

Globalization and the Erosion Effects on

BY GUIDA MAN

Cet article examine l'impact de la mondialisation et de la restructuration économique sur les émigrantes chinoises de Hong Kong et de Chine. L'État qui économise sur les services sociaux offerts aux nouvelles immigrantes et les procédures institutionnelles qui discréditent ces femmes hautement scolarisées, sont deux facteurs qui leur rendent la vie difficile dans leur pays d'adoption à cause de la double charge de travail à la maison et sur le marché du travail.

Since the 1980s, the Canadian neoliberal state has been rapidly undergoing economic restructuring. The dominant discourse argues for the natural and inevitability of the mechanisms of globalization, structural adjustment, and privatization, thus closing off challenges and debates for possible alternative strategies and action. The withdrawal of the state and the erosion of welfare programs (such as daycare, elderly care, women's shelters, psychiatric hospitals, etc.) changes concretely the everyday lives of Canadian citizens, particularly for women and other disadvantaged groups. Previously state-subsidized programs such as childcare, elderly care, mental care, and healthcare are either downsized or privatized. The work of caring is being pushed back into the home and downloaded onto women who are expected to be the primary caregivers due to their gender. The shutdown or downsizing of public institutions causes many women to lose their jobs, since they are over-represented in the public sector. Those women who seek employment are being channelled into

the private sector as part-time, flexible labour, with no benefits or job security. The hollowing out of the welfare state means that the state no longer provides a social safety net for its citizens. Unemployment is seen as an individual, private problem, rather than a public responsibility.

In recent years, feminist scholars have addressed the impact of globalization on women in general (Bakka; Brodie; Evans and Wekerle), and on immigrant women of colour in particular (Ng 1999; Das Gupta 1999; Lee). Many of the studies shed light on the experience of "unskilled"¹ immi-

grant women. This paper examines how globalization and economic restructuring affect immigrant women who are "skilled" or professionals. I will focus on the Chinese immigrant women who have immigrated from Hong Kong and China to Canada in recent years. I will present empirical data to elucidate how their experiences have been affected by institutionalized policies as a result of the globalization of trade and commerce, and the neoliberal state's valorization of private enterprise over public welfare. I will demonstrate the contradictions of the rationale of the state to actively recruit highly skilled labour to bolster the labour market on the one hand, and the concurrent problem of unemployment, underemployment and deskilling experienced by the highly educated and skilled Chinese immigrant women on the other.

Canadian Immigration Policies

Prioritizing highly educated, skilled immigrants and business personnel has historically been the objective of the Canadian state (see Man 1995b; 1998), although it was not always made transparent. The privileging of these immigrants was explicitly stated in 1967 when the supposedly non-discriminatory points system of the immigration policy was introduced. With the globalization of trade and the concomitant consequences of economic restructuring, privatization, and deregulation, the Canadian neoliberal state in the 1980s and the 1990s further intensified its restrictive measures in their selection of highly skilled professionals and business immigrants as immigration priorities. The rationale behind these economically driven policies was that these highly skilled new immigrants would benefit Canada in the new economic order. They would provide Canada with a "comparative advantage" (Brecher and Costello), propelling the Canadian economy into the twenty-first century with global competitiveness, despite criticisms of the state's strategy to skim off "la creme de la creme" from immigrant-sending countries, rendering a brain-drain of their skilled labour and crippling their economies.

During the 1980s, migration from Hong Kong to Canada has increased rapidly. Since 1987, Hong Kong has been the number one source country for immigrants to Canada (see EIC 1989-1993; CIC 1994-2001). This is coincidental with the events occurring in Hong Kong in the 1980s. The uncertainty of the reversion of Hong Kong

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of the Welfare State Chinese Immigrant Women

from British to Chinese sovereignty in 1997 has prompted many Hong Kong residents to seek a safe haven abroad. The signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984, the subsequent political developments in China, and the violation of human rights suggesting China's disrespect for the rule of law, eroded Hong Kong residents' confidence. Consequently, a mass exodus of emigrants to foreign countries started in the mid-80s. The Tiananmen massacre in 1989 further exacerbated people's uncertainty of the future of Hong Kong, prompting more citizens to emigrate. Not surprisingly, some changes in the Canadian immigration policy coincided with the developments of events in Hong Kong. In January 1984, Canada adopted new procedures in the business immigration program designed to attract highly qualified entrepreneurs. In January 1986, the investor component was introduced to further attract eligible immigrants with excess money for investments (see Borowski and Nash).

