Hamburg Declaration on Adult Learning, (1997). The Fifth International Conference on Adult Learning, 14-17 July, Hamburg, Germany. The full text is available at: [http://www.unesco.org/education/uie/confintea/pdf/con5eng.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/education/uie/confintea/pdf/con5eng.pdf)


## Appendix I: Profiles of Interview Participants

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Appendix II: Profiles of Focus Group Participants

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# Appendix III: Profiles of the Discussion Group Participants

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Appendix IV: Interview Questionnaires

Interviewer:                                          ID#:  
Date:                                               Sex:                                               Group: CH

Housework and Lifelong Learning Project (WALL) /家务劳动与终身学习

Introduction – Description of the Project/介绍-项目描述
As I mentioned on the phone, the goal of this research project is to understand what people learn through their unpaid housework and care work. We are particularly interested to find out whether life changes result in doing housework and care work differently and whether this leads to learning. There are no right or wrong answers to our questions. We are simply interested in what you think. You may, of course, refuse to answer any question. I will be taping the interview so that I can pay attention to what you are saying. When we publish the information we have collected, you will in no way be identified.

正如我在电话里提到的，该研究项目的目的是了解人们通过作无偿的家务劳动和看护工作学到了什么。我们尤其想了解的是生活的变化是否导致家务劳动及看护工作的不同以及是否引发学习。问题的答案没有对与错。我们只想了解您的看法。当然，您可以拒绝回答任何问题。我将对该采访进行录音以便能够专心听您讲话。当我们发表所收集的资料时，保证不泄露您的真实身份。

Ask the respondent to read and sign consent letter. Leave a copy for the respondent.

Background questions/背景问题:

I want to begin with a few background questions.
1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself? 您能告诉我一点有关您个人的情况吗？

   Probes (use what you feel is appropriate for the situation): family (siblings and parents), extended family, respondent’s paid work, partner, partner’s paid work, roommate/s

   如，家庭（兄弟、姊妹、父母），个人的工作，配偶及其工作，室友。

Major Life Event/s:

2. If you look back over the last five years, what would you say were events in your life that in some way changed the way you live?
   回顾过去的五年，您认为生活中的哪些大事对您现在的生活产生了一定的影响？
   Probe: When did the event(s) happen? 该事件何时发生？

<table>
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**Instruction:** If respondent did not identify the event that s/he has been selected for ask the following question:

3. In the survey you answered earlier this year, you mentioned that you immigrated to Canada. Did this change the way you live?

在今年早些时候的调查中，您提到您不久前移民加拿大。这对你的生活有影响吗？

4. As I told you, we are interested in the unpaid housework and care work that you do. Of all the events we discussed, which one most affected the unpaid housework and care work you do?

如您所知，我们对您从事的无偿家务劳动及看护工作感兴趣。在我们谈及的所有大事中，您认为哪一件对您从事的无偿家务劳动及看护工作影响最大？

---

**EVENT**

---

*For the rest of the questionnaire refer to the event named in question 4.*

5. What are some of the problems or challenges that you encountered because of this [event]?

您所遇到的由此产生的主要问题或挑战有哪些？

*Skip Question 6 if no challenges:*

6. How did you overcome them? 您是如何应付这些问题或挑战的？

7. Are there any unpaid housework and care work tasks that you do differently because of the [event]?

这一事件是否使您的无偿家务劳动及看护工作有所改变？

8. Are there any unpaid housework and care work tasks that you used to do that you no longer do because of the [event]? If so would you still be able to do these tasks if you had to?

这一事件是否让您放弃了一些从前你从事但现在不再从事的无偿家务劳动呢？如果是，在必要的时候，您还会做这些事情吗？

---

**Life Long Learning – Unpaid Housework and Care Work:**

终身学习—无偿家务劳动及看护工作

I’d like to ask you a few questions about the kinds of things you learned because of the [event].

9. In particular, what did you learn, with respect to unpaid housework and care work, in order to be able to deal with the [event] and how did you learn this?

尤其是，为了应付这一事件，你从中学到了什么以及是怎样学会的？
Probe: Could you give me an example (if none given)? 请举例说明。

Probe: How did you learn to do this? 您是怎么学会的?

I am going to ask you some more questions about your learning in unpaid housework and care work because of the [event]. But first I am going to give you a list of ways that people have said they have learned. You might like to refer to this list when we discuss how you learned. Let’s take a moment to go through the list.

下面我将针对您在从事无偿家务劳动及看护工作中的学习提几个问题。但是，首先我要给您看一张单子，上面列有人们学习的方式。当我们谈及这些问题时，你可以参考这张单子。让我们先来看看这张单子。

In Questions 10 to 25 – periodically say “because of the [event] and for any other reason”. For each question ask “what” was learned and “how” it was learned. If respondent has difficulty answering “how learned” ask s/he to refer to the list of learning methods.

