

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES- THE ROLE THEY PLAY IN SKILLED CHINESE IMMIGRANT UNDEREMPLOYMENT

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ABSTRACT

This paper approaches the problem of skilled immigrant underemployment at the human resource professional level by focusing on the relationship between communications disconnects caused by cultural differences and hiring decisions. It was confirmed that within the Vancouver tech industry, only a small percentage of skilled Asian immigrants applying get hired with the two most commonly cited factors affecting employers decision to hire being communication skills and the ability to work within the Canadian context.

Employers were aware that they are turning away skilled Asian immigrants, but felt it was a 'business decision' based on perceived negative effects on productivity. Employers were concerned with not only the cost, but also the knowledge required for successful integration. Although there is a definite need for cultural integration programs, it may be unrealistic to expect employers to provide them and there may be a role for educational institutions to help fill this void.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the near future Vancouver employers are going to become dependent on skilled immigrants for their labour force expansion. As skilled labour becomes more scarce, employers will move into a crisis situation and proper management of a diverse workforce will become a competitive necessity rather than an option for Canadian companies.

Currently, Canadian companies are turning away skilled Chinese immigrants. Interviews performed with Human Resource professionals in the Vancouver Tech industry as part of this study showed the percentage of Asian immigrants applying to their companies to average over 30 percent while the percentage of Asian immigrants in their workforce to be less than 5 percent. In these interviews, the two most commonly cited factors affecting employers decision to hire skilled immigrants were communication skills and the ability to work within the Canadian context. Some interviewees said that cultural differences were not important, but it is argued throughout this paper that cultural differences are what affect their communication skills and ability to work within the Canadian context.

In reality, each side needs what the other has to offer; before they can realize this, they must bridge the cultural gap to overcome basic intercultural interaction issues, understand the context that words are being used within, and effectively communicate on the same level. In order to do this, there is a definite need for cultural integration programs; the newer the workforce to the culture, the more training required. Rather than each employer inventing their own efforts, there is the potential for educational

institutions to help fill this void. Sixty-seven percent of employers interviewed said that they would consider outsourcing cultural integration programs and 83 percent saw a need for educational institutes to offer cultural integration courses.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Approval	ii
Abstract	iii
Executive Summary	iv
Acknowledgements	vi
Table of Contents	vii
List of Figures	ix
1 Introduction	1
1.1 Definitions	2
1.1.1 Skilled Immigrant	2
1.1.2 Underemployed	2
1.1.3 Communication Disconnect	3
2 Economic Projections	6
3 Employment Disparity	8
3.1 Wage Disparity	8
3.2 Occupational Disparity	9
4 Immigration Trends	12
4.1 Shift in Location of Origin	12
4.2 Shift in Skill Sets	14
5 Reasons for Skilled Immigrant Underemployment	15
5.1 Recognition of Credentials	15
5.2 Lack of Canadian Background	16
5.3 Incomplete Information	17
5.4 Language Skills	17
5.5 Social Values, Roles and Rules	18
6 Cultural Differences	20
6.1 Cultural Dimensions	23
6.2 Inter-Asian Differences	25
6.2.1 Meaning of Work	26
6.3 Impact of Culture on Business Relationships	28
6.4 Cross Cultural Training Methods	31
7 Employer Perceptions	34
8 Vancouver Tech Industry	37
9 Methodology	39
10 Interview Results	42
11 Information Disconnect	47

12 Recommendations	51
12.1 Skills Required By Employers/Canadian Employees	51
12.2 Skills Required by Skilled Chinese Immigrants.....	52
13 Areas for Future Research.....	55
14 Appendices	56
14.1 Appendix 1-Immigration Trends.....	56
14.2 Appendix 2 –Cultural Contexts	57
14.3 Appendix 3-Trompenaars 7 Dimensions.....	58
14.4 Appendix 4–Interview Guide.....	59
14.5 Appendix 5-Interview Tabulations.....	61
Reference List	62

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1-Communication Disconnect.....	4
Figure 2-BC Labour Force Expansion Forecast.....	7
Figure 3-Intended Vs Actual Occupations	10
Figure 4-Immigration Trends	13
Figure 5-Cultures Layers.....	20
Figure 6-Hofstedes Cultural Dimensions	23
Figure 7-Danger Zone: the specific-diffuse encounter	29
Figure 8-Modelling Processes, Rigor and Training Methods.....	33
Figure 9-Interview Results.....	44
Figure 10-Importance of Fit	45
Figure 11-Perceived Fit within Corporate Culture	45
Figure 12-Information Disconnect.....	49
Figure 13-Suggested Courses of Action	53

1 INTRODUCTION

Location and composition provide Vancouver the potential to become the gateway to Asia. It is up to Vancouver to take advantage of its potential and make use of the resources that it has access to, including a large Chinese immigrant population. In 2001, Chinese immigrants represented 70 percent of Canada's labour force expansion and 17.7 percent of Vancouver's total population (Smith, 2004). With an aging population, decreasing fertility rates and training systems that are not producing the number of skilled workers needed for the labour force, it is estimated that by 2011, 100 percent of Canada's net labour force growth will be dependent on immigration (CIC 2001).

Generally, these immigrants are as wealthy and well educated as the native-born population, yet many of them are underemployed. It has "become commonplace to hear former engineers, doctors and teachers working as dishwashers, factory workers and janitors." (Teo 2003; pg 21) The risk for Canada and the challenge for policymakers is that, as globalization gives greater mobility to highly qualified staff, and as Asian Canadian professionals feel frustrated at home, they will seek greater acceptance elsewhere, thus exacerbating the brain drain and eliminating a potentially powerful resource (Canada's Hidden Advantage Revisited, 1999).

Surveys have determined that Canadians believe immigration brings more benefits to Canada than problems. They also reveal that immigrants generally believe they belong in Canada and that their choice to move from another society has been justified (Bauder

2004), but the question remains why are such large numbers underemployed and what can Vancouver do about it?

1.1 Definitions

1.1.1 Skilled Immigrant

The government of Canada defines a skilled immigrant to be an: immigrant who intends to enter the Canadian labour market and possess the intention and ability to be self-supporting upon their arrival in Canada. This paper is going to use this definition and concentrate on those immigrants intending to work in skilled occupations, and in particular, those classified as professionals that include occupations in natural and applied sciences such as information technology

For the purpose of this study, an immigrant is an individual whom is born in China and has arrived in Vancouver with the intention to work.

1.1.2 Underemployed

Sociologists and economists typically use wage differential and loss of income in defining underemployment. The problem with this definition is that job satisfaction does not solely depend on income. To include various factors, social psychologists have done self report studies that measure the gap between what skilled immigrants want to be doing (their intended occupation) and what they are actually doing (their occupation after migration). For the purpose of this report, underemployment will be defined as a combination of wage and occupation disparity; that is the gap not only between wage levels of immigrants and native born but also between skilled immigrants intended and actual occupations. Note that this definition is very different from the definition used by the government of Canada who defines underemployed immigrants to be individuals

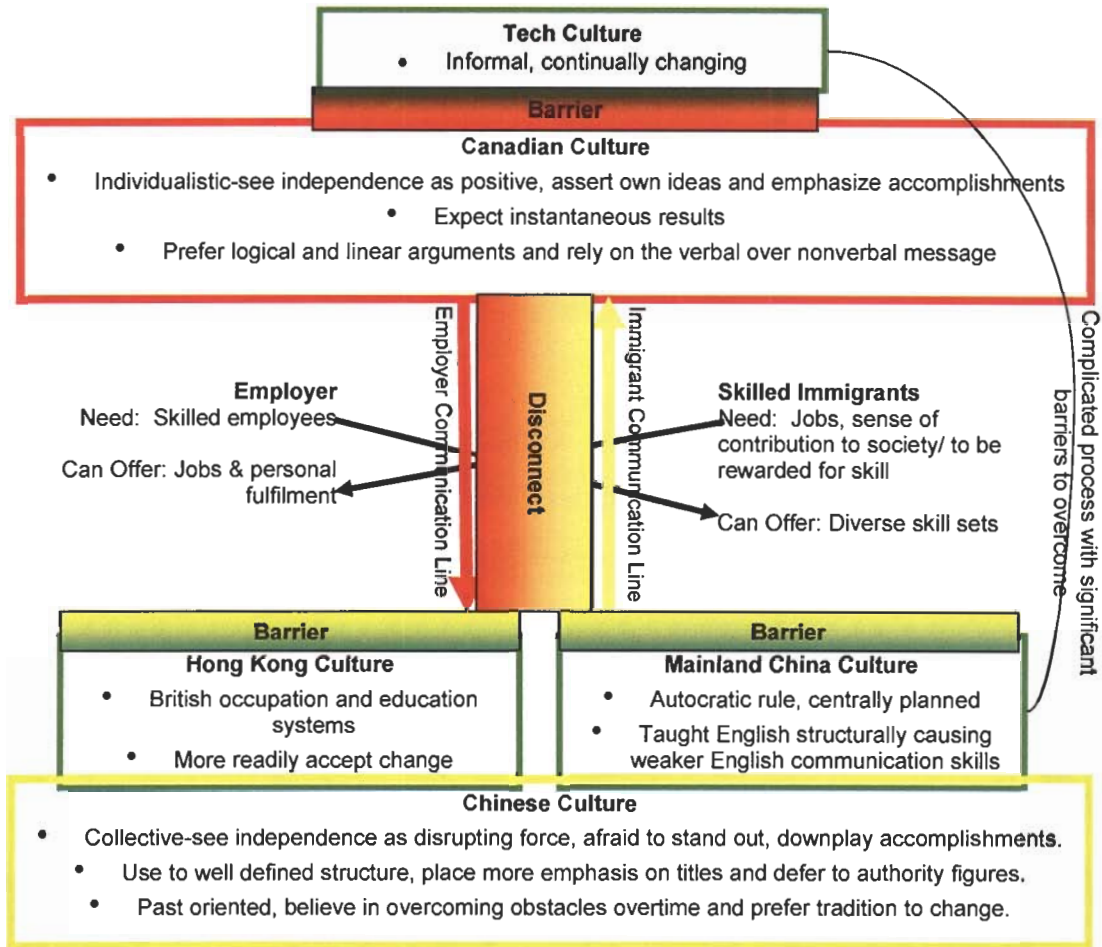
working less than 20 hours per week. As explained in section 11, this places severe restrictions on the services available to immigrants who may be underemployed by the definition explained above but are working more than 20 hours per week, and therefore not considered to be underemployed for the purpose of government programs.

Intended occupations are those declared by the immigrants at the time of landing.

1.1.3 Communication Disconnect

Mak et al (1999) believe that even when immigrants have a high level of proficiency in the language spoken, new comers may operate from a culturally conditioned basis, where behaviours performed would be effective in their original country, but ineffective in the new context. This is because cultures and societies differ in the values, roles and rules that govern appropriate verbal and nonverbal behaviour in social situations. This has been graphically represented in Figure 1.

Figure 1-Communication Disconnect



Each side needs what the other has to offer; before they can realize this, they must bridge the cultural gap to overcome basic intercultural interaction issues, understand the context that words are being used within, and effectively communicate on the same level. Until this happens, the needs and wants of the other side is a blur and the goodness of fit is never realized.

This is confounded by four key factors that are discussed throughout this report.

1. Only a small portion of culture is open to view. Beliefs, attitudes, values and assumptions are often hidden and hard to uncover.

