ETHNIC IDENTITY AND SEGMENTED
ASSIMILATION AMONG
SECOND-GENERATION CHINESE
YOUTH

Harry H. Hiller and Verna Chow

INTRODUCTION

The recent wave of immigration to North American society from new source
countries challenges old theories of acculturation that were based on European
immigration streams that assumed that ethnic retention was generationally
conditioned. For Caucasian immigrants, it was assumed that assimilation was linear
and that by the third generation, all traces of ethnic origin would be absent, save for a
nostalgic interest in quaint and ephemeral aspects of an ethnic past labeled symbolic
ethnicity (Child, 1943; Gans, 1979; Rumbaut, 1997; Waters, 1990). Since 1965 in
the United States, and 1967 in Canada, changes in immigration policy suggest that
alternative assimilation patterns may exist. Whereas previous immigration policy
had discouraged non-Caucasian immigration, the new policy brought with it large-
scale immigration from Asia in particular which introduced a different element of
race into assimilation expectations. For these new immigrants, race continues to be
a marker whereby prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination produce assumptions
of “foreignness” regardless of generational status (Neckerman, Carter & Lee, 1999;
Tuan, 1999).
In order to accommodate these changes, a new theoretical model has been articulated called segmented assimilation which assumes that there may be different modes of incorporation into the dominant society (Portes, 1997; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Zhou, 1997b). What this model has in common with older theories is a relationship between socio-economic status and assimilation. Whereas the older models assumed that assimilation occurred as a by-product of upward mobility, segmented assimilation suggested that blocked or downward mobility may be the new reality for some groups thereby retarding or resisting assimilation. A somewhat different emphasis though still rooted in status models is the social capital approach that focuses on how co-ethnicity supports vibrant communities that may either hinder mobility or support it (Zhou & Bankston, 1994, 1998). This paper proposes a shift away from mobility (or lack thereof) to that of identity as an indicator of segmented assimilation in relation to the new immigration. Instead of focusing on socio-economic factors, our goal is to examine socio-cultural factors as expressions of identity because identity is related to roles and social location in society (McCall & Simmons, 1978; Stryker, 1985). The new wave of immigration has produced a second generation of youth that provides a rich opportunity to examine whether segmentation exists and how members of this group understand themselves in interaction with others. The implication of segmented assimilation is that race can be a barrier to assimilation, so the question addressed here is how second generation Chinese understand their identity in relation to the dominant society and their familial socialization. How is this identity negotiated and how is it related to the process of segmentation? It will be shown that personal identity is divided into private and public spheres, and that the maintenance of ethnic identity in the private sphere (specifically the family and parent-child relations) allows for greater exploration in the public sphere that resists a segmented outcome for Chinese youth in Canada.

**THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

In segmented assimilation theory, it is proposed that there may be several trajectories to acculturation due to the fact that upward mobility is no longer a foregone conclusion. Phenotypic differences, combined with deindustrialization and the restructuring of the economy, have meant that some may experience the absence of mobility ladders, and youth in particular may be exposed to adversarial subcultures in inner cities that may support barriers to upward mobility. Portes and Zhou (1993) then propose that while integration into the white middle class may be the experience of some, others might experience permanent poverty and assimilate to an underclass culture. They also propose a third option whereby rapid economic
advancement may occur but through the deliberate preservation of tight in-group 
solidarity and immigrant community values. Segmented assimilation then suggests 
that the straight-line conceptualization of assimilation through the generations 
needs modification in the light of a changing opportunity structure and different 
strategies of incorporation. At the very least, Gans (1992, p. 186) suggests that 
there may even be “delayed acculturation” when the second generation experiences 
a decline in mobility. Perlmann and Waldinger (1997) note that this mismatch 
between aspirations and shrinking opportunities may provoke a “second generation 
revolt” against unattainable dominant cultural values.

Segmented assimilation theory makes an important point in noting that 
assimilation to the dominant culture is not necessarily an end result. The 
preservation of cultural distinctives may be forced on a group as a response to 
their low status or it may be a deliberate strategy in sectarian or enclave fashion 
to enhance full pursuit of economic advancement goals (Neckerman, Carter & 
Lee, 1999). This option is particularly relevant to more pluralist or multicultural 
models of society. While a more structuralist perspective puts the emphasis on 
the entrance status of the immigrant, it is also possible that for some groups 
ethnicity can be an asset or a form of social capital, which may assist in developing 
adaptation outcomes. The social capital of strong ethnic community supports or 
family values and structures may be absent in some instances contributing to 
“downward assimilation” or ghettoization while in other instances its presence 
may heighten self-esteem and foster academic and economic aspirations (Zhou, 
1997a). For example, Zhou and Bankston’s study (1994, 1998) of a Vietnamese 
community found that a process of “selective Americanization” was adopted 
whereby obedience and filial obligation provided social controls that were highly 
instrumental in adaptive outcomes towards upward mobility. Waters (1994) also 
found that those of second generation Haitian or West Indian descent who saw more 
opportunities around them were more likely to be proud of their ethnic heritage than 
those who thought their opportunities were limited. Rumbaut’s research (1994) 
concluded that having immigrant parents who were high status professionals also 
led to greater identification with the immigrant culture and ethnic identity. In all of 
these cases, there is reason to believe that the straight-line theories of assimilation 
are open to review, for the new immigration and changing economy create the 
possibility of outcomes different from step-wise generational assimilation.

THE CANADIAN CONTEXT OF VISIBLE MINORITIES

On the surface, segmented assimilation may have less utility when applied to 
Canada because of the absence of inner city ghettos typical of the American
experience and because of the point system giving preference for admission to immigrants with advanced education and skills. Yet the term “visible minorities” is frequently used in Canada and is even specifically acknowledged in employment equity legislation (Henry & Tator, 1999, pp. 103–106). Henry (1994) coined the term “differential incorporation” to refer to the Caribbean-born community in Toronto where internal class divisions fragmented the group but in which children of working class parents often become an underclass of marginalized and alienated youth. While many Asian immigrants have taken employment as blue-collar workers, there is strong evidence that their children have been socialized to take advantage of mobility opportunities through advanced education. Hou and Balakrishnan (1996) found that with the exception of blacks, visible minorities have higher educational attainment than the average of the total population and the charter groups, and that their Canadian-born children were also considerably higher in educational attainment indicating that this was not just the result of selectivity in immigration. Yet these results do not necessarily translate into higher incomes or occupational levels. In short, assimilation models must be re-examined for the evidence is that there is not racial equality within Canadian society (Henry, Tator, Mattis & Rees, 1995).

