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### **Immigration, Multiculturalism and Poverty: Chinese Immigrants in Canada**

Nowadays, more and more people in China are trying to migrate to other countries in the hopes of finding a better job and better living conditions, or try to escape from China's Communist government. Most Chinese choose to migrate to North American and European countries because they believe that the higher average wage and better living environments in these countries can give them a better life. However, most of these immigrants end up doing low-paid, labor-intensive jobs that locals do not want to do – for example, many of these immigrant Chinese work as cleaners or construction workers. Besides that, these Chinese immigrants usually face problems integrating with society, which could be due to cultural differences between them and their host country, as well as language barriers. Therefore, this essay aims to discuss the difficulties that Chinese immigrants might face when they migrate to North American countries such as Canada.

When Chinese immigrants move to Canada, they bring their culture along with

them; this has made Canada more multicultural and diverse. However, this influx of immigrants raises the question of whether the majority of the citizens in Canada are capable of fully accepting these Chinese immigrants. It may not be accurate to claim that the blanket multiculturalism policy in Canada would work for every resident in this country. Different cultures have different needs, and therefore Chinese immigrants may not be able to adapt fully to Canadian society despite the multiculturalism policy. In this essay, I'll first discuss the reason why Chinese people wish to migrate to Canada, and the privileges they gain as a result of living in this country. Secondly, I will discuss the pros and cons of living in Canada's multicultural society with specific reference to the immigrant Chinese, especially with regards to their living conditions and their social status. Finally, I will bring up the issue of social assimilation – whether the next generation of Chinese immigrants still have strong ties to their ethnic roots, or if they have been absorbed and assimilated into mainstream Canadian and Western culture.

From the 1970s onwards, overpopulation in China forced the country's residents to move to other regions. Overcrowding in China led to fewer resources each

individual, and society became highly competitive, with a corresponding drop in the quality of life (Jishnu Debnath, 2015). Many people living in megacities such as Beijing, Shanghai or Chengdu, desired a better job and better living environments, and therefore this resulted in immense competitiveness within the job market. Fresh graduates were unable to find jobs, and new employees were replacing those who were already in the workforce. Working conditions becomes worse; worker exploitation and low wages were common problems across many different jobs. On top of that, the price of housing was steadily increasing, and most people were therefore unable to secure a place to stay. The highly competitive job market and the inequity of resource allocation led to many people bemoaning the Chinese economy. These two reasons led to many Chinese deciding to migrate to other countries, but for Chinese parents, education for their children was another important factor influencing their decision to migrate as well. Some people in China are disappointed by the education system; high levels of pressure in the Chinese education system led to some parents deciding that a Western education might be more suitable for their children. Chinese parents were also willing to spend more money on migration and a Western

education for their children if it meant giving them some form of advantage within China's competitive society.

In comparison to China, Canada appears to have greater job opportunities and better standards of living. Canadian citizens have higher levels of job security and enjoy better welfare benefits than Chinese citizens. The Canadian government has several policies that are meant to help those in need – for example, those who are unemployed receive subsidies from the government. In addition, Canadian citizens enjoy benefits such as medical insurance, pension and social welfare (n.d.), none of which are found in China. Furthermore, Canada takes pride in its multiculturalism policy, and this policy enables different cultures and religions to coexist in Canadian society. This permission to stick to their own culture makes it easier for Chinese immigrants to start their new lives in Canada. This might explain why many people still choose to leave China, despite being able to do only low-paid, labor-intensive jobs in Canada.

Although there are many incentives that influence Chinese citizens to migrate to Canada, there are still some disadvantages to making this move. Despite the fact that

Canada is a multicultural country, different forms of discrimination continue to exist in this country. As mentioned above, many Chinese immigrants are only able to do basic, low-paid jobs, such as cleaners, clerks or factory workers, or other jobs that do not require a specific skillset. Many Canadian employers still prefer employees whose first language is English, and thus many non-English speaking Chinese immigrants are not considered for such positions. Even Chinese immigrants who are able to find work are usually treated unfairly compared to their colleagues (Monica Boyd, Siyue Tian, 2016). Few Chinese workers get the chance to be promoted to higher positions, often because their manager does not believe they have the ability to lead a group project or to deal with harder, more complicated tasks. Chinese workers may also face exploitation, as their employers may pay them less than the minimum wage or fail to provide their employees with proper insurance. All these factors result in a high rate of unemployment for Chinese immigrants, leading to both psychological and physical problems such as low self-esteem and high levels of depression (Chen, C. P., & Hong, J. L. 2016).

With regards to the culture, Chinese immigrants are the second largest minority

group in Canadian society (Chen, C. P., & Hong, J. L. 2016). Although Canada claims to be a multicultural country – justified by the fact that there are several different cultures all coexisting within the country – white Canadian citizens may not necessarily respect all these cultures. Chinese culture is very different from mainstream Western culture in Canada – the Chinese celebrate different holidays, speak different languages, and they behave differently from Canadian citizens. These differences may therefore lead to racism and discrimination. Prejudice against immigrants and common stereotypes of Chinese people are the main reasons why people may judge Chinese immigrants. All these factors lead to Chinese immigrants being vulnerable in Canadian society.

Being a minority group in a country often results in poverty (Fang Tony, Gunderson Morley, 2015). Minority groups often receive lower-than-average wages and lack opportunities for promotion in comparison to non-minority groups. Thus, these minorities rarely have the chance to attain upward social mobility and enter the upper-class tier of society. In addition, cultural differences usually end up isolating this group of people from mainstream society. In the end, some of these immigrants

realize that they are unable to integrate into mainstream society and, feeling disappointed about their life in Canada, choose to go back to China. It is true that the welfare system in Canada is better than in China, and that there are definitely more job opportunities, but the problem here is that the citizens of multicultural Canada may not have an open enough mind to fully accept non-white immigrants into their society. When it comes to living in Canada, racism and discrimination are the biggest obstacles that immigrants must face.

The second generation of these Chinese immigrants in Canada is another issue to be discussed. Unlike their parents, these second-generation immigrants grew up in Canada and have taken part in the Canadian education since their childhood. They were taught in Canadian schools and are natives to mainstream Canadian culture. These second-generation immigrants can speak the local language, English, more fluently than their parents, and are more adapted to life in Canada. This combination of factors makes it easy for them to integrate into Canadian society and find jobs in the future. These new Chinese-Canadians are more or less assimilated into the majority in Canada, and therefore face fewer problems when it comes to living in

Canada. However, despite their relative economic and societal stability, these second-generation immigrants have lost their racial identity (2013). Some of the people belonging to the younger generation do not know how to speak their mother tongue and know little of their Chinese roots; as a result, they become alienated from their traditional heritage (Howard Kim, n.d.). This is not a positive sign for Canada's multicultural policy as the policy claims to embrace cultural diversity within society – however this phenomenon is indicative of cultural assimilation rather than pluralism. Blind cultural assimilation is very dangerous for the goals of multiculturalism in Canada, because if everyone simply adapts to mainstream Canadian culture, the country will eventually lose the cultural diversity that makes Canada unique.

In conclusion, the main reason why Chinese immigrants choose to come to Canada is because they wish to pursue a better standard of living and find more job opportunities. However, the Canadian experience may not be exactly what they hoped for, as these immigrants may face cultural barriers that lead to other problems. On a positive note, these Chinese immigrants have contributed to multiculturalism in Canada; their presence makes Canadian society more diverse. For Canada to be a



truly multicultural country, Canadian citizens must be able to fully accept differences in culture and be less critical of immigrants with different traditions and backgrounds.

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