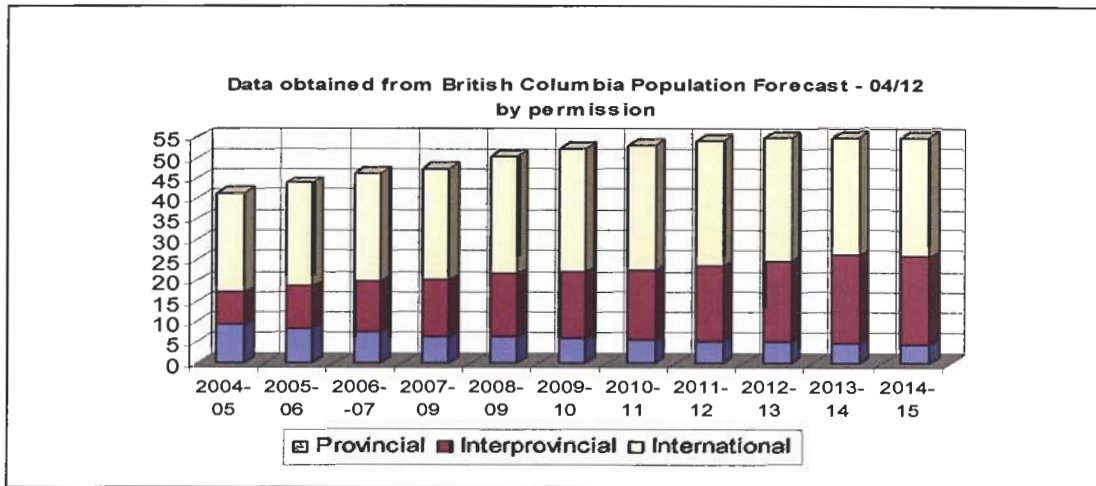
2. The shift in primary location of the origin of immigrants from Hong Kong to Mainland China. These immigrants have an even greater tendency to mask emotions, downplay accomplishments and place higher importance on structure and titles.
3. The progression towards a knowledge based economy where effective communication skills have become paramount.
4. Most employers have not yet been in the crisis needed to recognize how serious the problem is and do something about it.

2 ECONOMIC PROJECTIONS

Briscoe and Schuler (2004) believe that the most important labour-force issue for developed countries is the significance of their reduced birth rates extending from at least the early 1960s, and their resultant aging populations. They claim that in virtually all developed countries, there are more people retiring than there are available to fill the resulting open positions, let alone provide for expansion of these economies. Such labour shortages are particularly acute for positions that require higher levels of education and expertise such as all areas of high technology.

Canada is no different. With an aging population, decreasing fertility rates and straining systems that are not producing the number of skilled workers needed, the Canadian labour force is projected to slow to a crawl in the decade ahead. Looking at British Columbia in particular, as the Olympics bring new jobs to the province and the economy continues to improve, by the year 2015, natural provincial population growth is expected to fall to an all time low of just 4,600 people per year (British Columbia Population Forecast, 2004). This is reflected in Figure 2 which shows international immigration to be the major factor driving labour market growth well into the future.

Figure 2-BC Labour Force Expansion Forecast



The growing dependence on international candidates to fill skilled positions is confounded by the changing make up of the economy. This issue was addressed at the April 9, 2005 RIIM & World Journal Roundtable Forum by the Honourable Raymond Chan, Minister of state Multiculturalism.

Part of this restructuring entailed a definite shift away from goods producing industries towards service producing industries and requires an increased amount of skill. Eighty percent of the job growth in the last 15 years has required some sort of post secondary recognition. Moreover, the transition to the knowledge-based economy has also increased the importance of communication. Although new immigrants are more highly educated than those of the past, the ability to effectively communicate is even more important than ever before. However, with the changing origin of immigrants, in many cases these communication skills are lacking. As will be shown later on in Section 10, this is influenced by cultural differences and has a significant effect on hiring decisions.

3 EMPLOYMENT DISPARITY

For the purpose of this paper, underemployed is defined as a combination of wage and occupational disparity. Each of these factors will be analyzed in this section.

3.1 Wage Disparity

One would reasonably expect wage disparity between immigrants and Canadians to decrease as the level of skilled immigrants increases, but this does not appear to be the case. According to Statistics Canada (2001) the wage gap between Canadians and immigrants has widened over the last decade from 11 percent to 14.5 percent.

Pendakur and Pendakur (1998) found that “even controlling for occupation, industry, education, potential experience, official language knowledge and household type...visible minorities earn significantly less than native-born white workers in Canada.” (pg 26)

Smith (2004) suggests that the situation is getting worse and claims that while it is true that with time most Canadian immigrants achieve personal and intergenerational upward mobility, an increasing number, especially those visible minorities who arrived since 1991, seem to be struggling. Examining the comparative earnings and employment status of immigrants and the Canadian born, Reitz (2001) found recent immigrants in the early 1980s to be just as likely to have jobs and to earn 80 percent as much as the Canadian born. However, by 1996, recent immigrants were far less successful than their Canadian born counterparts in finding employment and only earning 60 percent as much.

Thompson and Kunz (2004) and Reitz (2001) extend this disparity beyond immigrants and Canadians and believe it to exist between recent and longer-term immigrants with similar skill and schooling credentials as well.

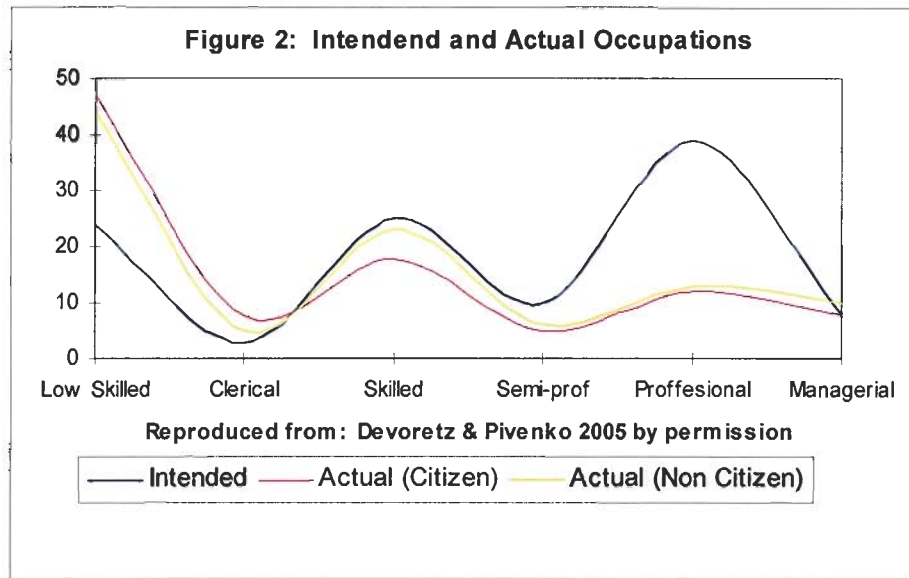
Heibert and Ley (2001) then take it one-step further by differentiating British and Northern European Immigrants from visible minorities. They note that while people of British and Northern European descent are overrepresented in the most well remunerated occupations; visible minorities are over concentrated in those occupations considered less desirable and poorly paid.

3.2 Occupational Disparity

Upon arrival in Canada, immigrants must declare their intended occupation. The intended occupations reported at the time of landing can then be used as an indication of the immigrant's occupation prior to immigration to Canada, and the occupation he/she is likely to seek after initial settlement in Canada.

According to Devoretz & Pivnenko (2004) intended occupation of the resident foreign-born stock was strongly biased towards the professions while actual experience after arrival is strongly weighted to the low skilled or clerical occupation. This is graphically represented by Figure 3 which was reproduced with permission from Devoretz and Pivenkos (2004) extract of tabulations from IMDB and 1996 Census of Canada.

Figure 3-Intended Vs Actual Occupations



Similar results were found by BC Stats (2000). Of the 93,000 immigrants that landed in BC between 1990 and 1999 who stated an intended occupation, one in four were in the natural sciences and engineering occupations, 16 percent were in managerial and administrative occupations while only 9 percent were in some kind of service occupation. Within the professional occupations in natural and applied sciences, engineers stand out as the dominant occupational grouping although significant numbers of immigrants also intended to work in the information technology sector. Asia has been a major source of these professions with China alone accounting for 37 percent of all skilled principal applicants in these occupations (CIC 2003).

The predominance of occupations related to natural and applied sciences is a fairly recent phenomenon. Since 1993, arrivals with these occupations have steadily outpaced other occupations especially those in trades and services. As a result, the skill level of immigrants has increased in accordance with the new occupational mix of immigrants (CIC 2003). A push factor for this could have been the occurrence of new selection criterion that gives more weight to education favouring highly trained

immigrants. However, despite the increase in skill, after migration 28 percent of the total immigrant population were engaged in service and sales occupations (BC Stats 2000). CIC 2003 found that more than one in every three working migrants who arrived between 1991-1996 were working in a sales or service related job while only one in every five immigrants landed before 1970 were engaged in similar jobs. Looking specifically at the Asian Immigrant population, approximately one in every four working immigrants were employed in sales or services related jobs, but unlike the immigrant population as a whole, this percentage did not show the same drastic decrease as immigrants landed before 1970 (CIC 2003). Immigrants might have willingly changed to an occupation different from the one they originally intended/declared, but the variance is more likely to be caused by outside factors.

An unsettling statistic surfaced when Vancouver employers were asked if the skilled immigrants they currently employ maintain positions that are at a lower level than their foreign education would dictate. Forty-four percent said that they were not utilizing the knowledge of their skilled immigrant employees. Thirty-three percent were not even certain of the foreign education level of their employees. (Wong 2004)

The strong evidence supporting that both wage and occupational disparity exists brings to light the importance of the question of the relationship between the communication disconnect caused by cultural differences and the hiring decision so that something can be done about it.

4 IMMIGRATION TRENDS

In order to gain a base for understanding why these disparities are occurring, immigration trends have been analysed.

As shown in Appendix 1, economic developments within Canada strongly affect public perception towards immigration which in turn leads to changes to immigration policy. A combination of policy changes and push factors from China has led to the immigration trends that we now see.

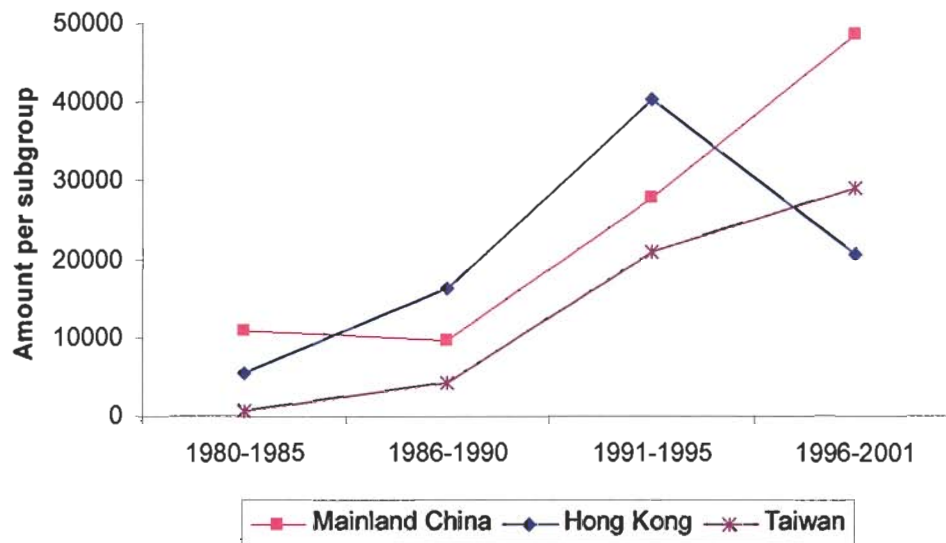
4.1 Shift in Location of Origin

Since the introduction of the point system, a definite shift occurred away from Southern China labourers towards professional and business immigrants from Hong Kong, Taiwan and Mainland China.