Since 1981, there has been a steady increase in the size of the visible minority population to about 11% of the Canadian population in 1996 (about three-quarters of which were Asian), and about 70% of this total was foreign born (Statistics Canada, 1998). The largest visible minority group in Canada is the Chinese. They made up about 27% of all visible minorities in 1996 and accounted for about 3% of the total Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 1998). Almost all visible minorities live in the largest urban centers. About 40% of all Chinese in Canada live in Toronto, 32% in Vancouver, and the rest in the other large cities. Approximately 74% of all Chinese living in Canada are foreign born. Of those born abroad, 29% immigrated before 1981, 32% immigrated between 1981 and 1990, and 40% immigrated between 1991 and 1996. Thus it is clear that Chinese are largely a recently migrated group and that this wave of migration has been continuing. Li (1998, p. 105) notes that this means that most native-born Chinese are under 16 years of age suggesting that a sizable cohort of second and third generation Chinese has been slow to develop. The percentage of Chinese persons with Chinese as mother tongue and language most often used at home is a significant indicator of a high percentage of foreign born in the population. Yet he notes that there is a language loss as those in subsequent generations begin to switch to English. The new wave of middle class immigration from Hong Kong and Taiwan beginning around the mid-80s brought a new image of Chinese from that of laborers to professional, white collar, and educated. Consequently, the proportion of Chinese in Canada with a university education is at least double that of other Canadians (Li, 1998, p. 121).
A study of Chinese youth serves as an interesting test of segmented assimilation theory. The new wave of Chinese immigrants with high ambitions and greater skills, with social solidarity supported by a significant critical mass, and with a continuing supply of new immigrant co-ethnics raises the possibility that the third option described by Portes and Zhou of ethnic preservation as well as upward mobility might be possible. Race then may combine with cultural distinctives to support a form of segmented assimilation. One place to look for this outcome is in the second generation youth that must deal with the conflicts between the culture of their parents and the dominant culture surrounding them.

**THE SECOND GENERATION: FROM MOBILITY TO IDENTITY**

The bipolar model that is frequently applied to the second generation suggests that the second generation is caught between the two worlds of the parents and the dominant culture, and that its members must negotiate in and out of the two segregated identities (Bacon, 1999). This type of “marginal man” analysis produces either a rather schizoid second generation or necessarily implies that the second generation will have a weaker ethnic identification than their parents. Another analytical perspective is to assume that the outside self is adaptive to the new culture while the inside self retains its ethnic core, or that the second generation learns to take the best of both worlds and synthesizes it into a new identity of cultural hybridity.

Research on the second generation immigrant has not received much attention in Canada, and when it has, the focus has often been on mobility related issues such as income, occupation, and education (e.g. Boyd & Grieco, 1998; Breton et al., 1990; Isajiw, Sev’er & Driedger, 1993; Kalbach, Lanphier, Rhyne & Richmond, 1983). However, issues of identity and behavior (e.g. language use and friendship patterns) are also significant and reveal something of the way in which the second generation deals with their status. Tsang et al. (2003) studied how Chinese youth negotiate their identity but their specific focus was on “satellite children” where foreign born parents returned to the country of origin. Berry (1997) has developed a typology of acculturative attitudes that focused on the perceived importance of the maintenance of an ethnic identity and its cultural characteristics in relation to the importance given to maintaining relationships with other groups. Options varied from “assimilation” and “deculturation” to “separation,” or adopting traditions and values from two or more cultures labeled “integration.” Persons choosing a “Canadian” identity were more likely to experience deculturation, integration, or assimilation whereas those selecting an ethnic label were more likely to prefer
separation (Tonks & Paranjpe, 1999). In contrast, those choosing an ethnic-Canadian label were more likely to prefer integration. None of this work explicitly introduced race into the analysis but it does suggest that identity and race together might also be relevant to segmented assimilation theory.

This matter is especially important given recent research in the United States on the emergence of what is called pan-ethnicity (Lopez & Espiritu, 1990). Building from the notion that ethnic identity is the result of a dialectical process involving not only your own self-identification but also how the host society identifies you (Nagel, 1994, p. 154), this process is especially applicable to racial minorities who are lumped together by the host society into categories as though they were homogeneous entities. For example, Portes and MacLeod (1996) have shown how American culture has created a new identity through the term “Hispanic” which lumps together Latin American minorities of diverse nationalities (e.g. Cubans, Columbians, Chileans) because of phenotypic similarities despite cultural differences. Kibria (1997) uncovers a pan-Asian American identity emerging among the Korean and Chinese second generation as a result of shared experiences and being racially labeled as Asian by the dominant society. While Kibria is careful not to assert that such pan-ethnicity is characteristic of all Asians, many Asians did perceive that their adherence to core values of Asian culture such as in family life and child-rearing, education, hard work, and respect for elders provided a behavioral basis for a pan-racial identity different from the dominant culture which might affect even matters such as dating and mate selection.

