

English learning lived experiences of Chinese student newcomers in a Canadian postsecondary EAP programme: The role of gender

Chuanmei Lin and Sylvie Roy

Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary, Alberta, Canada

Gender roles are still strictly defined in some countries while in others they are becoming increasingly fluid (McKeen & Bu, 2005). This article examines Chinese student newcomers' English learning lived experiences in a postsecondary English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programme and how different gender roles help or hinder the integration trajectories of those students into Canadian multicultural society. In this study, women language learners who seem to follow a more traditional feminine position experience more intercultural transformations of their identities than their male counterparts with worldviews perceived as more masculine. The study shows that gender roles serve as an impacting factor on second language learning processes for Chinese women and men. We conclude that gender equality pedagogy and gender-sensitive awareness should be promoted in language teaching and learning in order to foster a more inclusive educational environment for students from diverse backgrounds who might still have traditional behaviours towards gender roles.

Keywords: Gender roles; integration; languages and diversity; identities; Chinese EAP learners; Canada

Introduction

When Chinese international student newcomers study in Canada, their acculturation process is not assumed to be linear or a simple rejection of their old heritage culture in favour of an entirely new host culture (Dion & Dion, 1996; T. Tang & Dion, 1999). Gender patterns of female ethnic minority immigrant students, including Chinese women's tendency to outperform Chinese men, are consistently identified in relation to educational success (Brandon, 1991; Garcia-Coll, Szalacha, & Palacios, 2005; Portes, Rumbaut, & Rumbaut, 2001; Qin-Hilliard, 2003; Rong & Brown, 2001). The pattern also appears in the four traits of academically successful immigrant youths recognised by Suárez-Orozco, Pimentel, and Martin (2009): "proficiency in English, literacy in a native language, higher self-efficacy, and being female" (p. 715). In order to deconstruct the assumption that only females succeed in language learning, gender-sensitive awareness in language education needs to be addressed.

Ylöstalo and Brunila (2018) define gender equality pedagogy as "sensitive to discursive power that operates not only in gender equality work, but also in feminist pedagogy" and aiming "for gender equality as a social value concerned with gender, power and hierarchy, which requires a vision of a gender equal society and commitment to it" (p. 918). The intersection between feminist pedagogy and gender equality work serves to "criticize the unequal social relations embedded in contemporary society and to change these circumstances" (Ylöstalo & Brunila, 2018, p. 920), including sensitive teaching about gender and class inequality. This article examines gender inequality among Chinese English learners in the province of Alberta, Canada. Our questions are:

1. What are the discourses on learning English, in relation to traditional gender roles, that Chinese students bring with them?
2. How do different gender roles affect Chinese students' interactions with the social world when using a second language?

Gender is fluid and complex; however, in this article, we use social constructs of masculinity and femininity as (un)intentional¹ gender performances by individuals (Butler, 1990; Connell, 1995; West & Zimmerman, 1987) to explore the dichotomy between five male and five female Chinese students. A difference between male and female students in the study is identified and this will be discussed. However, it is worth noting that the concepts of identity and gender identity and their impacts on learning a second language are often complex. The goal of this study is to clarify what these differences can mean for Chinese students.

Conceptual framework

This article uses Norton's notions of identity, imagined communities and investment. In her early work Norton (Peirce, 1995) defined social identity as multiple, contradictory, and a source of struggle because the parts of an identity that a person adopts are different and dynamic within particular discourses. Years later, Norton (2013) revised her definition of identity to "how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (p. 45). According to Qu (2005), "when identity change involves a second language, it signifies confrontations between two cultures, or two sets of values derived from the two cultures" (p. 113). We argue here that Chinese English learners residing in China do not experience multiple cultural identity issues. However, they may experience cultural identity construction when they go abroad and are immersed in native English-speaking environments.

Norton's notion of imagined communities refers to groups of people, not immediately tangible and accessible, with whom one connects through the power of imagination (Kanno & Norton, 2003). The sense of belonging to a community emerges from the direct and concrete interactions within community practices, also known as engagement (Wenger, 1998), which can be achieved through neighbourhoods, workplaces, educational institutions and religious groups. A sense of belonging can also come from our imagination through "a process of expanding oneself by transcending our time and space and creating new images of the world and ourselves" (Wenger, 1998, p. 176).