As the 1997 deadline for British handover to Mainland China approached, the period from early 1980-1997 were years of political and commercial uncertainty in Hong Kong. This in turn led to a 'push' affect that motivated managers, professional classes and entrepreneurs to seek out 'safe havens' such as Canada. In many cases, the skills of these Hong Kong immigrants were considerably more advanced than the population at large (Edington Et al 2003). According to Teo and Waters (2003) this influx of wealthy business migrant families from Hong Kong presented profound challenges to conceptions of race, place, local and national identity amongst older residents of what were formally Vancouver's exclusive White-Anglo neighbourhoods.

As economic conditions within Hong Kong improved, many Canadians originally from Hong Kong returned to participate in the post-1997 Hong Kong economic boom. Accordingly, as seen in Figure 4, Hong Kong slipped from the number one source for BC immigration to number three behind Taiwan and Mainland China, adding further problems to the woes of the BC provincial economy in the late 1990s. (Eddington et al 2003)

Figure 4-Immigration Trends



Thus following 1997, the major immigration flows to Vancouver are now from Mainland China; most of whom have weaker English language skills and arguably take longer to blend in and participate in the city's economy. The reasons for this can be seen in Figure 1 by looking at the barriers between Mainland China culture and Canadian culture.

In 2001, Vancouver was Canada's second leading immigrant reception city with 738,555 immigrants representing 13.6 percent of the nation's total foreign born and 17.7 percent of Vancouver's total population. Eastern Asia (262,815); Southeast Asia (88,645) and

Southern Asia (75,945) predominate as immigrant source regions. Fifty six percent of the immigrant population arrived in Canada before 1991 while 44 percent arrived over the course of the 1992. Of those granted entrance to Canada and residing in Vancouver, in 2001 55 percent came as skilled workers, 27 percent as family class immigrants and 5.8 percent as refugees. (CIC 2002)

4.2 Shift in Skill Sets

As the origin of immigrants changed, so did their skill sets. The proportion at the higher end of the occupation class spectrum (namely business people, white collar and skilled blue-collar workers) is noticeably higher than for those who arrived from China in earlier centuries. This was reflected in a study performed by Guo and Devoretz (2005).

Teo and Waters (2003) claim that “the recent immigrants are generally as wealthy and well educated as the native-born population: 26 percent of principal applicants and dependents had at least a bachelor’s degree and 51 percent could speak English.” (pg 4)

According to a recent Citizenship and Immigration Canada Publication, the most striking trend in immigration is the percentage of skilled immigrant applications. In 2000 it reached a 20 year high of 23 percent of the total immigrant intake. (CIC 2003)

Throughout this paper, it will be proposed that this shift in location of origin and skill set may contribute to the extent that the communications disconnect is now occurring at.

5 REASONS FOR SKILLED IMMIGRANT UNDEREMPLOYMENT

Previous studies have analyzed possible reasons for skilled immigrant underemployment to include:

- Credential devaluation (Wong 2004)
- Lack of Canadian background and or experience (Man 1997) (Canadas Hidden Advantage 1999)
- Incomplete/lack of access to information (Teo 2003)
- Poor language skills (Teo and Waters 2003) (DeVoretz et al 2000)
- Differing social values, roles and rules (Mak et al 199) (Spitzburg and Cupach 1984)

I do not discredit credential devaluation, lack of Canadian background, incomplete information or poor basic language skills as being pieces to the puzzle. However, I think too much attention has been given to them while the effects of cultural differences and the broader inter cultural interaction issues (differing social values, roles and rules) in the hiring process have been relatively ignored. A brief overview will be provided for each of these categories with a more in-depth analysis showing the potential affect that cultural differences have on skilled immigrant underemployment.

5.1 Recognition of Credentials

The point system has helped attract a higher proportion of skilled immigrants but some believe there is a downfall to the point system in that the same credentials that get immigrants into the country are not being recognized once here. The problem could be

argued to occur on three levels: The immigrant level, the employer level and the regulatory body level.

On the immigrant level, cultural differences can prevent immigrants from fighting to have their credentials recognized. Rather than standing up for what they have accomplished, they avoid confrontation and simply do what they are told. This will be discussed in more detail in section 6.

Employers in regulated industries are required to follow rules set by regulatory bodies. Even though companies themselves don't see credentials as a problem, most companies have not been in the crisis situation needed to provide the sense of urgency necessary to fight the regulatory bodies and recognize Asian credentials. In a recent study performed in Vancouver, Employers were asked why Immigrants were in lower level positions than their experience should place them; 57 percent stated accreditation issues with professional organizations and/or regulatory bodies was the problem (Wong 2004). However, this is only the case for regulated industries.

At the regulatory body level, credential recognition is a major issue and something that government is working hard to solve, but this is only an issue for regulated industries which make up a small percentage of British Columbia's workforce. Moreover, skilled immigrant underemployment is still known to exist even with immigrants who obtained their highest level of education in Canada. (Hill, 2005)

5.2 Lack of Canadian Background

According to Canada's Hidden Advantage Revisited (1999) lack of Canadian background and experience of new entrants in the workforce is seen by employers as a barrier to recruiting immigrants in responsible positions, even if they had proven their

business skills overseas. Reasons for this include lack of familiarity with the Canadian work environment and lack of accreditation systems to calibrate international experience and qualifications.

Man (1997) further supports this by claiming that 'Canadian experience' tends to take precedence and previous employment is often rendered irrelevant.

5.3 Incomplete Information

Teo (2003) identifies information that potential migrants have about life in Canada and more importantly, their reception of it as a central concern. He claims that immigrants come to Canada with unrealistic expectations and are not prepared for what lies ahead.

Once in Canada, access to applicable information is not much better. As described in Section 10, there is a void in the market that often leaves skilled immigrants to fend for themselves.

5.4 Language Skills

In the past, immigration laws did not require new immigrants to speak either English or French. In 1998 49.2 percent of immigrants who landed in Vancouver could speak neither of the official languages (CIC 2000). DeVoretz et al (2000) argue that economic motives will determine optimum language skills required of immigrants, and in the absence of an economic incentive, official language ability will not improve.

As the influx came from Hong Kong businessmen, most were fluent in English, but following 1997, as the major immigration flows shifted towards Mainland China many had weaker English language skills, arguably taking them longer to participate in the city's economy.

It is important to note that language goes far beyond knowing the words and extends to being able to communicate them effectively; something that is not taught in Mainland China's schools and adds to the barriers that Mainland Chinese Immigrants face (as shown in figure 1).

5.5 Social Values, Roles and Rules

According to Mak et al (1999) "Culturally different recent immigrants and sojourners lack familiarity with the social values, roles and rules governing interpersonal relationships and this may hinder the attainment of their goals for career and educational success in the new country despite their qualifications and dedication." (pg 77) This was confirmed by a study she did in Australia with Hong Kong professional and managerial Immigrants that identified the greatest barrier to the transfer of their occupational skills to be unfamiliarity with Australian culture and society. It is interesting to note that these respondents were aware that cultural barriers existed and the affect that they were having but nonetheless were puzzled as to how to overcome them.

Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) believe that in order to be successful, qualified immigrants require information about what constitutes effective communication and learning ways of establishing interpersonal relations in the host society.

However, this problem does not solely rest in the hands of immigrants. Within the business environment, Briscoe and Schuler (2004) believe that business people often lack knowledge about or sensitivity towards these differences resulting in frequent mistakes both in business and personal interactions. Even when they do understand the differences, they often mistakenly assume that their own country or company way of doing things provides the best way to conduct business. Thus, they make decisions and behave in ways that alienate their foreign counterparts or they make mistakes that lead

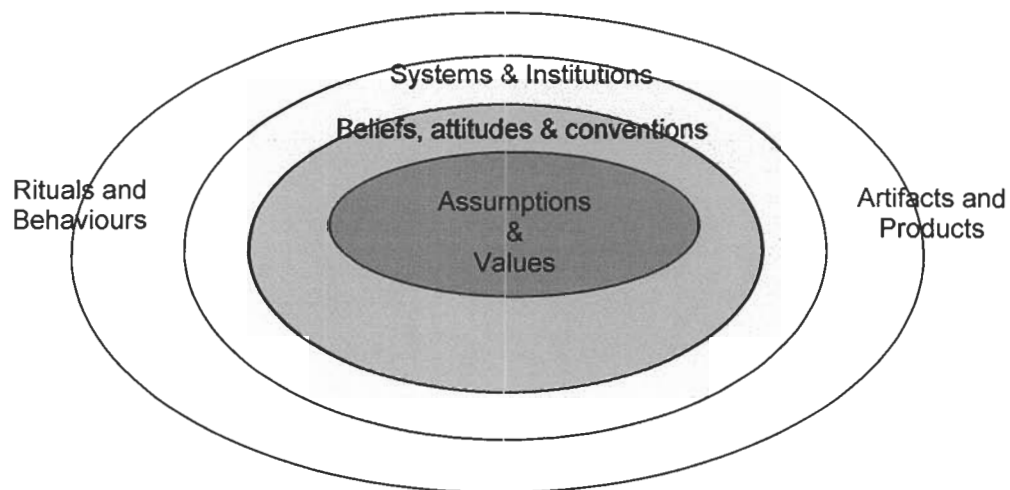
to business and or personal failure. This is reflected by Thomas & Inkson (2004) who believe that many individuals are unaware of the key features and biases of their own culture, and do not recognize when it is influencing their behaviour.

This implies that because of preconceived cultural biases, both immigrants being interviewed and human resource professionals evaluating the interviewee may be misinterpreting the behaviour of the other side, potentially having a negative affect on the hiring decision.

6 CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Canadian employers naturally expect immigrants to adapt and acculturate to Canadian norms, but this is not easy or even possible in the short term as much of culture cannot be seen. Culture was originally said to resemble an iceberg; only a small portion open to view. You can see how people act and hear what they say, but this does not necessarily mean that you understand the message they are trying to get across because the underlying values, assumptions and beliefs are unknown or remain hidden. Cultural research has progressed from this iceberg metaphor to more of an onion metaphor with the belief that over time cultural layers can be peeled to reveal its true content. Spencer-Oatey's (2000) formation of this onion has been reproduced with permission in Figure 5.

Figure 5-Cultures Layers



At first you only see and hear the observable reality, the rituals, behaviours and artefacts. Opinions voiced at this level usually say more about where you come from than the culture being judged. By asking why certain rituals or behaviours take place,

you can then peel off the first layer and see the systems and institutions. Once made visible, an understanding of why they operate in that way can be developed allowing the beliefs, attitudes and conventions that the individuals have to surface. Only then can you begin to grasp the assumptions and values that guide decision-making.

It is important to note that not all people within a culture have identical sets of artefacts, norms, values and assumptions. Within each culture there is a wide spread; however, this spread does have a pattern around an average that is what is looked at within cultural research.

Hofstede (1994) defines culture as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the member of one group or category of people from another” (pg 5)

According to Schell and Solomon (1997) “Learned and absorbed during the earliest stages of childhood, reinforced by literature, history and religion, embodied by...heroes, and expressed in...instinctive values and views, culture is a powerful force that shapes our thoughts and perceptions. It affects the way we perceive and judge events, [and other people], how we respond to and interpret them, and how we communicate to one another in both spoken and unspoken language. Culture with all of its implications, differ in every society. These differences might be profound or subtle, they might be obvious or invisible. Ever present yet constantly changing, culture permeates the world we know and moulds the way we construct or define reality.” (pg 8)

Hall (1984) then adds that culture is often subconscious. He compares culture to an invisible control mechanism operating in our thoughts that we only become aware of when it is severely challenged by events such as being exposed to a different culture. He believes that members of a given society internalise the cultural components of that society and act within the limits as set out by what is culturally acceptable.