Another issue indicative of assimilation patterns is ethnic language maintenance. Again, expectations in the past were that the first generation managed to learn enough English to survive economically, the second generation spoke the ethnic language at home whereas English was used in public life such as at school or work, and the third generation lost the ethnic language capability completely and adopted English as their mother tongue. But have these patterns changed? Portes and Schauffler (1994) found that among Spanish-speaking second generation immigrants in South Florida that there was rapid linguistic assimilation to English monolingualism. Speaking English at home and/or with friends increased the likelihood of the second generation assuming an American identity, and conversely speaking another language increased the likelihood of adopting an ethnic origin identity (Portes & MacLeod, 1996, p. 537; Rumbaut, 1994, p. 780). Yet Zhou and Bankston (1998) found that among Asians, fluent bilingualism among the second generation was much more likely than English monolingualism. This was primarily the case when they lived near co-ethnics, their parents lacked English proficiency, and repeated waves of immigration helped to keep active use of the language alive. Zhou and Bankston (1998) and Rumbaut (1994) conclude that ethnicity must be viewed not so much as a label, a tradition, or a national origin but a system of social relations in which parental relations and socialization, and kinship and friendship
Ethnic Identity and Segmented Assimilation

networks shape the nature and pace of assimilation. For example, the prevalence
of three generation households among certain immigrant groups adds a different
dimension in the presence of elderly persons that helps sustain ethnic traditions
and norms (Perez, 1994). All of these observations suggest that language use is
pivotal to ethnic identity, and that groups with active immigration streams and
strong social ties are more likely to retain these ethnic identities.

There is, then, considerable reason to expect that second generation Chinese in
Canada may not fit straight line assimilation expectations – or at least that it is
too early in the migration wave to assess its full impact. New Chinese immigrants
continue to arrive, old world Chinese values and traditions may still be alive,
and language patterns may be sustained through interaction with other Chinese in
large urban communities where Chinese have settled. Chinese organizations and
thriving Chinese commercial districts add a sense of robustness to the community
(Lai, 1988), and, of course, there is also the question of whether a racial difference
helps to sustain ethnic behavioral patterns. All of this is taking place in a society that
champions the ideal of being multicultural (Li, 1999). When these observations are
combined with the high achievement orientations of many Asians which has led to
their designation as the “model minority” (Hurh & Kim, 1989), it is apparent that
the applicability of segmented assimilation theory to second generation Chinese in
Canada merits empirical testing. Are second generation Chinese in Canada moving
towards assimilation or are there elements to their structural location within the
society that prohibits, retards, or alters that response to the dominant society? More
directly, how do the Chinese second generation negotiate that location in relation
to matters of personal identity and behavior?

It is widely recognized that the focus on immigration has usually been on the
immigrants themselves and that the study of the second generation has been often
ignored (Portes, 1996; Rumbaut, 1994; Zhou, 1997a, p. 91). This has largely
been due to the fact that the second generation was viewed as transitional to full
third generation assimilation. Now that source country origins of immigrants have
changed and race has been added as a new dimension to the acculturation process,
it might be helpful to look more closely at the second generation for help in
understanding what we might expect in the future. Therefore this study focuses on
second generation Chinese youth in Canada with specific emphasis on how they
interpret and negotiate their identity and its behavioral components.4

THE STUDY DESIGN

The large number of Chinese students in Canadian urban post-secondary
institutions provides an opportunity to access young adults who are second-
generation immigrants. Three post-secondary institutions were selected in the
western Canadian city of Calgary, an urban center population of around one million with a Chinese population of approximately 60,000. While personal interviews may have also been a rewarding data generating mechanism for the study (compare Kibria, 2002), it was decided to use an open-ended questionnaire which respondents could complete at their leisure and without the influence of an interviewer.5 A purposive sampling frame was used as respondents were sought at places on these college campuses where large numbers of Chinese students gathered for study or socializing.6 The questionnaire was distributed by one of the authors (who is Chinese), which it was hoped would enhance the response rate. All students who completed the Consent Form and were handed a questionnaire also returned their questionnaire to a marked box to ensure anonymity. Obviously, there are many second generation Chinese who do not attend post-secondary educational institutions and the sample may be skewed towards those who have an upwardly mobile or middle class perspective. If indeed this is the case, the framing of identity issues may even be more germane because of their anticipation of direct participation in the dominant society.

In order to participate in the study, both parents of the respondent had to be foreign born. The sample was composed of ninety respondents of which 53% were born in Canada, and 37% who had resided in Canada for more than ten years. Only 10% had resided in Canada for less than ten years. In spite of the 18–30 year old criterion in the sample design, observation of respondents led to the conclusion that most of them were between 18 and 22 having recently completed high school. This would suggest that most of the non-Canadian born came to Canada as small children, which means that most of their socialization took place in Canada. This group is either identified as the 1.5 generation or is considered second generation because they are the children of immigrants and have been educated here.7 Obviously the cut-point between the first and second generation is arbitrary, but if adolescence is made that dividing line, it is clear that virtually all respondents faced the acculturating pressures of the primary and secondary educational systems in Canada, and for the sake of this study can be considered second generation. Fifty of the ninety respondents were female and forty were male.

The questionnaire was designed to encourage reflection with opportunities for the respondent to describe how they felt about the question. In that sense, the primary thrust of the research was the collection of qualitative data that would allow respondents to express themselves in their own words. The two lead questions, for example, were open-ended and were meant to allow the participant to discuss their own identity. An attempt was made to collapse these responses into appropriate categories for analytical purposes. The third and fourth questions sought to assess parental influence on the respondent as well as contrasting personal reflections
Respondents were first asked how they described their identity (“How would you
describe your identity?”). Following Portes and MacLeod (1996, p. 533) who also
preferred a written self-designation over a fixed choice in determining ethnic
identity, the goal was to capture the respondent’s own conception of their identity.
Interestingly, being Chinese was a central identity for most respondents, but it
was usually linked to the additional descriptor of being Canadian as well. The two
dominant choices accounting for 66% of the respondents were Chinese-Canadian
(41%) or Canadian-Chinese (25%). Only 7% saw themselves as just Canadian.
10% were uncertain or gave no response at all. But 17% thought of themselves in
racial/ethnic terms as Chinese, Hong Kong Chinese, or Oriental.
The fact that “Chinese” and “Canadian” were linked together is perhaps no
surprise for the second generation, but the fact that two different word orderings
appeared suggested that ordering may be of special significance. While putting the
racial/ethnic label first when linked with Canadian (e.g. Chinese-Canadian) is a
typical Canadian pattern, informal feedback was received from some respondents
that the first term indicated a primary identity, and that is why both orderings
appeared.8 If this is so, then those who identify themselves as “Chinese-Canadian”
(by far the largest group) may have a special meaning. Putting Chinese first (as in
Chinese-Canadian, or Chinese-born Canadian often abbreviated as a “CBC”) might
indicate a primary Chinese identity in the Canadian context. When combining
these respondents with this interpretation of Chinese primacy with the other
more racial/ethnic responses of Chinese, Hong Kong Chinese, and Oriental, the
result is that almost 60% of the respondents viewed themselves in racial/ethnic
terms. Another interpretation is that the first word in a hyphenated naming is the
adjective and that the second word is the important one. As noted earlier, “Chinese-
Canadian” (the classic hyphenated Canadian who views the hyphen as the heritage
designator but “Canadian” as the core identity) was the largest single group but
it was not a majority. Similarly, a “Canadian-Chinese” would be someone who is