Norton's (Peirce, 1995) concept of investment describes the "socially and historically constructed relationship of learners to the target language, and their often ambivalent desire to learn and practice it" (p. 17). According to Kanno and Norton (2003), the imagined future affiliation with specific communities may affect a student's learning trajectory. Using these three concepts of identity, imagined communities and investment as the theoretical framework, we look at how the role of gender impacts the English learning lived experiences of Chinese student newcomers.

Research context

Canada is a diverse country where 18.9% of the population are born outside of the nation (Berry et al., 2006). Various English as a Second Language (ESL) programmes across Canada are the predominant educational integration responses to cultural

diversity (Burnaby, James, & Regier, 2000). China provided the largest source of international students attending Canadian universities in all provinces except for Quebec and New Brunswick in 2013-2014, making up 34.1% of international students (Statistics Canada, 2016).

English language is a compulsory subject from Grade Three onwards for students in China (Guo & Beckett, 2012). Nevertheless, many do not meet the language requirements of their chosen degree stream or faculty in Canada, so they enrol in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programmes prior to entering their degree programme. The admission requirement for the EAP programme described in this study is a minimum IELTS 5.5 or TOEFL 70. The minimum requirement for direct entry to undergraduate programmes is IELTS 6.5 or TOEFL 86. The EAP programme contains three tiers arranged in increasing levels of difficulty. Students must complete the third tier but can be exempted from earlier tiers if they have sufficiently high IELTS or TOEFL scores. Each tier runs for one semester of four months (Fall Semester: Sept-Dec; Winter Semester: Jan-Apr; Spring & Summer Semester: May-Aug).

When Chinese student newcomers start in the EAP programme, they bring with them their prior learning experience and ideologies influenced by their Chinese sociocultural background. Chinese society is culturally classified as collectivism-oriented where individuals are expected to share social and gender role norms (Marshall, 2008). For centuries, Confucian ethical principles have encouraged men to pursue more powerful virtues such as *ren* (benevolence), *yi* (righteousness) and *li* (justice) while women are encouraged to conform to *san cong si de* (three obediences and four virtues) by being subordinate daughters, wives, and mothers (C. S. Tang, Chua, & O, 2010). After the communist government established the People's Republic of China in 1949, Chairman Mao declared that "women hold up half of the sky" so as to encourage both Chinese women and men to contribute to China's economic development (Gilmartin, 1994; Leung, 2003; Riley, 1996). In contemporary society, better-educated women in areas with higher education rates, such as urban mainland China, tend to have more egalitarian gender attitudes regarding their careers, marriage rights, sexual freedom, and their beliefs on the importance of having sons (Shu, 2004). Chinese women and men are in a process of shifting from traditional cultural values to contemporary values due to political and economic movements. However, gender differences are still apparent in some of the participant discourses and practices discussed in this study.

Methodology

This study was divided into two stages. Stage One was undertaken when the new students had just arrived in Canada and enrolled in the EAP programme in the Fall Semester (Sept/Oct). Stage Two was conducted during the Winter Semester (Jan/Feb), after the participants had completed one semester of the programme. Each stage consisted of one-to-one interviews conducted in Mandarin with a number of participants. There was a three to four-month interval between the two rounds of interviews. Ten volunteer participants were recruited from across the Tier 1, 2 and 3 classrooms in order to include all levels of English proficiency represented on the programme. The participants consisted of five men and five women. Eight of the ten participants would be direct entrants into their third year of studies after completing the EAP programme (they had previously completed two years of study in China before transferring to Canada but needed to pause their studies to take the EAP programme because they did not initially meet the English proficiency entrance requirement at the

Canadian university), one participant would be starting his first year of academic studies and one was preparing to start graduate school. All participants came from the rapidly expanding Chinese middle class which constitutes about 5% of the Chinese population and is the main source of Chinese international students in English-speaking postsecondary institutions (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006).