According to Thomas and Inkson (2004) "The real problems occur when the norms and scripts of one culture clash with those of another because, in order to interact we must not only act out our own scripts but also observe and make sense of others' actions based on their script." (pg 42). This clash that Thomas and Inkson were alluding to is what can happen in the case of Canadians attempting to interact with Chinese immigrants. In many circumstances, Chinese and Western views are polar opposites. This can be seen by simply looking at the context of these two cultures; the way individuals of different cultures interact. The distinction between high and low context cultures is shown in Appendix 2.

Solving problems in low context societies, such as North America, consists of stating all known factual details and then evaluating their significance one by one. When drawing conclusions regarding the problem at hand, facts play the chief role and communication tends to be direct and open. Their freedom to openly question and challenge authority reinforces the idea that individuals exhibit behaviours of personal power and individualism. People are encouraged to verbalize their desires for answers and change if necessary.

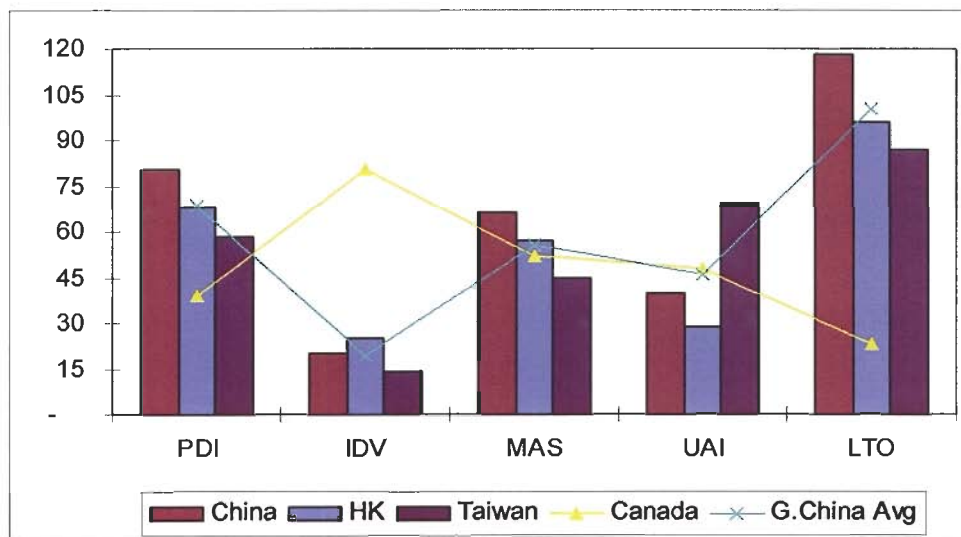
Within high context cultures such as China, group harmony is preferred to individual achievements and therefore developing trust between individuals plays the most crucial cultural function. The content of a situation, speaker's tone of voice, gestures, postures and sometimes even the persons status can hold greater significance than the situation itself. Messages tend to be more explicit and greater importance and consideration is placed on past events.

Throughout the cultural dimensions and solution sections, these differences will be analysed as to the potential effect that they can have on the communication disconnect and suggestions will be provided on how they can be reconciled.

6.1 Cultural Dimensions

Using a questionnaire focused on values and administered to IBM employees from 65 countries, Geert Hofstede developed a system for generic cross cultural applications. He found scores within specific groups of questions to be interrelated and therefore created dimensions. Four dimensions were originally used: power distance, individualism, masculinity and uncertainty avoidance with long term orientation being added in 1991. He claims culture is a motivator for behaviour and found there to be distinct differences between cultures among these dimensions. The general tendencies of Chinese and Canadian cultures are graphically displayed with permission in Figure 8. The blue line represents the average of Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan while the yellow line represents Canada's cultural tendencies.

Figure 6-Hofstedes Cultural Dimensions



As Figure 8 clearly shows, Asians place less emphasis on individualistic behaviours while valuing power distance and long-term orientation more than their Canadian counterparts.

The opposing views on individualism may have a significant impact on the hiring and employment process. Canadians tend to see independence as a positive attribute and believe that individualism leads to creativity. They are more concerned about consequences of actions on themselves than others allowing them to resist group pressure and assert their own ideas with the expectation that others will do so as well. Meanwhile, Chinese, especially those from Taiwan and Mainland China, tend to disapprove of individualism and see it as being disruptive to group harmony. They are more concerned with the effects of their actions on the group and tend to downplay their personal achievements; inadvertently making them seem less ambitious and qualified than their Canadian counterparts who try to stand out and emphasize the skills they can offer.

According to Brisilin (1990) "To transcend the distance between self and other, people in individualistic societies have to develop a certain set of social skills. These include public speaking, meeting others quickly and putting them at ease...making a good first impression, and being well mannered, cordial, and verbally fluent during initial encounters with others. These skills are not as necessary for collectivist. When it comes time for a person to meet unknown others in the large society, members of the collective act as go-betweens and make introductions, describe the person's accomplishments and abilities, and so forth." (pg 21-22) This means that a significant learning process needs to occur before individuals raised in a collective environment will be able to be successful within the Canadian context.

China's high power distance ranking implies that they are used to a well defined structure and place more importance on titles. Meanwhile North Americans generally feel most comfortable with their social equals and minimize the importance of social status. For a Chinese individual entering a company with an informal corporate culture, an adjustment period is required as new cultural norms and ways of interaction need to be learned.

Lastly, China is the highest ranking country in long term orientation which indicates a society's time perspective and attitude of preserving; that is, overcoming obstacles with time, if not with will and strength (Hofstede 2005). This could be a factor in the reluctance of underemployed immigrants to change their current situation as they believe over time it will work out. The issue of saving face and not wanting to appear ungrateful for what they have confounds this issue as well and is reflected in the information disconnect diagram in Figure 12.

6.2 Inter-Asian Differences

Psychic distance paradox makes it tempting to treat all Asians alike and expect them to exhibit the same behaviour. Generally, most North Americans cannot distinguish Chinese from the Mainland and elsewhere or even between Chinese, Japanese and Koreans. Many Canadians are unaware of the history of each Chinese economy and the structures and cultural tendencies that have formed. Although there are similarities, the bars in Figure 5 show that cultural tendencies do vary within this group.

Mainland China's history of communism and autocratic rule explains it ranking lower than any other Asian country in individualism and higher in power distance.

With its free market economy, Taiwan is significantly different from autocratically ruled China. Not only does Taiwan rank higher in uncertainty avoidance than any other Asian nation, it ranks higher than Canada as well. Uncertainty avoidance focuses on the propensity to take risks and the level of tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity within the society. A high-level uncertainty avoidance ranking indicates the country has a low tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity. This creates a rule-oriented society that institutes laws, rules, regulations and controls in order to reduce the amount of uncertainty. Entering a new environment such as Vancouver that has a propensity for risk taking behaviour can be quite an adjustment. Immigrants will need to learn ways to deal and cope with uncertainty.

Hong Kong's low uncertainty avoidance rating implies a lower level of concern about ambiguity and uncertainty, more tolerance for a variety of opinions, a tendency to take more risks and propensity to readily accept change. They have been able to use this as a strength to become a middleman between China and the rest of the world. Their tolerance for different opinions could, in part, be attributed to their long time British rule and a possible reason why immigrants from Hong Kong may have a slightly easier time adjusting to the Vancouver climate than their counterparts from Taiwan and Mainland China.

6.2.1 Meaning of Work

Westwood and Lok (2003) performed an interesting study looking at the meaning of work in Beijing (part of Mainland China) and Hong Kong as measured and related to the socio-cultural and political economic environment. Their analysis reaffirmed that while there are areas of similarity, there are also significant differences in the meaning of work patterns in Beijing and Hong Kong. They attribute these differences to be caused by

cultural affinities; the way work has been situated historically, politically, ideologically and with respect to levels and stages of economic development and industrial organization.

They found the most obvious difference between Hong Kong and Beijing to be the fact that China embraced a Marxist-Leninist-Maoist political economy in 1949 while Hong Kong remained a British colony and became an exemplar of freewheeling capitalism. Hong Kong's Laissez-faire capitalism has entailed considerable freedoms with respect to all modes of economic activity. It has a very liberal labour market in which people are free to pursue employment where they can and within which there is considerable mobility. Moreover, the governments' hands off approach extend to social policy such that the level of welfare provision and protection (ie social security, unemployment benefits and pensions) force them to fend for themselves to ensure adequate financial security.

Meanwhile, the political economy of Mainland China has been on a different footing. A centrally planned economy under the auspices of a socialistic system shapes the economic, organizational and work context radically different. While recognizing that the Dengist reform process has brought important changes to enterprise structures, governance and employment relationships, Westwood and Lok (2003) maintain that there are two distinctive aspects of work experience in Mainland China that continue to shape peoples' thinking and attitudes. These are the work unit or danwei and the 'iron rice bowl' within state-owned enterprise systems. For many, these features are still a workplace reality. For others, they are in recent memory, or are resident in the collective memory and talk of people. In these systems, people are allocated to a work unit or task with little regard for their skills and therefore do not develop a strong identification with a particular occupation.

Westwood and Lok (2003) presume that both groups have a strong instrumental orientation to work, leading them to place higher importance on the extrinsic benefits than intrinsic factors. However, Hong Kong workers are expected to give stronger weighting to intrinsic factors than workers in Beijing. Financial rewards will be a priority in both locations, but Hong Kong workers are expected to be more concerned about promotion opportunities while Beijing workers are expected to be more concerned with working conditions and job security. In both locations, interest in opportunities for learning will be high, although, again, with the context and reasons being somewhat different.

These inter-Asian differences have a significant effect on how individuals from these different areas behave and perceive events. Without having a basic understanding of these differences employers will not have a base to interpret different immigrant group behaviours and therefore misinterpretations can occur affecting the hiring decisions.

6.3 Impact of Culture on Business Relationships

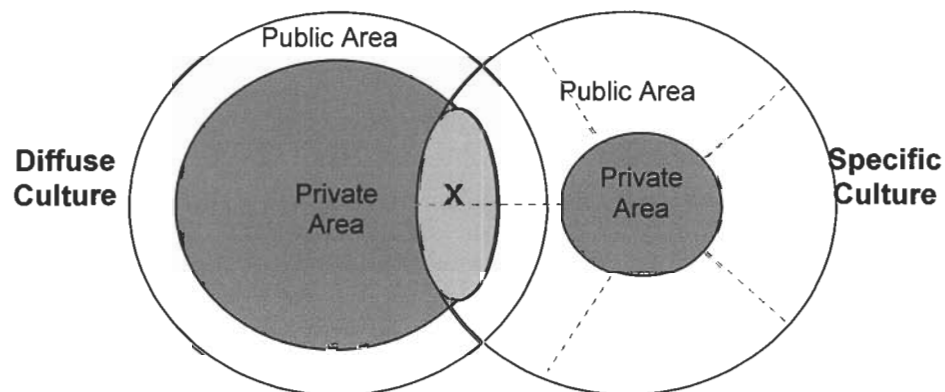
Trompenaars and Hamden-Turner (1998) believe that every culture distinguishes itself from others by the specific solutions it chooses to certain problems that reveal themselves as dilemmas. They developed a model to analyze these decision-making tendencies and show not only the challenge that managing a heterogeneous environment is but also its importance to the strategic success of companies. While Hofstede focuses on the values of society, Trompenaars and Hamden-Turner concentrate on the assumptions made at the core level and classifies cultures along a mix of both behavioural and value patterns. Just as Hofstede's framework was not intended to apply to every individual within a culture the same, Trompenaars dimensions

are used to analyse how individuals tend to react in different situations and is not intended to represent how they would react in every situation.