The privileging of business class immigrants does not favour women, who comprise of a small proportion of business immigrants. According to two surveys conducted by Employment and Immigration Canada (EIC), only 10.7 per cent of entrepreneur immigrants in 1984, and 12.7 per cent² in 1986/87 were women.³ It is evident therefore that male and female Chinese immigrants occupy different locations in Canadian society, and it does not offer an optimistic and encouraging view of the status of Chinese immigrant women in Canada.

From 1987 to 1997, Hong Kong became the leading immigrant group to Canada (EIC 1989-93; CIC 1994-2001). In the post-1997 period, immigration from Hong Kong started to dwindle as a result of the seemingly smooth transition of power from British to Chinese sovereignty, generating increased confidence of Hong Kong people in the political stability of Hong Kong. Furthermore, the unemployment and underemployment of many Hong Kong immigrants in Canada has prompted a stream of returned migration. At the same time, since the 1990s, the number of Chinese immigrants from Mainland China to Canada has been increasing steadily. By 1998, Chinese immigrants from Mainland China became the single largest group of immigrants coming to Canada (CIC 1994-2001), and has remained so ever since. Many of these new immigrants were highly educated professionals in their home country.

The Chinese are not a homogenous group. They differ

in gender, class, and sexual locations, and they come from diverse social, cultural, political and geographical sites (see Man 1995b) although they belong to the same "ethnic" group, the Chinese immigrant women from Hong Kong and those from Mainland China are vastly different in many ways. For example, they have lived in diversely different social, political and economic systems. While Hong Kong immigrants have lived in a capitalist system under colonial rule for 99 years, people from Mainland China have lived under a communist regime since 1949. In general, the Hong Kong immigrant women are more affluent and have personal assets prior to immigrating to Canada vis-a-vis their counterparts from China. The selective immigration policy, however, ensures only the highly educated and "skilled" professionals are admitted, regardless of whether they are from China, Hong Kong or elsewhere. Other discriminatory processes such as employer's reluctance to hire new immigrants without "Canadian experience" and the lack of recognition of foreign degrees by professional organizations also have a homogenizing effect on the new immigrants, rendering the new immigrants' previous experience in the home country obsolete, and their education and training irrelevant. For those immigrant women who have insufficient English language skills to practice in their profession, English language training courses are inadequate to meet those needs. Only those immigrants who have the material resources to be retrained can dream of eventually re-entering their original professions.

The employment opportunities for immigrant women who often have to take primary responsibility for housework and childcare are drastically hampered.

In the following analysis, I will draw upon data from two research projects. The data for Chinese immigrant women from Hong Kong is based on in depth interviews with 30 Chinese immigrant women from Hong Kong who came to Canada between 1986 and 1992. The data for the immigrant women from China is based on in depth interviews and focus groups with 20 women who have immigrated to

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Canada between 1995 and 2000. The latter research is part of a larger project on the Mandarin-speaking Chinese immigrants in Toronto, conducted for the South East Asian Service Centre (see George, Tat Tsang, Man and Wei Da; Man, George, Tat Tsang and Wei Da). All the women in both studies were married.

In my analysis of the research data, I have used a feminist methodology which addresses the intersections of gender, race, class, and other discourses of inequality and which places women as the subjects of the study (see Ng 1982; 1993; hooks; Smith). My goal was to link the Chinese immigrant women's accounts of their situations to the larger structures of society, to the social, economic, and political processes where their experiences are embedded. By making visible the processes which are organized extra-locally, and which have tremendous impact on their everyday lives, I hope to bring about policy changes which would improve these women's lives.