Because of the [event] or for any other reason/由于上述事件:

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<th>QUESTION</th>
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<th>HOW LEARNED</th>
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<tr>
<td>10. Did you learn to <strong>COOK</strong> differently?</td>
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<td>11. Did you learn to do <strong>HOME REPAIR</strong> and maintenance differently?</td>
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<td>12. Did you learn to use new <strong>TECHNOLOGY</strong> or use existing technology differently (i.e.: microwave, appliances, cell phone, fax, computer, etc.)?</td>
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<td>13. Did you change the way you <strong>PLAN</strong> your day, your week, your month or your year?</td>
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<td>14. Did you learn to manage your <strong>TIME</strong> differently?</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Did you learn to <strong>ORGANISE</strong> things differently?</td>
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<tr>
<td>16. Did you learn to conduct your <strong>BUDGETING</strong> or financial management differently?</td>
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| | 22. Did you deal with **INSTITUTIONS** or bureaucracies because of this/these events?  
由于这一事件，您是否要与机构或官僚打过交道？ |
| | 23. Did you learn about **SOCIAL, POLITICAL** and/or **ENVIRONMENTAL** issues?  
您对社会，政治以及或者环境问题有所了解吗？ |
| | 24. Do you think about **YOURSELF** differently?  
您对自己有不同认识吗？ |
| | 25. Did you learn something through this experience about the **MEANING OF YOUR LIFE**?  
您对生命的意义有新的认识吗？ |
| | 26. Did you learn different cultural traditions and /or customs?  
您学到不同的文化传统 和或习俗吗？ |
| | 27. Did you learn new language skills?  
您学到了新的语言技能吗？ |
| | Other than the ways of learning that you have already mentioned, if we go through the list again, are there any other ways in which you learned?  
除了上述提到的学习途径外，如果将问题再看一遍的话，您还有其他学习途径吗？ |
There are just a couple more questions I would like to ask you.

28. Instruction: This question is designed to explore the area of learning least discussed by the respondent whether it is unpaid housework or unpaid care work. Of the following questions, ask the one that is most applicable to this respondent.

   a) We have talked a lot about your learning in unpaid housework. Now I would like you to think about the learning you have done in respect to unpaid care work.
      我们刚才谈了许多做无偿家务劳动中的学习。现在我想请您考虑做无偿看护工作有关的学习。

   b) We have talked a lot about your learning in unpaid care work. Now I would like you to think about the learning you have done in respect to unpaid housework.
      我们刚才谈了许多做无偿看护工作中的学习。现在我想请您考虑一下做无偿家务劳动有关的学习。

29. We are interested in knowing what skills you have developed in your unpaid housework and care work that would be useful in paid work.
    我们想了解您在做无偿家务劳动和看护工作时学到的哪些技能对有偿工作有益？

30. What are some of the matters that you feel you are not yet handling as well as you would like to?
    您认为自己还有哪些问题没有处理好但想做好的？

31. What do you do to replenish your energy?
    您是怎样恢复精力的？

32. Are there any other points you would like to add?
    您还有什么要补充的吗？

Thank you very much for this interview! Before I go there are two more things we need to do.
    谢谢接受采访！

33. Would you like to select a pseudonym for yourself – a first name and a surname?
    您愿意给自己挑选个假名吗—名和姓？
Appendix V: Consent Form

Unpaid Housework and Life Long Learning

Principal Investigator: Professor Margrit Eichler, Ontario Institute for the Studies in Education, University of Toronto.

Tel: 416-923-6641 ext. 2276  E-mail: meichler@oise.utoronto.ca

The Housework and Learning Project is part of a larger project on Work and Life Long Learning (WALL). The goal of the project is to understand the impact of major life transitions on unpaid housework and care work. You were selected for this study because you stated that you’d be willing to participate in a follow-up interview when you answered a survey about work and learning earlier this year, and you mentioned that you experienced a life transition within the last five years. We are interested in what you learned through the experience.

Please note that your participation is voluntary and that you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time, without negative consequences. There are no foreseeable risks or harms in participating in this research. The potential benefit of participation is an increased awareness of the importance of learning in doing unpaid housework and care work. The interview will take about an hour.

The interview will be taped but anything you say will remain strictly confidential. Only the principal investigator and the other research team members will have access to the data. To protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants, the audiotapes and transcripts will be stored in the locked filing cabinet in the project office. Data records will also be kept in the project’s computer hard-drive, which can only be accessed by password. The study’s findings will be used for journal articles, a book, theses, and presented at conferences. However, your name will not be included in any report on this study; nor will any identifying details about you be attached to any comment you make.

I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences.

I have received a copy of this consent form for my own records.

I consent to participate in this study.

_______________________        _________________________       ______
Participant’s name              Participant’s signature        Date
### Appendix VI: Content of household work-related informal learning* by sex (%) among four subgroups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of work</th>
<th>Canadian-born</th>
<th>White Immigrants</th>
<th>Non-white Immigrants**</th>
<th>Chinese Immigrants</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Total Male Female</td>
<td>Total Male Female</td>
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<td>31 38 24</td>
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<td>38 43 35</td>
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<tr>
<td>New Equipment/Appliances</td>
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<td>49 51 47</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Parenting/Childcare</td>
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<td>30 23 36</td>
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<td>19 21 17</td>
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<td>Eldercare</td>
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<td>25 22 29</td>
<td>30 24 35</td>
<td>19 23 14</td>
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<tr>
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<td>34 38 30</td>
<td>39 41 37</td>
<td>41 41 41</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organizational/management skills</td>
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<td>24 26 23</td>
<td>37 41 33</td>
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Sources: WALL Survey, 2004

*Only those who reported household work-related learning were asked about the topics.

**Chinese immigrants are not included in the non-white immigrant group.
Appendix VII: Content of general interests-related informal learning* by sex (%) among four subgroups

<table>
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<tr>
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Sources: WALL Survey, 2004
*Only those who reported some general interests-related learning were asked about the topics.
**Chinese immigrants are not included in the non-white immigrant group.