Trompenaars and Hamden-Turner (1998) state that understanding our own culture and our own assumptions and expectations about how people should think or act is the basis for success. The next step is then to grasp the opposite values and learn how to reconcile the differences and create a competitive advantage. The tendencies for Canada and China have been laid out in Appendix 3.

One aspect of Trompenaars and Hamden-Turners framework that can be particularly useful in understanding the tension and misunderstandings that can occur between interactions of individuals operating in a Chinese and Canadian context is the specific/diffuse dimension. The key danger in developing relationships between diffuse and specific cultures is graphically represented with permission from McGraw Hill Education in Figure 7.

Figure 7-Danger Zone: the specific-diffuse encounter



What a Canadian operating in a specific cultural context considers to be public area, a Chinese operating in a diffuse cultural context may interpret to be private area. For example, when a Canadian lets a Chinese colleague into one compartment of their public space and show their customary openness and friendliness (such as getting to

know work colleagues over the water cooler), the Chinese colleague may assume that they have been admitted to diffuse private space and interpret the situation differently than intended (such as becoming friends outside of work). This is represented by portion X of Figure 7.

Expanding on this example of the work context, Canadians see work as one of their many aspects of public life. They distinguish it from other aspects of their public life and keep it separate from their private life. However, for many Chinese employees it is still considered to be part of their private life and not separable. In a study performed by Trompenaars and Hamden-Turner (1998), 68 percent of Chinese surveyed said that their boss had authority over them outside the workplace while only 13 percent of Canadians felt the same way. Moreover, 82 percent of Chinese felt that the company was responsible for helping them with personal aspects of their life such as providing housing while only 23 percent of Canadians felt the same way (Trompenaars and Hamden-Turner 1998). The responsibilities of the employee vs employer is something that must be specified to those coming from Chinese contexts to ensure that they do not misunderstand circumstances and become disappointed with unmet expectations.

Moreover, specific cultures find it much easier to criticize people without devastating the personal space of the target of that criticism. However, the lack of separation between different aspects of life make it very difficult for diffuse cultures not to take things personally. Canadians do not tend to understand this and do not fully grasp the implications of losing face, which happens when something is made public which people perceive as being private. The importance of avoiding loss of face is why diffuse cultures avoid private confrontation and spend so much more time getting to the point. In order to prevent individuals coming from a Chinese to Context from going through unnecessary discomfort, Canadians must be conscious of this.

In Trompenaars and Hamden-Turners view “it is the interplay of the two approaches which is the most fruitful, recognizing that privacy is necessary but that complete separation of private life leads to alienation and superficiality; that business is business, but stable and deep relationships mean strong affiliations.” (1998; pg 99).

The general idea being that once we are aware of our own mental models and cultural predispositions, can respect and understand that those of another culture are legitimately different, then it becomes possible to reconcile the differences. It is not a matter of simply being nice, but rather one of survival. Once differences are reconciled we can see how others perspectives can help our own and move further ahead (Trompenaars and Turner 1998). If accomplished, the effect of the communication disconnect caused by cultural differences on hiring decisions could be minimized.

6.4 Cross Cultural Training Methods

Cross-cultural training (CCT) has long been advocated as a means of facilitating effective cross-cultural interactions; however, its use in North America is not widespread (Mendenhall and Oddou 2000). Many companies have an ethnocentric view believing their management practices are best, others should adjust to them, and do not see a need for cross-cultural training. Other companies simply lack the knowledge or resources to offer such a program.

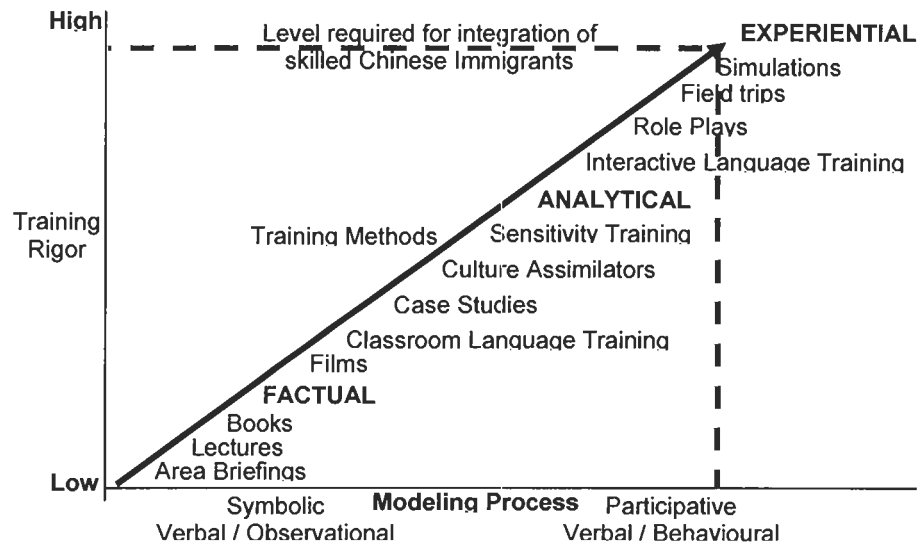
Black and Mendenhall (1990) examined the effectiveness of CCT relative to three outcomes: (1) cross-cultural skill development, (2) cross-cultural adjustment, and (3) job performance. Ninety percent of studies found a positive relationship between CCT and self—confidence concerning one’s ability to function effectively in cross-cultural situations. One hundred percent of studies found a positive relationship between CCT and increased cross-cultural relations skills as well as more accurate cross-cultural

perceptions and cross-cultural adjustments. Lastly, Seventy-three percent found a positive relationship between CCT and job performance in the cross-cultural situation. (Mendenhall and Oddou 2000)

Mendenhall and Oddou 2000 suggest that social learning theory provides a theoretical framework for systematically examining the level of rigor that specific CCT methods generally contain and determining the appropriate cross-cultural training approach for specific training cases and situations. "The greater the novelty of the behaviours to be learned and the greater the required level of reproduction, the higher the requisite levels of attention and retention needed, and the higher the level of the rigor of training required." (pg 454) The novelty of behaviours depends on three factors: The culture novelty-that is the cultural distance between the host and home cultures; job novelty-that is the transferability of your skills from the old job to the new job; and the degree of interaction.

Analysing skilled Asian immigrants on these dimensions, the culture novelty would be high (as discussed in the Cultural Difference Section). With Immigrants planning on working in the same occupations that they left in China, the job novelty could be fairly low, but the Canadian context and operating environment does make it somewhat novel. The degree of Canadian interaction would depend upon the amount of communication required within the work context as well as social networks, but for true integration to occur would need to be high. Overall, the novelty would be high and therefore the training rigor would need to be in the high range as well. Figure 8 graphically represents the type of training methods that Mendenhall and Oddou (2000) think are required to have a high level of rigor and be successful in the novel situation.

Figure 8-Modelling Processes, Rigor and Training Methods



Reproduced with permission from Mendenhall and Oddou (2000)

The specific training methods being recommended for skilled Asian immigrants looking to integrate in to the Vancouver economy are displayed in Figure 13 and discussed in Section 11.2.

7 EMPLOYER PERCEPTIONS

In Mosaic's (an immigrant service organization in Vancouver) experience, immigrants are often regarded as sources of cheap labour in North America. Additionally they are viewed as second-class workers incapable of performing a job because they lack the language skills and Canadian work experience and are devoted to different cultural customs. (Chan 2005)

Wong (2004) found over 70 percent of skilled immigrants in British Columbia to come from cultures that employers perceive to be collective and passive. It may be necessary for immigrants from these cultures to proactively enhance their existing skills with extra cultural training programs that would provide them with a firmer grasp on what is expected in the Canadian workforce.

According to Larry Koopman, Program Manager for the Greater Vancouver Business Leadership Network, stereotypes and misconceptions based on culture or background rather than objective evaluations of the employees contributions is the most important challenge for organizations to effectively manage diversity (Koopman 2005). This is supported by a study performed by Mendenhall and Oddou (2000) that found all executives interviewed acknowledged that there were cultural biases in the selection process that probably caused talented people to be overlooked.

In 2004 the Business Council of British Columbia performed a study of approximately 190 large and medium sized enterprises engaged in business in British Columbia. Seventy percent of employers surveyed currently employ skilled immigrants. Of these,

77 percent did not seek skilled immigrants out, rather, the immigrants applied to the employer through conventional means, 6 percent were recruited using formal methods such as contacting an immigrant service organization or engaging in intra-company transfers and 11 percent relied on informal methods such as internal employee referrals. (Wong 2004)

Wong (2004) found that many small and medium sized enterprises (SME) were unaware of programs such as the provincial nominee program. Forty percent of provincial nominees are nominated by the public sector namely healthcare (30 percent) and education (10 percent). This may suggest that the public sector has greater access to public programs and that SMEs in the private sector are not receiving the intended information. It could also be in part because the vast majority of companies have yet to experience serious skill shortages necessary to contemplate alternative labour pools. However, if posed with the situation of a severe skilled labour shortage, over one quarter of employers who would hire skilled immigrants had no idea how to tap into that applicant pool. (Wong 2004)

Wong (2004) found the foremost benefit of employing immigrants was the diversity that they bring to the workplace and the differing perspectives that they offer. The second most cited benefit was superior work ethic. However, 60 percent of employers surveyed believe that poor language proficiency is a major challenge in integrating skilled immigrants into their respective workplaces. All employers suggested extensive training in Canadian culture and higher standards of language proficiency were desperately needed. Some also mentioned the need for training on the nature of the Canadian workplace.

It was communicated that in the increasingly competitive business environment, cost containment is a priority. Corporately, additional capital and resources are not typically available for a comprehensive integration program, employers do not see it as their role, especially since there is government funded free training available to newly arrived immigrants. Employers would like to see government and/or immigrant service organizations prepare and train the applicant but stated that the language training had to be improved to a much higher level. A handful of employers said that they would take on the cost of training for specific licensing criteria if they could not fill positions with Canadians. (Wong 2004)

8 VANCOUVER TECH INDUSTRY

According to statistic Canada 2001, landed immigrants account for less than 5 percent of the Information Technology workforce. Considering that other countries such as India have been very successful in the tech industry and that Asia has been the major source of immigrants intending to work in information technology with China alone accounting for 37 percent of all skilled principal applicants in IT occupations (CIC 2003), this is quite surprising. In part, this could be attributed to the drastic differences between tech culture and Chinese culture as described in section 3.2, but even more so I believe that the lack of knowledge and resources available to integrate these immigrants, as discussed in Section 10, is what is making employers hesitant.

The Vancouver tech industry consists of relatively young companies with flatter, more informal corporate cultures. Discussions with HR professionals in the industry emphasised the collaborative nature of the industry and the importance of the relationships built among the various players to create the best possible synergies.

The industry is nearing a point where skill shortages are hampering growth and expansion opportunities. They are becoming desperate for skilled labour. In the near future it may not be so easy to pass up Chinese candidates because of cultural differences.