This article uses a qualitative research approach that employs an inductive strategy to build theory from “observations and intuitive understandings gained in the field” (Merriam, 1998, p. 7). It emphasizes education as a lived experience and school as a process. Education involves individual progress and is determined by personal and case-specific interactions between a person and the social world.

The ontological intent of this study is rooted in interpretive case studies (Merriam, 1998) presenting detailed descriptions of the phenomenon under investigation in order to “illustrate, support, or challenge theoretical assumptions held prior to the data gathering” (p. 38). Each of the ten participants is treated as a discrete case to delineate how different gender roles impacted their English learning trajectories through two-rounds of one-on-one semi-structured interviews.

To avoid bias and maintain objectivity, the common themes from all interviews were summarised. In addition, at the time of the study, the first author was a student researcher from China so understood Chinese students and the country’s education system well. She had a higher level of English proficiency and cross-cultural competence than the study participants and, therefore, possessed a different integration trajectory from them. This experience allowed her to think from the perspectives of both an insider and outsider, who could analyse the data subjectively, with in-depth knowledge of Chinese sociocultural background, and objectively, as someone who was not as exposed to the challenges experienced by the participants as a result of their lower cultural and linguistic competency.

Findings

This section examines the data were examined from multiple angles using Norton’s (2013) concepts of identity, investment and imagined communities in language learning, and by comparing men and women.

Chinese male identity, investment and imagined communities

The five male participants (Table 1) all indicated a more apathetic embrace of the Canadian culture than their female counterparts. They felt more strongly against integrating into Canadian society when they first arrived than later when they had spent one semester in Canada. For example, during his first interview, Peter, who had just graduated from high school, expressed his resistance to communicating in English because his limited English proficiency made him feel it was not as worthwhile as for those who speak English well:

I felt their [classmates’ and instructors’] English was way better than mine. I just felt it was inconvenient for me to communicate with them. Because it’s tiring trying to talk, so I chose not to talk. I didn’t have many verbal interactions with them. (Peter)

Table 1. Chinese male participants' biographies

Name (Pseudonym)	Age on Arrival	Previous Programme*	Post-EAP Year of Study**	EAP entry Tier***
Peter	18	An international high school in China	First	1
Jack	20	GSP****	Third	1
Daniel	20	GSP	Third	1
Tom	20	GSP	Third	2
David	22	A Chinese university	Graduate School	1

Notes:

- * The most recent level of study before leaving China
- ** The year of study participants would enter into at the Canadian university after successful completion of the EAP programme
- *** The tier (level) at which the participant entered the EAP programme (Tier 1 is the lowest proficiency level)
- **** General Study Programme, a 2+2 Sino-Canadian programme allowing completion of a Bachelor's degree in the Canadian university after an initial two years of studying the major and English at the Chinese university.

Peter claimed he did not have, and did not want to have, much communication with local people because he felt it was too challenging to communicate with counterparts who had higher English competency:

I am just [temporarily] studying in a foreign country, it'll be wonderful to make some [local] friends. But if not, [it's] because of cultur[al differences], I don't think it really affects me because my purpose to be here is to study. (Peter)

When asked if he has experienced changes to his identities, he said:

People have to possess such a tender heart to feel and answer these questions! I never noticed those things [as an IT major]. (Peter)

He commented that,

maybe [redefined identities are experienced by] people who have foreign friends to communicate with who are able to get to know the culture, but I don't know them [foreign friends] yet. Language is a big problem, even if you want [to communicate with local people] you wouldn't know where to start or to understand. (Peter)

Peter's experience exhibited similarities to a Peruvian immigrant in Norton's (2000) research who referred to herself as a "foreign person who lives here by accident" (p. 101), because "a 'foreign person', like a tourist, is someone who is not subject to the social relations of power in the host country" (Norton, 2013, p. 141). Peter perceives himself as an individual who studies in a foreign country and does not need to integrate

into the host culture. There are other factors which can affect a participant's ability to learn ESL such as whether they plan to travel and stay abroad temporarily or even to move to another country permanently.