The Deskillling of Chinese Immigrant Women

In the paid labour market, women's household and childcare responsibilities have always been seen by management as too cumbersome for an efficient and low-cost labour force (Kerr). The gender segregation of the labour market has ghettoized women into jobs with lower pay and fewer benefits. The globalization of trade, economic restructuring, and downsizing in recent years have significant impacts on women's employment. The erosion of funding for social and community services undermines women's labour market participation that is concentrated in these sectors (Armstrong). The labour force is becoming increasingly feminized. As full-time secure employment dwindles, women, along with some men, are being channelled into part-time, flexible, insecure employment.

The situation has an adverse effect on immigrant women's employment. In the last decade, the labour force participation of immigrant women in Canada has been

drastically reduced. In comparison to immigrant men, immigrant women's labour market participation is even more disadvantaged. According to Statistics Canada, while the employment rate for immigrant men between 25 and 44 fell from 81 per cent to 71 per cent between 1986 and 1996, for immigrant women of the same age group, their employment rate fell from 58 per cent to 51 per cent in the same time period; while for Canadian-born women, it rose 8 per cent to 73 per cent (Carey). Similarly, previous studies have found that immigrant women have higher unemployment rates than Canadian-

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born women and they are concentrated in poorly paid and insecure service, sales and production jobs (Boyd; Badets and Howaston-Lee). Immigrant women generally have a higher educational attainment than their Canadian-born counterparts. Unfortunately, it does not improve their chances of employment (Mojab). Although immigrant women who come to Canada as adults are twice as likely as Canadian-born women to have some university training, they are less likely to hold professional jobs once in Canada (Travato and Grindstaff).

The employment opportunities for immigrant women of colour in a gender segregated, racialized, and globalized labour market are even more seriously jeopardized. It has been demonstrated that being foreign-born, a member of a visible minority group, or female, has a cumulative effect such that foreign-born women of colour received the lowest wages and salaries of all workers (Boyd). Immigrant women from developing countries who do not have English or French language skills, nor the "appropriate" educational background are ghettoized in low-paid menial labour (Ng 1993; Das Gupta 1996).

The Chinese immigrant women I interviewed, whether they were from China or Hong Kong, were highly educated. The majority had university degrees or post-secondary education (21/30 of Hong Kong women, and 20/20 of women from China). Despite their high level of education, the majority of them came to Canada under the family class immigrant status as dependents of their husbands, the principal applicants (Man 1996; Man *et al.*). As dependents immigration officers see them as being "not destined for the labour market," despite the fact that many have participated in the paid labour market in their home country as skilled workers and professionals. Women in China have always participated alongside their male counterparts in productive processes. Recent studies of the employment patterns and work decisions of married women in Hong Kong also confirm the centrality of women's monetary contributions to the livelihood of the families concerned (Association for the Advancement of Feminism). But institutionalized racist and sexist practices embedded in the immigration process discriminates against these women, treating them as if they were "non-productive" labour.

Both groups of women spoke of the extreme pressure they felt for both monetary and emotional reasons to find employment as soon as possible, particularly for the women from China, who felt extremely vulnerable economically. Although most of the Hong Kong women had some financial assets, they feared they would soon deplete their savings. They also did not want to be dependent on their husbands financially.

The climate of globalization has a downward levelling effect by lowering wages, fostering part-time, unstable employment, and generally contributing to the feminization of the labour force (Armstrong). Under such circumstances, immigrant women of colour looking for

work are vulnerable to employers' discriminatory practices towards them. A contentious issue many immigrant women of colour have experienced, which were reiterated by Chinese immigrant women in my study, was the employers' requirement for "Canadian experience," and their reluctance to recognize immigrant women's qualifications and experience from their own country. These practices pose a significant barrier for the Chinese immigrants and other immigrant women, hampering their participation in the labour market, and relegating them to underemployment or unemployment (Preston and Man; Man 1995b; 1997; George).