Murphy and Leech (2005) identified several issues facing the tech industry including “a continually expanding list of career choices and opportunities...baby boomers reaching retirement, bringing concerns about the availability of qualified technologists, technicians

and highly skilled trades people ... the design and construction of infrastructure for 2010 at a time when the industry is firing on all cylinders, adding to the pressure for qualified people...integrating immigrants into the workforce and society, and our role in ensuring a smooth transition...post secondary educational institutions setting enrolment targets that are often driven by 'bums in seats' , challenging the lower enrolment, higher cost technology and trade programs to justify their continuance...career counselling that is sometimes not all it ought to be ...and much more!" (pg 4)

In a recent Vancouver Sun article, Peter Wilson (2005) emphasized the urgency that the matter needs to be dealt with by saying "Jobs are going begging in B.C.'s burgeoning tech industry-with companies scrambling daily for talent and searching worldwide to find key technical employees" (pg C1) and the situation is not expected to get better anytime soon.

According to Tim Murphy and John Leach at Applied Science Technologists and Technicians of BC, "keeping BC competitive is closely linked with fostering career opportunities for young people, our technology professionals of tomorrow, and the effective integration of foreign-trained professionals into the workforce" (Murphy and Leach 2005). However, as shown by figure 1, several barriers are preventing this from happening.

9 METHODOLOGY

I conducted an exploratory study whereby literature reviews were used to analyze the trends of: skilled immigration to Vancouver, wage and occupational disparity, and the reasons for skilled immigrant underemployment. Background information was provided connecting economic conditions within Canada to public perceptions of immigration and changes to Canadian immigration policies. Immigration trends, and in particular the changing country of origin were analyzed and suggested to be possible factors affecting the selection bias.

Experience surveys were conducted with:

- Don Devoretz, Director of RIIM (a research centre dedicated to studying the impact of immigration on local economies, the family, educational systems and the physical infrastructure of cities), to discuss proposed courses of action, determine what has already been done and narrow down the research focus;
- Kenny Zhang, Researcher at Asia Pacific Foundation and Sherman Chan, Director at Mosaic (an immigrant service organization), to discuss the problem in general and learn from their experiences.
- Kirk Hill, Director of SFU Career Resources, and Melissa McCrae, MBA Applied Projects Advisor, were then used to gain knowledge of the hiring processes and an understanding of the problem from the human resource point of view.

From the consolidation of this information, an interview guide was then developed to clarify the relationship between the communication disconnect caused by cultural differences and the hiring decision in the Vancouver tech industry. The base interview guide is attached in appendix 4.

Primary research was then performed in the form of 20 interviews with Human Resource professionals from various Vancouver high tech companies to: determine their current situation, learn about their perceptions of skilled Chinese immigrants, confirm the communication disconnect and get a feel for the steps they are willing to take to better integrate immigrants. This was done with the eventual goal of helping skilled immigrants know what they need to do in order to achieve their potential and come up with possible solutions for how both immigrants and Canadian employees can reconcile these cultural differences.

Allison Rutherford from the High Tech Employers Group, a network of HR professionals in Vancouver Hi-tech companies, was then used as the starting point to select Human Resource professionals to interview. She was able to refer me to five other Human Resource professionals of medium sized Vancouver Tech firms who she thought may be willing to do the interview. Three of these individuals (two of whom asked to remain confidential) were then interviewed and Marlene Jan, HR manager at Blast Radius, was able to refer me to other companies (of both small and medium size) and my interview sample grew. To increase the sample size, other interviewees were then obtained randomly by cold calling Vancouver Tech Companies from the yellow pages. Altogether 20 Human Resource professionals (most of whom asked to remain confidential) from the Vancouver tech industry were interviewed. Whenever possible interviews were done face to face, however, due to time constraints and scheduling conflicts this was not possible in all cases. Where meeting face to face was not possible, phone interviews

were used. The base interview guide used in the interviews has been attached in Appendix 4, the tabulations for multichotomous questions has been attached in Appendix 5 and the results are described in Section 9.

10 INTERVIEW RESULTS

It was confirmed that within the sample Vancouver tech companies interviewed, only a small percentage of skilled Asian immigrants applying actually get hired. Survey results showed the percentage of Asian immigrants applying to average over 30 percent while the percentage of Asian immigrants hired in their workforce to be only around 5 percent.

In most cases, employers were aware that they are turning away skilled Asian immigrants, but there was a general sentiment expressed that it was a 'business decision' based on their performance in the interviews and the potential negative effect on productivity and not at all affected by the country of origin, race or ethnicity.

When pushed further on where employers concerns with productivity stemmed from, employers were divided on whether cost or lack of knowledge in relation to how to integrate these immigrants was the major concern. One interviewee who was more concerned about the hard costs worded it as "not only are they unproductive at the beginning, but they are taking a productive member of my team away from making money to act as a baby sitter." Other interviewees who were more worried about their own knowledge and abilities expressed more sensitive sentiments that they would like hire these individuals and help them adjust, but they don't know how and could not risk hiring candidates that may not integrate.

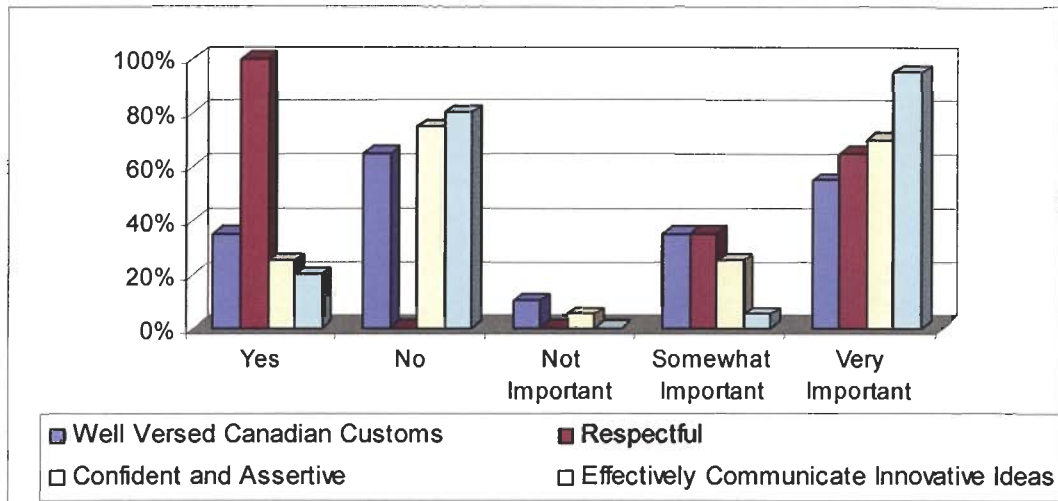
Most respondents said that tech companies generally do not view Chinese credentials as an issue; their previous 'technical experience' is recognized and they are viewed as being very hard working and technically competent. In many cases, interviewees

claimed the candidates to be the ones undervaluing their previous experience. Asian Immigrants tended to lack confidence in their abilities and did not feel ready for positions that entailed certain responsibilities.

The two most commonly cited factors affecting employers' decision to hire skilled immigrants were communication skills and the ability to work within the Canadian context. Some interviewees felt that cultural differences were not important, which could have been caused by a lack of understanding on the part of the interviewee as to what cultural differences are, but it seems evident from the literature reviews that cultural differences are what affect their communication skills and ability to work within the Canadian context.

When asked about how skilled Asian immigrants tend to portray themselves in the interview process, all respondents felt that skilled Asian immigrants were very respectful, but only 35 percent felt that they were well versed in Canadian cultural customs. Twenty percent felt that they were able to communicate their ideas effectively and only 25 percent felt that skilled Asian immigrants portrayed themselves to be confident and assertive. Although all factors were considered somewhat important to very important, Figure 9 shows the high importance employers placed on Asian immigrants being able to effectively communicate innovative ideas.

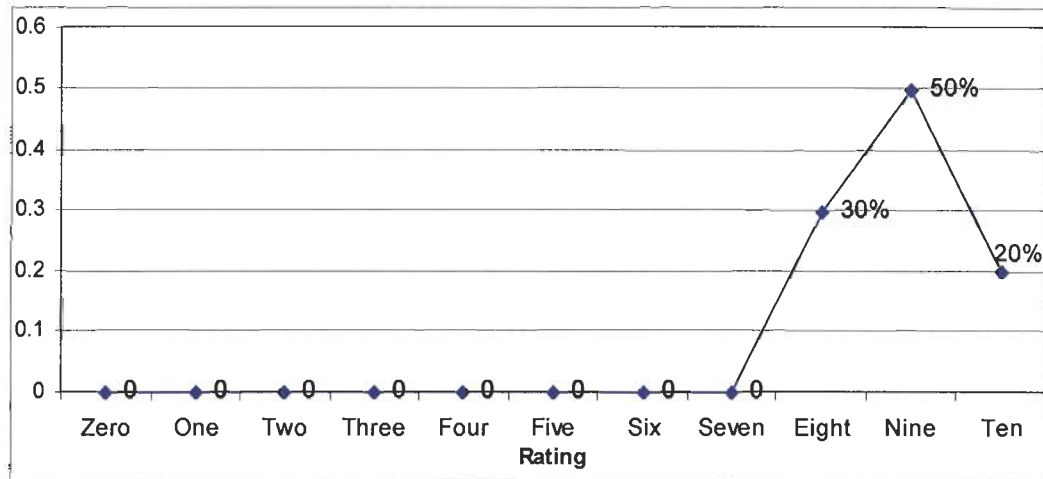
Figure 9-Interview Results



Considering its importance, the low number of employers that perceived immigrants to be able to do effectively communicate innovative ideas is a cause for significant concern. As mentioned in Figure 1 there are a significant number of barriers preventing effective communication that must be overcome. In order to do so, suggested training avenues and methods to best provide Asian immigrants the skills necessary to effectively communicate are included in the Recommendation section.

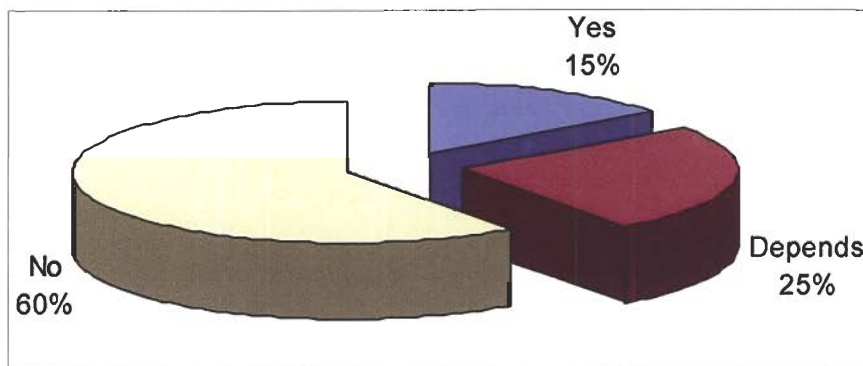
Employers confirmed the suspicion that perceived fit within the corporate culture was an important factor in the hiring decision. As shown in Figure 10, on a scale of 1-10, 10 being very important, 20 percent of respondents said that perceived fit within corporate culture was 10, 50 percent 9, and 30 percent 8.

Figure 10-Importance of Fit



Important characteristics of corporate cultures in the tech industry included: outgoing personality, work ethic, team skills, problem-solving skills, social skills, interpersonal skills, drive and creativity. However it was perceived by some that skilled Asian immigrants lacked the social skills or personality traits necessary to fit within the corporate culture and be productive members of the collaborative environment that they were trying to create. As seen in Figure 11, 60% of employers stated that they did not perceive skilled Asian immigrants to be a good fit with their corporate culture.