THE FINDINGS

Identity and Heritage
primarily Chinese, and Canadian is just an adjective. Many in this category actually
used the term “Canadian-born Chinese” (Note that the CBC abbreviation works
again). While it is impossible to say which interpretation is correct, it is likely that
order conveys some form of identity preference for some people since both orders
were used. But it is clear that whichever way the data are interpreted, the majority
see themselves as a blend of two identities with enduring qualities understood
in racial/ethnic categories. In other words, it was our perception that linking the
label Chinese with Canadian in whatever order did have meaning because the term
Chinese had not just ethnic meanings but racial meanings as well, and that there
was a clear sense of a unique status within the society. At the same time, few
understood their identity in pan-ethnic or national terms and always linked being
Chinese with being Canadian.

When length of residence is correlated with ethnic identity, it was not only
those who had been here for less than ten years who selected Chinese, Hong Kong
Chinese, or Oriental, but such choices were also made by those who were born
here or lived here for longer than ten years. The fact that respondents would still
utilize such explicit racialized terms is significant. Those who were born in Canada
were only slightly more likely to respond that they were Canadian and they were
clearly more likely to choose Canadian and Chinese. What is important is that
while persons born in Canada were somewhat less likely to have a racial/ethnic
identity, it is clear that the majority of persons in all residential categories identified
themselves in racial/ethnic terms, especially if the ordering of the hyphenated
identity had special meaning.10

It is very clear that race is an important basis for that identity because of its
visibility in spite of how the respondent feels inside. In relation to the dominant
society, it is something that cannot be denied.

I think of myself as a banana – white on the inside and yellow on the outside . . . I’m Chinese
but I’m Canadian.

I have slanted eyes. I have to accept that I’m Chinese, but in the inside I still have a good laugh
at the Chinese customs sometimes.

Being that I came here when I was about two months old, I think that I’ve always felt like
everyone else and not Chinese. But I guess I would describe myself as Chinese.

Public socialization within the dominant institutions of the society helps the
second generation to feel that they belong, and yet a racial difference from the
dominant group requires that their identity be at least partially modified. On
the other hand, their private socialization at home is rooted in Chinese cultural
traditions and provides the native tongue, which creates a split between how they
see themselves at home and how they see themselves outside the home.
I feel Chinese at home but Caucasian outside my home.

I find there is a lot of conflict between my Chinese heritage and my Canadian identity.

The dual spheres then between private (home) and public (outside the home) are also countered by the struggle between a cultural definition of Chinese and a racial one.

I describe myself as Chinese Canadian because I consider my Chinese values, tradition, and culture first.

I am Chinese and I think it is very important not to think that I am not. I think that my ethnic identity could be stronger because I feel it weakens generation after generation.

Here identity is given a very clear ethnic/cultural spin because it is either a priority or it is assumed that it is undergoing a transformation and loss over time.

The second open-ended question asked “How do you feel about your Chinese heritage?” The question was meant to deliberately be vague about what “heritage” included but aimed to ascertain generally how they felt about their Chinese identity. Perhaps most surprising was the fact that independently, over 50% of all respondents actually used the same word “proud” to describe their feelings about their heritage. They used words such as, “proud to be who I am because it adds another dimension to who I am,” “proud because it defines who I am,” “proud because of the culture, art, and moral teachings,” “proud, and enjoy participating in celebrations and learning about it from my parents,” and, as one respondent put it, “I am proud of it now, but when I was younger I just wanted to fit in. This usually meant ignoring my heritage.” When these responses are added to the others of a positive nature (almost 30%) such as “good,” “important,” “accept and respect it,” “very interested in it,” and “strong feelings towards maintaining my heritage,” 80% of all respondents can be accounted for. The remainder were either “neutral,” “depends,” “confusing,” “don’t care,” or no response. Thus, in general terms, there was overwhelming positive feeling towards their Chinese heritage. In spite of some dilemmas pertaining to racial distinctiveness and cultural retention, and the split between their private/home identity and public identity, there was an overwhelming positive affirmation of their identity as Chinese.

INTERACTION AT HOME

A key element in the preservation of an identity is the cultural artifacts and customs that help to sustain that identity. Parents are the ones to introduce their children to those traditions, and it is important to know whether there are any generational
differences in attitudes towards them. It could also be argued that these customs stress more the ethnic/cultural side of being Chinese.

When respondents were asked how important Chinese customs and culture were to their parents, it is somewhat surprising that only 34% said “Very Important,” and 64% said “Somewhat Important.” Only 2% said “Not Important.” Youth who had been here less than ten years were more likely to say “Very Important” although not exclusively so. Respondent’s justifications for their answer seemed to be very similar regardless of which option they chose in that repeated references were made to cultural artifacts such as “eating rice,” “following the lunar calendar,” “celebrate special days such as Chinese New Year,” “practice some Chinese medicine such as herbs and pills,” or “go out for dim sum.” What seems to differentiate those who say it is “Very Important” is a deeper recognition of the religious aspects and filial aspects of Chinese culture. For example, ancestor worship, Buddhist practices, the “plate of rotting fruit,”12 or choosing Chinese entertainment are mentioned. While a few pointed out that their parents were eager to maintain Chinese culture in some detail, the more common response was that parents were concerned not to put too much pressure on their children at the same time that they instilled a sense of appreciation for at least fragments of Chinese culture. For example:

My parents take the issue of respect very strongly, but are willing to try out new things.