In order to make a living, and to acquire "Canadian experience," these highly qualified women professionals had to take whatever employment they could find. These jobs were usually low-paying, low-status, entry-level menial positions, often exploitative, and that did not utilize their skills, education, or experience. Due to the long hours they spend on the jobs, and the demands of their household responsibilities, some of the women from China were not able to continue with their ESL courses. As a result, these immigrant women were unable to extricate themselves from the menial positions they are ghettoized into. Their experiences are typified by one woman who was a teacher in Beijing prior to immigrating to Canada, and found a job in Canada as part of a hotel's cleaning staff:

The first job I had was babysitting, that was one month after I arrived. I found this job from a newspaper. My husband helped me prepare the interview. At that time, I knew very little English, but the woman hired me because she thought I have a good heart and would be kind to her children. I was very happy to get this job. ... I worked there for over one year. I have very good relationship with that family. Now I work in a hotel as a cleaner, full-time. It's hard work. My English is not good, I want to improve it, so I attended English classes in the evening at first while I was working during the day. But I couldn't keep doing so as I felt too tired. I couldn't concentrate on my study, so I have to give it up.

Some women, particularly those from China, felt that their lack of fluency in the English language affected their employment opportunities. At the same time, most of the women found the Language Instruction for Newcomers (LINC) program for ESL classes to be too elementary, and it did not help them in gaining the vocabulary they needed to find employment that would be commensurate with their qualifications. The racialized and gendered labour market also made them ineligible for the Labour Market Language Training (LMLT) program, an advanced language training program targeting those whose labour market skills are most in demand (EIC 1992). Furthermore, neither of these programs provide a living allowance, and both are restricted to new immigrants who have

been in Canada for less than a year. The elimination of a living allowance discriminates against the most disadvantaged immigrants who cannot afford to forgo wage work to attend language classes full-time. It is in this way that inequality in race, gender, and class practices in Canadian society is reproduced and perpetuated.

Even though some of the women did find employment, the poor condition of the work environment, the discriminatory practices, the irregular hours, and the unstable and insecure nature of the work made it difficult for them to survive on the job. The women's underemployment and unemployment in the new country undermined their sense of stability and well-being. The difficulties some of them encountered in communicating in English also exacerbated their feelings of isolation and depression. Some women from China talked about friends or acquaintances that had experienced depression or had even committed suicide after immigrating to Canada. The class privilege of the immigrant women from Hong Kong did allow them relatively more choices, affording some the option of not participating in the paid labour force.

Childcare

Although childcare is a primary concern for women, the state has not responded to their needs. There are no public policies to ensure the availability of adequate childcare facilities (Luxton and Reiter). The hollowing out of the welfare state and the dismantling of social safety net have foisted healthcare and childcare onto the family and the unpaid work of women. In Ontario, restructuring and severe government cutbacks of social services (Friendly; Kitchen and Popham; Evans and Wekerle). Feminist gains in the last decade in such areas as childcare services and employment equity have also been drastically undermined (Brodie; McQuaig).

Previous studies have found that immigrant women bear the bulk of the day-to-day housework and caring responsibilities, while their husbands are only marginally involved in such tasks (Weber; Gelfand and McCallum). Predictably, most of the women interviewed bore primary responsibility for housework and childcare. They also found childcare services inadequate in meeting their needs. One immigrant woman from Hong Kong voiced her criticism of the inadequacy of daycare in Canada:

I have a five-year-old and a two-year-old. I'm finding that daycare is a serious problem. Daycare is not flexible enough to accommodate working parents. Their hours of operation don't fill our gaps. We have

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to choose between quality or service. Sure, there are a few daycare centres now that run from 7:00a.m. to 6:00p.m. They are all privately run. They offer the service, but not necessarily the quality. So sometimes you don't want to put your child at risk...

The lack of subsidized daycare, coupled with the women's marginalized position in the labour force, relegates them part-time menial work with irregular hours. Their household and childcare responsibilities in turn hampers their opportunity for obtaining full-time positions. The racialized and gendered labour market structures in Canadian society intersect to further marginalize their everyday experience, compounding their difficulties in the new society (Das Gupta 1994; Ralston).