Figure 11-Perceived Fit within Corporate Culture



Considering its importance (as shown in Figure 10) there is a definite need for immigrants not only to develop effective communications skills, but also to learn Canadian cultural norms as discussed in the recommendation section.

It is interesting to note that all but one employer perceived a shortage of skilled labour in the near future, but only one currently had or had set plans to develop a cultural integration program. The most commonly cited reasons for not offering integration programs in-house was the lack of time, knowledge and resources available. There are many companies within the Vancouver tech industry that do not yet have HR departments, nether less the know-how to develop a comprehensive integration program. There were also some employers that were doubtful as to the positive effects a cultural integration program would have. However, 76 percent of employers were interested in outsourcing such a function and 83 percent saw a role for educational institutions to offer cultural awareness courses. This is reflected in the recommendations provided in Section 12.

11 INFORMATION DISCONNECT

The process of acculturation (individuals and organizations adapting and becoming ready to change to each other's cultures) can take place in a number of different ways:

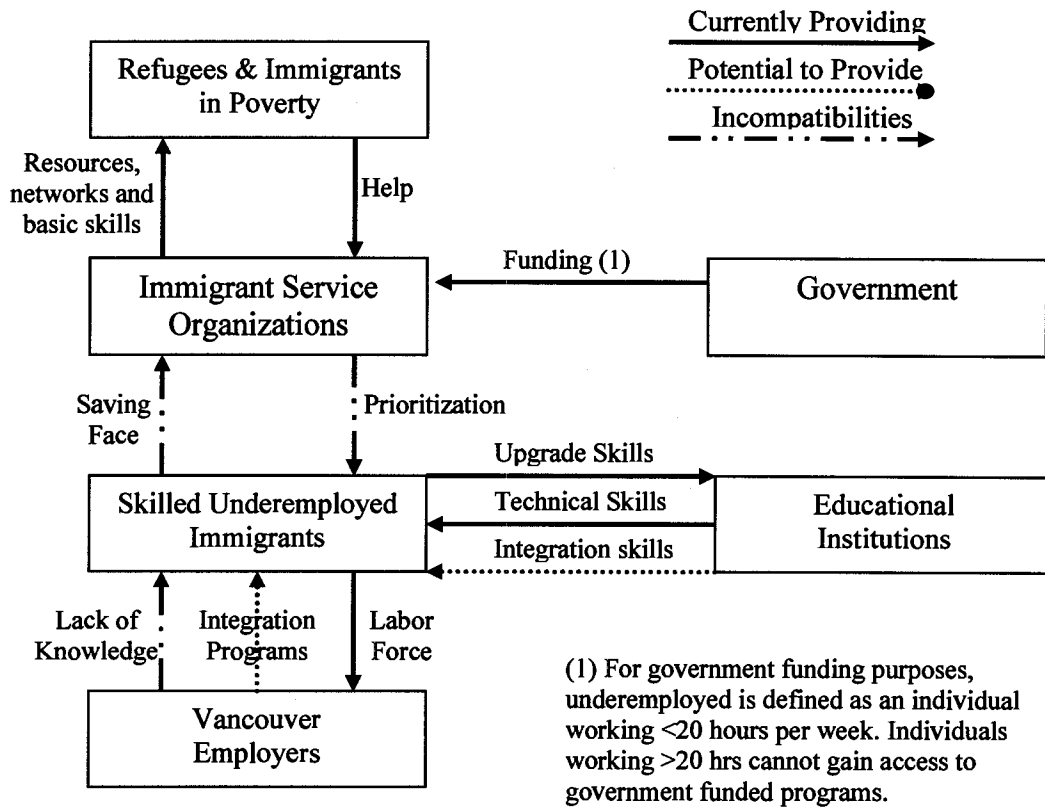
- Assimilation-where the non-dominant group relinquishes its identity
- Integration-where the non-dominant group maintains its cultural integrity but becomes at the same time an integral part of the dominant culture.
- Rejection-where the non-dominant group withdraws from the dominant culture
- Decolouration-where the non-dominant group loses cultural and psychological contact with both his or her own culture and the dominant culture. (Briscoe and Schuler 2004)

Most employers and immigrants claim that integration is the goal, but very few know how to achieve it. What they do know is that translation services are not enough, but before immigrants can take the next step, two key challenges lay in their path. The first challenge is for immigrants to determine what they need to update or improve upon; the second challenge being the cost and avenues available to do so. Willingness to jump through the hoops is not the problem, but knowing what hoops to jump through and how to jump through them is.

This problem has been able to go on for so long because of a void in the market. Most Immigrant service organizations target refugees and low income families. Their main role is to find them jobs to survive, not necessarily to fulfil their potential. There are several reasons for this including the need to prioritize their funding to areas that they

believe will be most effective. The collective nature of the Chinese culture, the idea of the extended family and wanting to take care of your peers make refugees and immigrants living in poverty likely candidates. In the past, these Asian organizations have found helping skilled underemployed immigrants to be a difficult task, in part, because of the issue of saving face. Underemployed skilled Chinese immigrants tend to personalize their career failures and become reluctant to go to offices such as Mosaic, because of the fear of losing face and admitting that they are not as successful as they should be in front of their Chinese counterparts. (Chan 2005) Moreover, they do not want to be perceived in front of their Chinese counterparts as being ungrateful for what they have. Lastly, due to their long-term orientation, there is a belief that overtime things will work out. Even if immigrant service organizations did want to target this segment they would likely be unsuccessful. These disconnects or incompatibilities are shown by the broken lines in Figure 12.

Figure 12-Information Disconnect



In order to minimize some of the above-mentioned issues of confronting the problem in a Chinese context, it may be necessary to approach it within the Canadian context instead, that is, by Canadian individuals, allowing Asian immigrants to distinguish between operating within the Chinese and Canadian Contexts.

On the employer side, although many companies pay lip service to cultural awareness and integration programs, very few outside of the banks and RCMP have programs in Vancouver. The reason being, within the Vancouver business community, these are the largest organizations; the ones that have the money, time and access to the necessary knowledge to set them up. The problem is that the majority of employees in Vancouver work for smaller employers, many of whom do not even have HR departments never mind the resources, money, time or knowledge to set up such programs.

Rather than each employer inventing their own efforts, there is the potential for educational institutions to help fill this void. In the exploratory interviews performed as a part of this study, 67 percent of employers interviewed said that they would consider outsourcing cultural integration programs and 83 percent saw a need for educational institutions to offer cultural integration courses.

Vancouver is not alone in its desire to outsource these programs. According to Mendenhall and Oddou (2000) "Since many [North American] firms do not have the in-house expertise to design CCT [Cross Cultural Training programs] the use of external consultants and trainers is common. (pg. 465)

As skilled labour becomes more scarce, employers will move into a crisis situation and proper management of a diverse workforce will become a competitive necessity rather than an option for Canadian Companies.

12 RECOMMENDATIONS

12.1 Skills Required By Employers/Canadian Employees

Teo and Waters (2003) suggest that resident populations require more easily accessible information about immigrant populations to enhance understanding and breakdown barriers caused by stereotyping and miss-informed judgments. In addition, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998) believe that understanding our own culture and our own assumptions and expectations about how people should act is the basis for success. This same sentiment is reflected by Thomas and Inkson (2004) whom believe that the first step to cultural flexibility is to understand your own culture and how it affects your interpretation of the behaviours of others.

As survey results reflect, human resource professionals in the Vancouver tech sector see a need for educational institutions to teach cultural awareness courses and programs. Alternatively, the amount of literature in newspapers, magazines, and books on cultural tendencies could increase. However, I think that the most effective avenue to teach Canadian workers would be by employer held seminars. Canadians need to believe that an understanding of their own and other cultural tendencies will benefit them before they will actively try to develop these skills. For this reason, employer regulated programs may be received with more success as it can be seen as part of the job, necessary to build a corporate culture of diversity and an important skill to succeed within the organization.

12.2 Skills Required by Skilled Chinese Immigrants

While I believe the skills required by Canadian employees and employers are best taught through employer held seminars, the skills required by Chinese immigrants may be best learned through educational institutions. The reason being twofold: they take time and practice to develop and many skilled immigrants will not have the opportunity to be hired at an appropriate level unless they have already been learned.

It is important to note that these skills are not learned simply by being in a new environment. "To develop cultural literacy or competency, one must take deliberate steps to learn about another country's or culture's practices and values. One must make a concerted effort to learn about the deep values that motivate people and provide the context for their actions. One must experience the culture shock of coping with a new culture in order to begin to fully understand it so as to function effectively within it."

(Briscoe and Schuler 2004, pg 291)

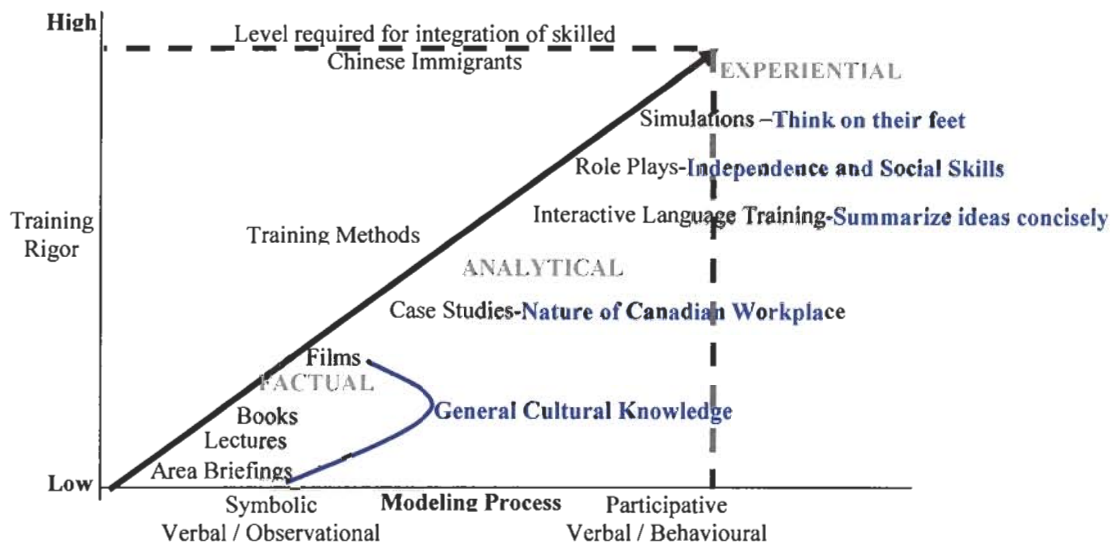
According to Briscoe and Schuler (2004) "Training for cross-cultural adjustment should focus on helping IA [International assignees] and their families do three things: (1) become aware that behaviours vary across cultures...and work at observing these differences quite carefully; (2) build a mental map of the new culture so they can understand why the local people value certain behaviours and ideas and how those behaviours and ideas may be appropriately reproduced; and (3) practice the behaviours they will need to be effective in their overseas assignments." (Pg 260)

I believe this broad framework for cross-cultural training originally intended for use with international assignees can be used as a base for integrating skilled immigrants.

In addition to general cultural knowledge, I have identified six specific factors that immigrants coming from a Chinese context must learn in order to be successful. With

permission from Mendenhall and Oddou, Figure 13 places these factors within their modelling process, rigor and training methods model showing the most effective ways that I feel they can be taught.