They believe that they are in a different place and different time now, so life is adjusted accordingly, that not everything is maintained or followed.

The culture is interwoven into their decisions, with respect to the older generation, and filial piety is still considered important, however, their lifestyle is not ruled by many of the Chinese customs.

In short, the data suggests that there is not the dogmatism and rigidity that sometimes is found amongst the first generation where adherence to traditional patterns of behavior produces generational conflict.

Interestingly enough, when respondents were asked about how important Chinese customs and culture were to them personally, their response mirrored that of their assessment of their parents with 73% choosing “Somewhat Important” (compared to 64% for their parents). A few more said “Not Important” (10%) and a few less said “Very Important” (16%). There was usually very little difference in the explanations between “Very Important” and “Somewhat Important” as they all seemed to stress the need or desire to preserve their heritage and family history, and that this became more clear to them as they matured.

As I grew older, I feel more and more regretful in losing some of my culture, that recently I try to recover what I’ve lost, for example, speaking Cantonese or attending more Chinese events. I want to retain the customs and culture and pass it on to my children.
As I grew older, I became more aware of my heritage, and as of now I am very interested in my Chinese heritage but I would still consider myself Canadian.

It is important to keep some culture and customs to know them, and it is always useful to know so that you know your background.

I believe if I don’t continue to participate in Chinese customs, I will forget and no one will teach my children and I believe strongly in family values and loyalty Chinese families have.

Since it is difficult to be Canadian and Chinese at the same time, it helps to learn about our own culture and to gain an understanding of it.

But there are many others who are also somewhat ambivalent about Chinese culture recognizing that it has its place but that personally there is considerable distance from that culture and ignorance of it.

It’s only important in that it is fun to follow the customs but I don’t know the meaning behind the customs.

I am only aware of what customs and traditions my parents pass on, but many of them I am not sure about and I try to go by the Chinese way, but realistically there is little support to do so.

It doesn’t matter, I just need to know a bit and that is good enough for me.

I don’t really know much but maybe someday I’ll want to learn about them.

I am aware of them but unless it is something important, I only follow the customs at my convenience.

On balance, there is a clear leakage away from intimate knowledge of Chinese culture, but this loss is counterbalanced to a considerable degree by a desire for some heritage retention. Second, while it might be possible to speculate about whether these second generation Chinese might be underestimating the importance of Chinese culture to either themselves or their parents, it does seem to be clear that few see embracing this ethnic culture as a type of counter-culture to be preserved in the midst of an alien dominant culture (as segmented assimilation theory would suggest).

SOCIAL CHOICES: FRIENDSHIP, DATING AND MARRIAGE SELECTION

Friendship, dating, and intermarriage are three significant indicators of in-group solidarity and three open-ended questions were asked about these matters. The first question aimed not to determine whether the respondent had Chinese friends but how important those friendships were. In response to the question “How important
to you are friends who are Chinese?”, slightly over half (57%) said something to
the effect that it was important. A sense of being in similar circumstances led
to statements like “it is easier to relate to them,” “they understand what it is like to
be Chinese,” “we share the same experience,” “because they bring security and
comfort,” or “it is easier to identify with someone with the same background.”
This commonality was based on race but also included shared experiences and
similar home backgrounds. On the other hand, about 40% deliberately rejected
that way of thinking that friendship based on race/ethnicity should serve as a basis
for interaction. The declarative nature of these feelings were conveyed with strong
statements such as “race shouldn’t be important,” “many of my friends come from
different backgrounds,” “friendship goes beyond race,” or “all of my friends are
important regardless of race.” While many respondents understood the value of in-
group relations, there appears to be a clear rejection of racial exclusion in friendship
formation, even to the point that some are almost militant about being more open.

In one way, having some Chinese friends in a pantheon of friends could be
considered a rather inclusive ideal since the question does not ask whether a person
should have “only” or “mostly” Chinese friends. A better test may be dating and
marriage partner preferences. Quite unequivocally, 82% said they would “consider
dating a non-Chinese” and a slightly less 75% said they would “consider marrying
a non-Chinese.” Using the word “consider” may have affected the responses as
it is somewhat more tentative than actually doing so. Nevertheless the fact that
there was overwhelming openness not only to inter-group dating but exogamy in
marriage choices as well suggests the lack of strong in-group ties and even the
downgrading of such ties into the future. Those who preferred a Chinese partner
in dating and marriage provided similar kind of rationales such as commonality in
values and family backgrounds or the understanding and preservation of Chinese
customs. Some had tried dating non-Chinese and it did not work well. But the
overwhelming response was that racial/ethnic factors were not as important as
personal compatibility and romantic love. “As long as it is the right person, it does
not matter what race they are,” “no matter what, marriage is only for love,” “if they
are willing to accept me for who I am,” “what is important is what is in the inside
of the person,” “in Canada boundaries should not be important,” or “everyone is
equal.” Whether these were platitudes for equality as opposed to ultimate bases
for action of course might be debatable. Many respondents acknowledged that
marrying someone who is Chinese might have advantages but they did not want
their choices restricted by that fact alone. In fact, some respondents referred to
strong physical attraction to members of other racial groups. In retrospect, using
the word “consider” might have biased the response as it is widely recognized that
in-group marriage is often thought to be at least a preference among many second
generation Chinese.
LANGUAGE USE

The evidence that has been presented above of considerable openness to the dominant society finds an interesting counterpoint in language use. It is important to know that this second generation was overwhelmingly (83%) taught Chinese by their parents as their first language and only 13% were taught English as their first language. Ninety-one percent continue to speak Chinese with their parents with 52% “almost always” doing so and 39% “sometimes” doing so. In other words, the use of the Chinese language is alive and well with this second generation in its spoken form. Thirty-one percent claim to speak Chinese “very well” and 48% claim to speak it “reasonably well.” Eighteen percent know the language but speak it “poorly” but only 3% of all respondents say that they do not speak it at all. However, reading and writing Chinese is a totally different matter with 31% claiming that they cannot read Chinese at all and 36% being unable to write Chinese. A further 48% say they read Chinese poorly and 43% say they write it poorly. As expected, those who have been here less than ten years were more likely to be able to read and write Chinese very well whereas those who were born here or resident here more than ten years were more likely to be those who had no ability to read or write Chinese at all. Overall, however, the data indicate that the spoken form of the language is critical to communication at home, and even the written form of the language survives in some rudimentary fashion among second generation Chinese. Whether it can do so beyond this generation, however, is a major question. Yet to this point, speaking Chinese strengthens home ties and provides oral familiarity with others in the Chinese community. In fact, oral use and familiarity with the Chinese language appears to be the most important behavioral indicator of being part of that community.