Similarly, Daniel stated that the difficulties to fully and freely utilize English made him choose not to use English at all:

I tried my best to avoid speaking English when I first came. When I did the grocer[ies], I went to a Chinese supermarket like T&T. When I went out to eat, I went to Chinese restaurants (Daniel)

Jack concurred with him by saying:

I was of the view that I had just come to study in a foreign country, I did not want to assimilate. Unless it was out of necessity, I avoided contact with them [locals] as much as possible. And I really felt strongly about that way back then. (Jack)

The above excerpts demonstrate that these three men did not really want to speak English or to be part of the English dominant academic community. It seems they lacked interest in using English to communicate with others due to their lower English proficiency than those whose "English was way better than mine" (Peter). Norton (Peirce, 1995) proposed "the right to speak" and called into question the legitimacy of the assumption that "those who speak regard those who listen as worthy to listen, and that those who listen regard those who speak as worthy to speak" (p. 18). She (2000) identified an appropriate usage that must be understood with regards to inequitable relations of powers between interlocutors. Lower English proficiency naturally put the Chinese men in a less powerful position, which resulted in their ambivalence to speaking. In addition, Chinese men may lose their traditional status as family heads (Chua & Fujino, 1999; Hibbins, 2003) in Canada because of their limited language proficiency.

The male participants' reasons for enrolling in a Canadian university were not always related to study. David, for example, mentioned that his parents sent him to Alberta to take care of his younger brother who was studying at a local high school. Peter came to study in Canada because his parents' colleagues and friends set a trend of sending their children overseas because "they think foreign education is better" (Peter). Consequently, for the males their lifestyle in Canada consists typically of going to school and staying at home playing video games. An exception is Tom who had started his undergraduate degree. Even by the time of the second-round interviews, none of the male participants except Tom (the only male student who said he wants to integrate with Canadian students) showed any interest in mingling with communities outside of their Chinese friend groups. This diversity of reasons for entering the EAP programme, along with educational backgrounds which were more diverse than those of the females, might explain why the males experienced fewer intercultural transformations of their identities as a result of learning English. However, similar to female participants, male participants all made noteworthy progress and developed their own strategies for achieving personal academic and linguistic developments.

According to Qu (2005), "When identity change involves a second language, it signifies confrontations between two cultures, or two sets of values derived from the two cultures" (p. 113). Male participants tended to draw a line between the two languages and cultures based on their prior connotations and denotations. Instead of

initiating communication with the local culture (as the female participants did), male participants interacted with local culture on the basis of need, often marked by polite responses and necessary questions. This may be largely because men invested less in English than their women counterparts, and this may have been because they could not assert their hegemonic masculinity when using English in Canada as they had when using Chinese in China. The clash between identity and culture is illustrated by Tom:

Tom: 'Seek to find common ground while preserving your differences', Chinese culture comes first, it is fundamental, and it is something that can't be discarded.'

Interviewer: For example?

Tom: Confucianism. However, Canadian culture is founded more on freedom and openness, while Chinese culture is more euphemistic, and which is the opposite of the open [directness]. I feel like I am in the middle of the two, in the very middle of the two extremes... so I can put myself in someone else's shoes which is a key point... and deal with things using different methods and switch back and forth. Maybe that's the purpose of studying overseas, you can bring with you, for example, your way of seeing things, but not the degree.

From the data (as represented by the above excerpt), it is evident that the male participants did not appear to experience significant identity loss and identity/confidence-reclaim and that they largely perceived themselves as remaining unchanged by the host culture. Similar to Hibbins' (2003) study of forty Chinese males that migrated to Australia over fifty years, "migration and duration of settlement seemed to have had little influence on these traditional processes" (p. 28) as Chinese male migrants highlighted their role as sole provider and head of the family. The attitudes towards the traditional family responsibilities of women looking after children at home with men taking a more powerful position in the family relationship was also reflected in the research findings of recent Chinese male newcomers in North America (Chua & Fujino, 1999). Male participants in this study invested in two separate cultural identities that they switched between as necessary. Identity constructs may not be as complex and as big a source of struggle for male participants as they are for female participants, but the gendered view of Chinese male students as tenacious and determined English learners subconsciously yielded some degree of cultural and linguistic integration into Canadian multicultural society.