Figure 13-Suggested Courses of Action



(1) Nature of the Canadian workplace-Although standard operating procedures may vary from industry to industry or even from company to company, the role that rules and relationships play is fairly consistent in Canada but significantly different from China. The important distinction between rules and relationships and the purpose of each must be explained to immigrants hoping to integrate successfully. As shown in Figure 12, after the general cultural knowledge has been introduced, I feel the best way to teach the nature of the Canadian workplace is through a case study format. This gives immigrants a chance to analyse a situation from the outside, removing them from the Chinese context, and allowing them to ask questions as to why certain events are occurring.

(2) Summarize Ideas concisely-that is the need to develop logical and linear arguments rather than circular arguments. This is something that is hard for many Asians to grasp

and again needs to be practiced. This is best done in an educational setting where repetitious exercises can be used to gain an understanding of how linear logic works and receive constructive feedback on the difference between what is being said and what is expected in many situations.

(3) Independence-that is how to fend for themselves, prove their own abilities and respectfully challenge authority. This is something that needs to be learned outside of the Chinese context and practiced in a non-threatening environment. Role-playing, with constructive feedback being provided, would be one way to accomplish this.

(4) New set of Social Skills-that is how to initiate conversations and make an appropriate first impression. Mak et al (1999) suggests that newcomers from culturally different backgrounds will benefit greatly from learning appropriate ways of conducting strategic social exchanges useful for a variety of interpersonal situations, such as seeking information and help, making social contacts and conversation, participation in group discussion, receiving and giving feedback and refusing a request or expressing disagreement. I believe that this too can be practiced through role playing exercises.

(5) Think on their feet- It was cited in the interviews that Asian immigrants tend to be reluctant to give immediate answers. Immigrants need to understand the expectation of being able to make decisions without conferring with others and reduce their reliance on and tendency to defer decisions to authority. This again is a tool that needs to be practiced and a toastmaster type format or simulations may be most appropriate.

(6) Deal with ambiguity. To handle ambiguity, individuals often find it necessary to invent or reclaim tools for deep learning that is ways to surface their mental models to help find patterns in chaotic phenomena. One way that this can be taught is by using structured collaborative groups in the classroom setting.

13 AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

A more proactive approach would be to set up such programs in China. On average it takes 2 years between when economic immigrants apply to immigrate and when they actually land. This lag time could be effectively used to prepare immigrants for what they are about to face before the face it. An interesting potential avenue for future research would be to look at the demand and feasibility of such a program.

It would also be interesting to do a cross industry study analysing the factors leading to skilled Asian immigrant underemployment in different industries or a cross cultural study looking at the perceptions and integration possibilities of immigrants from other cultural backgrounds in the tech industry.

Lastly, a similar study could be done looking at the integration of foreign students into post secondary institutions to find ways to ease their transition into the Canadian school systems.

14 APPENDICES

14.1 Appendix 1-Immigration Trends

	Economic Variables in Vancouver	Public perception	Policy In Place	Push Factors from China	Immigration Trend
1881-1885	Workers needed to construct CPR railway	Immigrants are needed	Open Immigration policy		Arrived in droves from S. China
1885	Railway construction completed	Immigrants are taking jobs away from Canadians	Head tax on Chinese migrants to discourage entrance		Experienced reduced levels
1923			Restrictive Chinese Immigration Act to prohibit entrance		Immigration cut off
1967	Post War Boom/ Industrial revolution (3). Europeans not able to meet demand	Skilled Immigrants can be useful	Point system put into place to promote economic development and employment by attracting international business persons based on their ability to successfully establish themselves in Canada	Riot caused by cultural revolution	90,000 immigrants from Hong Kong, Mainland China and Taiwan immigrated.-Hong Kong accounting for over 2/3rds of this (Li, 2003)
1973				Diplomatic relations established between China and Canada	
1976-1978				Death of Mao Zedong-marked end of cultural revolution.	80,000 immigrants arrived from Hong Kong, Mainland China, and Taiwan. Migration from China small; estimated 50,000 Taiwanese immigrated (2)
				Deng Xioping-created economic conditions for mobility	
Early 1980s	Recession in Vancouver	Too many immigrants are being let in		Uncertainty in HK as to effects of Chinese Rule	
			Pro-democracy student movement in China (1)		
Late 1990s	Economic surge in Vancouver	We need skilled laborers to fill voids	Canada opened immigration office in Beijing	Conditions in Hong Kong improved	Substantial immigration shift from Hong Kong to China. Taiwan and PRC became #1 and 2 sources of immigrants
				Open door policy in China resulted in economic boon	

1-According to Gou and DeVoretz (2005) the event had two conflicting effects. "On the one hand, the event prompted the Canadian government to issue permanent resident status to many Chinese students and scholars who were studying in Canada during that time. On the other hand, the Chinese government tightened up rules to further restrict people's mobility." (Guo and DeVoretz 2005; pg 6)

2-According to Tseng (2001) immigration from Taiwan has always been closely related to the island's political instability, particularly with regard to its relationship with Mainland China.

3-As the industrial revolution occurred manufacturing jobs that were once a staple of immigrant employment opportunity and security were replaced by either high skill/high pay or low skill/low pay positions in the bifurcated service sector.

References used: Gou and DeVoretz 2005, Edington 2003, Edington et al 2003, Li 1998

14.2 Appendix 2 – Cultural Contexts

Low Context Cultures	High Context Cultures
Competitive and believe in individualism.	Prefer group harmony to individual achievements.
Prefer logical and linear arguments and rely on the verbal over nonverbal message.	Emotions and behaviours are more openly expressed and more highly valued than pure reason or words.
Messages tend to be implicit	Messages tend to be explicit
The present and future take precedence over the past. They want personal control over their environment.	Past oriented, reliance on non-verbal codes over verbal messages.
Prefer change over tradition	Prefer tradition over change

14.3 Appendix 3-Trompenaars 7 Dimensions

	Dimensions	Description	Country Tendencies
1-	Particularism	Decisions are made based on relationships	Chinese (1)
	Universalism	Rules and procedures guide decisions	Canadian
(1) Unless it involves breaking a commitment to the organization in which case Chinese tend to have more a universalistic stance as well.			
2-	Communitarianism	The group is given preference	Chinese (2)
	Individualism	Tendency to look out for yourself first, then the group	Canadian
(2) Although Chinese have a strong tendency to protect members of their group, 57percent of Chinese did report that jobs found most frequently in organizations did allow for individual credit to be received.			
3-	Neutrality	Conceal emotions, seek indirect response	Chinese
	Affectivity	Show emotions, seek more of a direct response	Canadian
NOTE: Neither countries tendency is that strong on this dimension. The differences can be seen more in the directness of the response respected.			
4-	Diffuse	Deep relationships are developed and reputation transfers to all aspects of life.	Chinese
	Specific	Relationships tend to be more superficial and to serve a purpose. Public space is much larger than private space.	Canadian
See page 33 for further explanation			
5-	Outer Directed	Believe that man is part of nature and must go along with its laws, directions and forces.	Chinese
	Inner Directed	Believe that they can and should control nature by imposing their will upon it.	Canadian
While 42percent of Canadians believe that it is worth trying to control nature, only 22percent of Chinese reflect the same philosophy. The difference between the two societies can really be seen when measuring the percentage of respondents believe that they are the Captains of their fate-79percent of Canadians vs 29percent of Chinese.			
6-	Ascribed	Who you are-people are born to influence.	Chinese
	Achieved	What you do-accord status on basis of achievements.	Canadian
In the Chinese context, only 19percent believe that it comes from family background. It is more likely to be influenced by age, gender, social connections, or education. NOTE: all societies ascribe and all achieve after a fashion. It is once again a question of where a cycle starts			
7-	Synchronic	Multi task all at once. Time for appointments is approximant, relationships more important than schedule.	Chinese
	Sequential	See relationships as sequential, stick to schedule, separate means from ends.	Canadian
(Trompenaars and Turner, 1998)			

14.4 Appendix 4–Interview Guide

Name	<input type="text"/>	Company	<input type="text"/>
Keep Confidential?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO	Keep Confidential?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
Nationality	<input type="text"/>	Position	<input type="text"/>

- 1) Do you currently have a skilled labor shortage or perceive a shortage in the near future? YES NO
- 2) What Percentage of your applicants do you estimate are skilled Asian Immigrants? %
- 3) What percentage of your workforce would you estimate to be skilled Asian immigrants? %
- 4) When I say skilled immigrant underemployment, what is the first thing that comes to your mind?
- 5) What are the key factors that affect your decision to hire a skilled Asian immigrant or not?
- 6) Do you see Asian immigrants as a potentially powerful source of skilled labor? YES NO
Why or Why not? _____
- 7) On a scale of 1-10 (10 being very important) how important is perceived fit within your corporate culture into the hiring process?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

What aspects are most important to you? _____
- 8) Do you find that skilled Asian immigrants are a good fit within this culture? YES NO
Why or Why not? _____
- 9) What is your general perception of how skilled Asian immigrants portray themselves throughout the hiring process? _____
- 10) Do you find that Asian immigrants are well versed in Canadian Cultural customs? YES NO
How important is this to you?

Not Important	Somewhat Important	Very Important
---------------	--------------------	----------------

Are they Respectful? YES NO
How important is this to you?

Not Important	Somewhat Important	Very Important
---------------	--------------------	----------------

Are they confident and assertive? YES NO
How important is this to you?

Not Important	Somewhat Important	Very Important
---------------	--------------------	----------------

Are they able to effectively communicate innovative ideas? YES NO

How important is this to you?

Not Important	Somewhat Important	Very Important
---------------	--------------------	----------------

11) Do you now, or have you ever, offered cultural integration programs?

YES	NO
YES	NO

If not, would you be interested in outsourcing this function?

Why or why not? _____

12) Would you consider hiring immigrants as a FREE intern to determine if they can adjust?

YES	NO
-----	----

Why or Why not? _____

13) Do you see a need for educational institutions to offer cultural integration courses to teach immigrants Canadian customs?

YES	NO
-----	----

What key factors would need to be included? _____

14) Are there any important questions that I have not asked? Anything that you would like to add?

Would you like to be notified of my results?

YES	NO
-----	----

Email: _____

14.5 Appendix 5-Interview Tabulations

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20		
Well Versed Canadian Customs																						
Yes			1		1	1				1		1				1			1		35%	
No	1	1		1			1	1	1		1		1	1	1		1	1		1	65%	
Importance																						
Not Important				1																1	10%	
S/W Important			1			1			1	1					1	1					35%	
Very Important	1	1			1		1	1				1	1	1			1	1		1	55%	
Respectful																						
Yes	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	100%	
No																					0%	
Importance																						
Not Important																					0%	
S/W Important	1	1	1			1				1					1	1					35%	
Very Important				1	1		1	1	1	1		1	1	1			1	1	1	1	65%	
Confident and Assertive																						
Yes			1							1	1			1						1	25%	
No	1	1		1	1	1	1	1	1			1	1		1	1	1	1		1	75%	
Importance																						
Not Important							1														5%	
S/W Important	1	1								1					1					1	25%	
Very Important			1	1	1	1		1	1	1		1	1	1		1	1	1		1	70%	
Effectively Communicate Innovative Ideas																						
Yes			1							1	1									1	20%	
No	1	1		1	1	1	1	1	1			1	1	1	1	1	1			1	80%	
Importance																						
Not Important																					0%	
S/W Important			1																		5%	
Very Important	1	1		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	95%	
Asian Immigrants Fit within the Corporate Culture																						
Yes						1					1									1	15%	
Depends			1	1		1									1	1					25%	
No	1			1			1	1	1	1		1	1	1			1			1	60%	
Importance																						
Eight						1		1	1	1						1			1		30%	
Nine				1	1		1				1	1	1	1	1		1				1	50%
Ten	1	1	1																	1	20%	

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