DISCUSSION

Perhaps the most important finding of this study is that these second generation Chinese possess a very limited sense of segmentation from the dominant society, and that this result is a consequence of a clear differentiation between the public and private sphere. While they are aware of the racial difference from the Caucasian majority, and while some articulated that it had a social-psychological impact on them, they fought hard to overcome any disadvantages which race might produce. They resisted in-group exclusivity at the same time that most seemed comfortable with their own identity between the dominant society and the culture of their parents. Rather than belaboring intergenerational conflicts or rebelling against their background, most seemed quite comfortable with who they were. The question is,
why is this so? Five factors showing how the self is affected by interaction with others can be identified.

The most surprising result was that the response to an open-ended question with no prompts or prescribed choices led to a majority of the respondents independently selecting the word “proud” to describe how they felt about their heritage. The strength of this positive affirmation not only reveals something about their inner selves (e.g. tranquility and lack of anger or confusion) but the way that they have been socialized. In-group pride might be a strategy for dealing with racism but is also a form of race socialization that occurs within families (Kibria, 2002, p. 41; Lyman & Douglass, 1977). For these second generation Chinese, race may be acknowledged as a limitation but was not perceived as a disadvantage that should be jettisoned. Instead, group pride taught at home and fostered within the ethnic community was accepted with confidence. Furthermore, pride in the heritage was a strong positive emotion that empowered rather than disabled and suggested that roots were to be affirmed and not rejected. Such pride may also be linked to a high achievement orientation and the “model minority” concept (Hurh & Kim, 1989).

Again, this picture of a second generation is very different from that presented in the earlier literature on the children of European immigrants who sought to distance themselves from the culture of their parents, and may also be quite different from the experience of other racial groups who were made to feel inferior in a white-dominant society. It also is in contrast to the social psychological effects described by Lyman (1977, pp. 18, 19) of marginality, anomie, and self-estrangement experienced by children in the earlier phase of Chinese migration (see also Chan, 1998, p. 153).

The second interaction factor of importance pertains to the social context of language practices. Portes and Rumbaut (2002, p. 144) use the term dissonant acculturation to refer to the problems that result when children become English monolingual and their immigrant parents are not fluent in English. When the parents are bilingual and/or when the children are bilingual, they refer to the end process as consonant acculturation. They argue that if the second generation is fluent bilingual, there is less likely to be loss of self-esteem or shame about the culture of the parents. In our study, while we did not ask questions about parental language use, it was clear that almost all of this second generation were bilingual which facilitated comfortable interaction in both the private sphere of the home and in public. While their use of the Chinese language in its written form was questionable, what was important is that they were able to communicate with parents, grandparents, and family friends in social contexts requiring the language and facilitating a sense of belonging. Instead of feeling marginalized by either their own culture or the dominant culture, they could interact comfortably in both.
Third, the attitudes of parents seem also to play a significant role for our second generation respondents in relation to the issue of generational alienation. Our data suggested that the second generation clearly understands that their parents are also either fluently bilingual or are open to bilingualism in spite of the fact that Chinese is the home language. One of the reasons for this might be the fact that some Chinese immigrants came from places like Hong Kong where English language use is common. Given the fact that many of these new wave immigrant parents did not enter the country as laborers but as professionals, Chinese may be the language of the home, but many of them are in the labor force and use English outside the home as well. Thus the second generation have more in common with the first generation in that they both live in two linguistic worlds that reduce the dissonance with the home environment. Furthermore, the majority of respondents indicated that for both them (73%) and their parents (64%), retaining Chinese customs and culture was only “Somewhat Important.” This suggests that most understand their parents as being open to change and flexibility themselves with regards to traditional customs and practices, and that they acknowledged their own need to adapt to their new environment (compare Chan, 1998, pp. 128, 129). Following Zhou and Bankston’s study of Vietnamese youth in New Orleans (1994, 1998), it appears that this racial/ethnic identity as structured through family socialization is more a resource in acculturation and achievement than a disadvantage.17

Fourth, the policy underpinnings of a multicultural society legitimates the persistence of ethnic differences in the private sphere, and to an extent also in the public sphere. The statements of many respondents suggested that racial differences had often been transformed in their minds to ethnic differences. To be a “banana” (yellow outside and white inside) suggested a keen awareness of feeling inwardly like others in the dominant society at the same time that some customs and language use could be different. To an extent then, racial differences were reinterpreted as ethnic differences. The ideology of the Canadian multicultural state legitimates cultural retention (usually fragments of culture) and minimizes racism by stressing the naturalness of clinging to cultural groups, even when bounded by race. Yet if whiteness is the reference point for the Canadian identity, then non-whites are “othered” and non-meltable in important respects (Kelly, 1998). It is unclear how the second generation will handle the issue of race but it is clear from the data that the dominant culture legitimates the ethnicization of their racial identity, and many respondents demonstrated a keen interest in either retaining or modifying their ethnic heritage, a practice supported by the ideology of a multicultural society (Roberts & Clifton, 1982).