Chinese women's identity, investment and imagined communities

There were five female participants (Table 2). However, this article only uses excerpts from two participants (Mary and Maxine) who generated the most typical female discourses.

Four of the five female participants clearly communicated that their identities transformed after a process of loss and reclamation. Coming from the same General Studies programme, they all showed a willingness to adjust in order to achieve academic and linguistic improvements along with personal and cultural integration into Canadian society. Their different levels of English proficiency may have caused different levels of marginalization in their study or work.

Table 2. Chinese female participants' biography

Name (Pseudonym)	Age on Arrival	Previous Programme*	Post-EAP Year of Study**	EAP entry Tier***
Maxine	20	GSP****	Third	1
Ada	20	GSP	Third	1
Vicky	20	GSP	Third	2
Vera	20	GSP	Third	2
Mary	20	GSP	Third	3

Notes:

* The most recent level of study before leaving China

** The year of study participants would enter into at the Canadian university after successful completion of the EAP programme

*** The tier (level) at which the participant entered the EAP programme (Tier 1 is the lowest proficiency level)

**** General Study Programme, a 2+2 Sino-Canadian programme allowing completion of a Bachelor's degree in the Canadian university after an initial two years of studying the major and English at the Chinese university.

Mary, the only female who had already started her undergraduate studies, regained her confidence after a long period of feeling lost and recalibrated herself in the Canadian post-secondary educational environment:

Now that I have spent more time here, I do not feel as though English is unfamiliar and I can use it well now. Although I have not mastered it completely yet, at least I don't feel the intense psychological pressure I felt before... for example, I took a Japanese language course and I have met many students, most of them are Canadian. I developed good relationships with the Canadian girls who sit near me. Today the instructor asked the nationalities of the class, when asking who are Chinese? I raised my hand, then she said 'You are Chinese? I thought you grew up here'... I feel good about it.

Maxine was the only participant who started working during her studies. She worked as a part-time server in a Sushi restaurant run by Chinese people. She divulged her sentiments about her lived experiences with English-speaking in Canada and the transformation of her identity as a result of being in the workplace. Maxine considered herself to be a strong and independent girl in China, but she felt unable to survive alone in the workplace in Canada because of her second language barrier. She felt dependent in her job on her co-workers' for interpretation when she did not understand customers.

Maxine's experience is similar to the feelings of exclusion described by the female Polish immigrant, Eva, in Norton's (2000) research. Eva needed English to access social networks but could not develop fluency without access to those networks (Norton, 2000, 2013). Likewise, Maxine felt like she was "deaf" and began to reminisce about being valued by her parents and her community back home:

I feel left out when I work, when customers order using long drawn-out English sentences, I have to ask for help from my co-workers because I can't understand everything. I feel like I am deaf, like I can't hear what people are saying and I can't work independently... (Maxine)

Unlike Mary, Maxine's identity constructs must be understood in the context of her imagined communities, which include becoming a Chinese-Canadian in the future. During the first-round of interviews, Maxine said she planned to stay in Canada and look for a job after completing her studies. She stated she would assess how well she has adapted to Canadian culture at the end of her studies. During the second-round interview, Maxine said she had already adapted to Canada because of its multiculturalism. While recalibrating her imagined Chinese Canadian identity, she noted that the Chinese community is impressive because "we have a Chinatown everywhere". She perceived that remaining in Canada is not difficult and noted that most of her workplace co-workers are Chinese immigrants.

The sensitive and expressive nature female participants identified their initial feeling of being *othered* due to the asymmetrical nature of social relationships with native speakers. However, as time went by, their English improved and they established new ways of understanding themselves. They adjusted their identities, for example to "an international student who speaks English" (Mary) or a bilingual future Chinese-Canadian (Maxine), through interactions with people in their academic and work networks, thus investing in their English and multiple identities simultaneously. The intense psychological pressure which was related to learning a new language, the novice English language skills experienced by Mary and Maxine upon first arriving in Canada, and other people's negative reactions to their interactions, served to undermine the women's sense of worthiness to use English.

