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RESEARCH REPORT

*Immigration Acculturation Process: A Study of
Adaptation Experiences of Elderly Dependent
Chinese Immigrants in Auckland*

A 52.785 research report presented in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree of Master of Business Studies
at Massey University

ZHENG WANG

1999

MASSEY UNIVERSITY



1061454704

Acknowledgements

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the people who have supported me through this thesis.

Firstly, I would like to thank my wonderful supervisor, Professor Chris Selvarajah, for his invaluable guidance and feedback throughout the entire process. He started his research focusing on immigrant acculturation experience from the early 1990's. I am moved and inspired by his enthusiasm and his personal academic interest in the study of immigrants from Asia, as well an interest I share greatly.

Secondly, a big thanks to all the elderly dependent Chinese settlers who participated in this research in Auckland. Without their participation and cooperation, this research could not be finished completely.

Finally, I wish to express my gratitude to my wife and my son for their constant support and encouragement.

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Abstract

Over the past decade, there has been a “new wave” of Asian immigrants to New Zealand. The majority of these immigrants are Chinese. Following the wave of immigration of younger Chinese, a large number of elderly Chinese immigrated to New Zealand in the past five years under the Family Reunion Category to live with their sons or daughters. In a new environment, many of them suffer from language difficulty, changing of relationships between family members, discontent, stress, and cross-culture shock. As elderly family members of an ethnic minority group, they have not received much attention in the New Zealand society. The main purpose of this study is to examine the adaptation experiences of elderly dependent Chinese immigrants who moved to New Zealand in recent years. For the purpose of this research, an elderly dependent Chinese immigrant is defined as an ethnic Chinese above the age of 50 and who immigrated to New Zealand in the last five years to be with their children.

In this study, the change of New Zealand’s immigration policies is summarized. Traditional Chinese value on child-parents relationships is discussed to indicate that in a new Chinese immigrant family, this issue impact on both the adjustment experiences of older parents and the adaptation processes of younger family members when they move to a new environment such as New Zealand. Dominant social gerontological theories are seen as limited in explaining the aging experience in adjustment of the elderly dependent Chinese immigrants. Assimilation theory is also described to try to give more explanation on immigrant adjustment. Finally, cross-cultural adjustment study which plays an important part in analyzing the immigrant’s acculturation in the foreign environment is adopted to examine the process of acculturation of the elderly dependent Chinese immigrants.

The main part of the study involved group-administered questionnaire surveys to measure the various aspects of the adaptation, while selected in-depth interviews were conducted by the researcher to explore the issue of influence of relationships between the elderly

dependent Chinese immigrants and other family members in the New Zealand environment.

The key findings of this study are: (1) The five main factors that influence the living condition in New Zealand of elderly dependent Chinese immigrants are language difficulty, medical care, transportation, cost of living, and relationships with other family members. (2) The 50 – 59 age group among the respondents thinks that immigration to New Zealand was helpful to their family. However, the same age group responded that they are suffering more stress in the New Zealand environment. (3) Respondents who have lived in New Zealand between 1 and 2 years support that learning English is important and equally understanding the local culture is important. (4) The study also showed that when the immigrant family coped well in the local culture, the influence of the five factors (language difficulty, medical care, transportation, cost of living, and relationships with other family members) significantly impact less on the living conditions of the elderly dependent Chinese immigrants in New Zealand. (5) Based on factor analysis, elderly Chinese immigrants who were less adaptive, less cooperative and less participative in the New Zealand environments responded that they may decide to leave New Zealand. As a corollary than, the immigrants and their families with high degree of contentment may decide to stay in New Zealand and become more adaptive, more cooperative and more participative. The results generally support the application of the four-stage adjustment model of Oberg (1960) in the study of expatriates and Expatriate Acculturation Process (EAP) Model of Selvarajah (1998) in the study of immigrants.