Fifth, it has often been noted that identities may be affected by the experience of prejudice and discrimination. In their panel study in 1992 and 1995, Portes
and Rumbaut (2002, pp. 155–181) were surprised to find a significant decline in the proportion of their second generation respondents who identified themselves as hyphenated Americans, preferring instead a foreign identity or pan-ethnic identity. The Chinese, for example, showed increases in a pan-ethnic identity. Portes and Rumbaut link this change to external circumstances such as the influence of Proposition 187 in the state of California or attending an inner city school where disadvantage and a gang culture may exist. This identity shift is understood as a reactive formation whereby a defensive identity develops in relation to the dominant group and other minorities.

The experience of second generation Chinese living in large Canadian cities now involves interaction with large numbers of co-ethnics. While the presence of Chinatowns serve as active retail and entertainment centers (Lai, 1988), the Chinese population tends to be dispersed throughout the urban area without significant concentration. There have been few high profile events in Canada in recent years which have galvanized the Chinese population as outsiders or as under attack by nativists. Consequently, no defensive identities have arisen. Some of the second generation have clearly had experiences that serve as reminders of racial differences. Without asking any explicit questions about discrimination or prejudice, some respondents volunteered such information.

As a child, I felt out of place due to discrimination against Chinese kids as there were few of us, but now I am proud to be Chinese and sometimes I wish I knew more about Chinese culture.

These kinds of observations suggest that forms of disadvantage may produce some alliance with a pan-ethnic identity in spite of differences in origin and background among Chinese people but there is little sense that this discrimination is debilitating or leads to attempts to repudiate the parental identity.

The relationship between phenotypic traits and the social construction of race also suggests that interaction with others also impacts identity. In the American context, Tuan (1999) refers to this as the "authenticity dilemma" of being considered neither real Americans nor real Asians, which encourages the identification with hyphenated spaces. Because of prejudice, discrimination, and stereotyping, assumptions of foreignness may persist regardless of generational status. Tuan’s study of persons of Chinese and Japanese ancestry suggests that the commonalities of experiences by non-whites may push some into retaining a racial consciousness. The findings of this study seem to suggest that dual forces are at work, the acceptance of assimilation through public identity but also of ethnic preservation particularly in the private sphere. And throughout this process, ascriptive characteristics (race) serves as a shadow rather than a source of segmentation. In succeeding generations, if culture tends to erode, one can only guess about how
race might affect identity, particularly as the position of the dominant Caucasian
group erodes and Canadian society becomes more multi-racial.

CONCLUSION
It is obvious that the expansion of the Chinese community in Canada in recent years
and the escape from the lower social class position of earlier waves of Chinese
immigration has transformed the structural location and identity of Chinese persons
as individuals and as a group. Consequently, parents are more flexible and more
facilitative (rather than resistant) to the construction of their children’s own
identities in their new society. Perhaps they also experience less disadvantage,
marginalization, and discrimination than earlier waves of Chinese immigrants
(Lyman, 1977, 1986). In any case, segmentation as assessed by identity and socio-
cultural resources appears to be considerably tempered by a willingness to adjust
and adapt to a multicultural society that legitimizes ethnic culture particularly in the
private sphere of the family. The distinction between the private sphere of the family
where language and customs are retained are in direct contrast to the public sphere
where assimilation as measured by open attitudes towards friendship selection
and mate selection are proceeding rapidly.19 Whether indeed these attitudes of
young adults represent idealistic thinking or unrealistic optimism as opposed to
actual reality may be an important point but, for example, even if ideas about mate
selection are more ideal than real, they do reflect an attitude about assimilation
that many must think are attainable and desirable.

Has the segmented assimilation theory been confirmed among second generation
Chinese in Canada? Recall that the expectation was that race and a changing
economy and labour market shifts were introducing different paths to integration
in American society including blocked mobility experienced by an ethnic/racial
urban underclass as well as rapid economic advancement through the preservation
of tight ethnic cultures. This study has no data on socio-economic mobility but
it does assess the evidence for socio-cultural segmentation from the perspective
of interactional identities among potentially upwardly mobile post-secondary
students. The evidence presented here is that second generation Chinese do not
view themselves as part of a tightly-knit ethnic culture that participates in only
selective acculturation (Portes, 1997, p. 815) to the dominant Canadian culture
thereby creating a defensive identity. In that sense, segmented assimilation theory
must be rejected. On the other hand, race/ethnic identities, particularly in the private
sphere, appear to provide an anchor that supports assimilation in the public sphere
rather than serving as a hindrance to it. Rather than the result being a segregated
identity typical of the second generation in other contexts, the result is more of
a situational identity primarily as a consequence of perceptions of the attitudes
of their parents. While it may appear that assimilation is proceeding in a similar
manner to white immigrants, race combines with ethnicity to support the existence
of a real boundary that appears permeable rather than a barrier. In other words,
there remains some evidence that assimilation trends are counterbalanced by
race/ethnicity, which might combine to structure associational preferences at least
to some extent, but that the boundaries to greater integration are not impermeable.20

As one respondent put it,

It is quite confusing sometimes to be Chinese in a Canadian society, but also difficult to be
Canadian with a Chinese look.

Nevertheless, experiences of racial exclusion and discrimination have not been
severe enough among recent Chinese immigrants to Canada to produce a strong
identity built on race (Kibria, 1997). These conclusions seem to support similar
findings in the United States that Asians do not conform to the stereotype of other
racial minorities in that they have higher incomes and education, high rates of
intermarriage, and less residential segregation (Lee, 1998).

One of the key themes of this paper is that parent-child relations are an
important ingredient in the development of ethnic identity as one might expect
when discussing generational change. This focus serves as a significant addition
to the literature on segmented assimilation by replacing mobility with identity,
and noting how in a pluralist society identity switching (Lyman, 1977, p. 207)
occurs from the private sphere of the home to the public sphere and vice versa, and
that this switching occurs apparently with the support and participation of parents
themselves.21 Ethnic identity is indeed fluid, situational, dynamic, and volitional
for the second generation. For the Chinese second generation, it involves both
choice (agency), and ascription (structure), and situation (public vs. private), and
is the result of a dialectical process involving insiders (other Chinese persons) and
outsiders (non-Chinese, and especially Caucasians) (Nagel, 1994). Identity is not
so much related to a common origin as it is the result of negotiation and situation
differentiating the public and private spheres (Yancey, Erickson & Juliani, 1976).
To the extent that Canadian society is defined in racial terms by the Caucasian
majority, the Chinese second generation seems to be aware of its minority status
at the same time that it resists segmentation and seeks accommodation and
incorporation. Recognition of being different from the dominant group has not
produced reaction formation. Evidence from other ethnic/racial groups or from
persons less likely to be of middle class status may produce different results.
But from this ethnic/racial group at this stage of the life cycle, and among the
second generation of this immigration wave in the Canadian context, it appears that
segmentation is minimal. At the same time, ethnic preservation at home provides an identity anchor that encourages full participation in the public realm.