Some of the immigrant women from China who had to negotiate several part-time jobs in order to make ends meet, and who had difficulty obtaining subsidized childcare, resolved to send their children back to China to be taken care of by grandmothers or other family members. Some of the children were babies when they were sent away. The long-term effect of this prolonged separation from their parents is not known. Anecdotal evidence, however, shows that it can be detrimental. Some of the children who grew up separated from their parents subsequently disowned their parents. Some Chinese immigrant women from Hong Kong have become "astronaut" wives (see Man 1995), staying in Canada with their children while their husbands returned to Hong Kong to work. However, their stories of isolation and loneliness were harrowing. Although not found in my study, some women from Hong Kong who were discouraged by their underemployment and unemployment in Canada resolved to return to Hong Kong to find work along with their husbands, leaving their children alone in Canada.⁴ While outside of the scope of my research, the long-term effects of "parachute children" warrants serious investigation.

Conclusion

**"Canada needs labourers, but not professionals....
Now they use professional people to do menial labour.
How do you expect us to function well psychologically?"**

As the process of globalization deepened in recent years, the Canadian state, in an effort to take full advantage of the fluidity and flexibility of human capital, launched new initiatives to actively recruit skilled immigrants to the country. However, institutionalized racist and sexist practices embedded in Canadian society continues to marginalize the highly educated and skilled Chinese immigrant women. The retrenchment of the state in providing an adequate social safety net, the lack of adequate childcare services and

subsidies, coupled with immigrant women's diminished earning power makes it even more difficult for immigrant women to be able to afford childcare for their children. Their household and childcare responsibilities in turn prevents them from engaging in full-time positions, and in some cases, deters them from taking ESL courses which, in any case, do not meet the employment needs of these professional and highly skilled women. Thus, the "brain drain" occurring in developing countries has become the "deskilled" labour force in the new country. As one disillusioned woman from China commented indignantly:

I think Canada needs labourers, but not professionals.... Now they use professional people to do menial labour. How do you expect us to function well psychologically?

For these women to become equal and active participants in Canadian society they must have access to the resources required to help them develop to their full potential. To bring about changes in state policies and institutional support for new immigrant women we have to first unmask the rhetoric of globalization and reveal that it is an unnatural and socially constructed process. When we move away from hegemonic thinking about the market as a natural and inevitable force we can begin to imagine how women can play a role in shaping markets and economies (Berneria). It is only through the implementation of inclusive programs and policies that Chinese immigrant women will be able to enjoy equal opportunity and outcomes in an anti-racist and anti-sexist environment.

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¹It should be noted that "skill" is in fact socially constructed and is imputed with gendered and racialized meanings.

²The figures of 10.7 per cent and 12.7 per cent for female entrepreneur immigrants were lower than the female figures for the Canadian entrepreneur population as a whole (Thompson 1986, 6-8).

³See EIC PPDB 1985, Tables 2.6, 3.5, 3.6; EIC Strategic Policy and Planning 1990, 27.

⁴Preliminary data analysis of the study "Transnational Citizenship and Social Cohesion: Recent Immigrants from Hong Kong to Canada" by Audrey Kobayashi, David Ley, Guida Man, Valerie Preston, and Myer Siemiatycki found that such occurrences are not uncommon among recent immigrants from Hong Kong.

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MICHELINE MERCIER

À ma soeur Afghane

Le monde s'ouvre devant toi, fille de femme,
née du même ventre que ton frère.
On t'annonce que tu peux maintenant
partager avec le monde entier ton
expérience ancestrale.
La montagne se dresse devant toi?
Tu sais que tu n'as qu'à tender la main pour
toucher.
Enfin tu laisses tomber le voile.

Tu étais seule à posséder le pouvoir de
briser ces frontières qui t'empêchaient
d'évoluer.
Un pas, un seul pas séparait ton rêve de la
réalité
et tu viens de le faire
car depuis peu, tu sais que ces barrières
érigées par l'homme
n'étaient que du vent.
Il soufflait si fort qu'il transformait les oasis
en d'infranchissables raz-de-marée, le
croyais tu?
Ce matin, comme tous les matins de ta vie, le
soleil s'est à nouveau levé.
Comme une révélation tu apprends qu'il
brille aussi pour toi,
femme de savoir.
Tu récoltes enfin le fruit de ton évolution.

Micheline Mercier est une mère et grand mère.

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