NOTES

1. It is interesting to note that Park (1950, pp. 194, 195) himself eventually reconsidered his race relations cycle and acknowledged that instead of assimilation some groups could become permanently institutionalized with a minority status. See also Gordon (1964, p. 235) who after emphasizing assimilation acknowledges conditions of structural separation.

2. Both the United States and Canada have experienced almost a complete shift away from the original source countries of Europe so that non-Caucasians are by far the largest group of immigrants. Both countries also have similar assimilation issues with the aboriginal population (Ponting & Kieley, 1997). Differences do exist though in the greater predominance of race in the United States as represented by a larger resident black population and a significant cross-border Mexican migration as well as migration from Latin America.

3. The term charter group is a term used in Canada to describe the two ethnic groups (British and French) who were the first to immigrate and settle in the country (other than aboriginals) and who controlled the nation-building process. In this regard, the British are considered the higher charter group because they had more control than the French.

4. It is significant that one important study of ethnic identity in Canada (Breton et al., 1990) did not include the Chinese in their study because the second generation was too young. Most of the data for that study was gathered in the late 1970s.

5. One of the limitations of this procedure was that it eliminated any opportunity for clarification of the information the respondent provided. However it was hoped that responses might be more frank and thoughtful on paper. In retrospect, some participants clearly spent more time with their responses than others who apparently completed their questionnaire quite hurriedly.

6. On the one hand, this convenience factor would suggest that participants in the study might be more predisposed to socializing and identifying with other Chinese. If this is so, then, as we will see later, the results may actually understate the degree of openness, which the second generation has to the broader society as students selected at random might have been even more open. On the other hand, locating the sample in this way may provide a more rigorous test of feelings of segmentation.

7. There is considerable variation in the way that first and second generation is distinguished in the literature. There is widespread agreement that foreign born who arrive as small children should not be considered first generation immigrants but the question is at what point do we mark the transition from childhood to adulthood (e.g. 12? 16? 18?). Zhou and Bankston (1998, p. 4), for example, call those arriving under 5 years of age as the second generation, those from 5 to 12 as the 1.5 generation, and those over 12 as the first generation. Park (1999, p. 163) calls all native born and the 1.5 generation the post-immigrant generation. The operational definition of second generation in this study includes all those who received their pre-post-secondary education in Canada and is similar to Portes and Rumbaut (2001, p. 23) who include foreign born children brought to the U.S. before adolescence as the second generation.
8. Very few respondents used a hyphen in linking Canadian with Chinese regardless of the order in which the words appeared. It is unclear if this has any meaning.

9. A good illustration of the dilemma in understanding the meaning of the order in which this identity was expressed is contained in the following statement. “My first impulse would be to answer Chinese Canadian, but I always try to reanswer Canadian Chinese.” Future research needs to examine this identity issue much more closely.

10. Compare these results with an earlier study of university students by Frideres and Goldenberg (1977) prior to the wave of new immigration that found that most students specified their ethnic identity as “Canadian” and only 12% with a hyphenated identity.

11. Compare the classic position of the second generation that often felt embarrassed or alienated and rebelled against their heritage.

12. This is a form of ancestor worship where ripened fruit is left out in a dish for the benefit of the spirit of those who have died.

13. A few respondents answering affirmatively to marrying or dating a non-Chinese considered other Orientals non-Chinese and would restrict their choices to all Orientals. In short, they would choose beyond Chinese but would still try to restrict their choices to Asians suggesting that race was important to these respondents.

14. For example, Kelly (1998) speaks of the negative effects of blacks feeling highly visible and “under the gaze” of those in authority in a white dominant society monitoring their behavior.

15. The fact that the language’s existence is more and more dependent on its oral form is significant and does not portend a durable future. Compare Li (1998, p. 107) who also speaks of significant language loss in the second and subsequent generations in spite of a high percentage of persons in the Canadian population with Chinese as a mother tongue and language most often used at home.

16. The implication here is that beyond retaining fragments of the culture, much of Chinese culture may erode. Hoe (1976) and Friesen (1988) found a similar cultural acquiescence among Chinese youth.

17. Compare Lan (1993) who found that family ranked as the most important influence on self-identity. It is also important to note that a number of respondents made reference to wanting to preserve Chinese values or morals (particularly the role of family and respect for elders), the lack of which they considered a liability in the dominant society.

18. For example, dragon boat races or festivals have become major events in Canadian cities that often include non-Chinese as well.

19. Arguably Chinese voluntary associations could also be included in the private sphere. Fung (1998, pp. 118, 119) has shown how as Chinese Americans felt greater acceptance in American society, participation in such organizations became less important.

20. Breton et al. (1990, p. 259) come to a related conclusion in their study of Toronto that the Chinese do not emphasize ethnic retention and reconstruction and want to blend in at the same time that as a group they were weakly incorporated into Canadian culture.

21. There has been some discussion of the presence of a glass ceiling among Chinese in Canada but these young people are not yet in the labor market and may be unaware of such limitations. Also, compare these findings with “satellite children” where one or both parents are absent and there is much greater identity confusion (Tsang et al., 2003).
REFERENCES


**UNCITED REFERENCES**

References cited in the text must appear in the reference list; conversely, each entry in the reference list must be cited in the text... The author must make certain that each source referenced appears in both places and that the text citation and reference list entry are identical in spelling and year.