However, after Mary completed her EAP programme and developed friendships with Canadian girls in her undergraduate course and Maxine had the opportunity to learn from the older and younger generations of Chinese Canadians in her workplace, they both achieved what (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 37) refer to as "a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will in turn increase the value of their cultural capital and social power". The stories of Mary, Maxine and the other female participants involve intercultural adaptations that occur during the process of loss-transformation-reclamation of their identity.

Discussion

Promoting gender-sensitive awareness in language teaching and learning

From a cultural and linguistic integration perspective, the two most academically/socially successful² female participants in the study did not identify themselves as feminists even though they already possessed some feminist points of view.

Maxine revealed that she did not want to conform to her peers who sought a sense of belonging that depended on getting a boyfriend who "has spent a couple of years here". Instead, she felt more comfortable obtaining power through material goods such as a car and money and the symbolic power of learning from interacting with local people while she is working.

Mary stated that her traditional Chinese identity as a woman influenced her decision to opt for more security and stability in life, leading her to choose a high pass rate major and to not be an independently-minded person. This shows that certain gender roles may be ingrained in her preferred life path. Mary was the quickest female participant to graduate from the EAP programme. Mary felt she was not legitimately pursuing her true goal and passion in life, but she was able to reclaim her confidence and identity as a result of being recognized for her academic achievement in the EAP programme.

Male participants did not express feelings and thoughts that were as detailed as their female counterparts, even though the interviews were in their native language. It is likely that the less powerful gender roles for Chinese men in Canada made them pursue separate cultural identities instead of integrating their cultural identities as the Chinese women did. Thus, less investment was made and no imagined communities were articulated by male participants. In the context of EAP, instructors are usually gender neutral towards their students. However, heightened gender-sensitive awareness may help instructors understand that there are differences between the ways that Chinese men and women learn English.

Practicing femininities and masculinities in a second language

Paechter (2006) discussed “femininities in schooling” as “a range of ways in which girls construct and enact collective femininity and their individual femininities” (p. 254). Paechter (2006) concluded that when men distance themselves from hegemonic masculinity, which Connell (1995) describes as the power, patriarchy and domination of men towards women, they are symbolically or practically giving up power, whereas when women distance themselves from traditional femininity (e.g. from household roles) it is an action of claiming power.

In this study, when female participants expressed their cultural and linguistic lived experiences, they unconsciously indicated that their female gender roles were a factor that influenced their learning trajectories. For example, Maxine did not desire her peers’ collective femininity of finding a boyfriend. She preferred the individual femininity of depending on herself to obtain symbolic and material resources. Maxine’s refusal to adopt her peers’ action is consistent with Paechter’s (2006) description of distancing oneself from traditional femininity by abandoning a subordinate position and claiming power. Mary also reflected her collective femininity by stating “we are girls” who are supposed to feel “secure” by remaining in their home country, instead of being “adventurous as boys”, who can stay for a longer period of time in a foreign country. This reflection suggests that Mary believes there is a proper way of “doing girls” (as defined by West & Zimmerman, 1987) that is distinctly different from the approach taken by boys. Mary self-identified with what she thought girls are supposed to be instead of identifying with adventurous boys, suggesting that she assumed certain life paths are only for those with hegemonic masculinity.

Male Chinese English learners showed a tendency to obtain a brand-new Canadian identity separate from their existing Chinese cultural identities during their English learning. It is possible that they made this choice to maintain a position of power, dominance and assertiveness associated with their Chinese hypermasculine identities. Hence, men participants subconsciously chose to *other* the host Canadian language and culture as an entirely different identity that they could utilize as needed. The two separate identities described by male students suggests that they treat their Canadian cultural identity as subordinate to their more dominant Chinese cultural identity. The value they place on their cultural autonomy and importance of their mother tongue might slow down their ability to adapt to the host country compared to their female peers.

Conclusion

This article examines the cultural and linguistic lived experiences of Chinese student newcomers in a Canadian postsecondary EAP programme and how gender roles affect

their interactions with the social world while using a second language. It shows that gender equality pedagogy is needed for women and men who hold firm traditional Chinese cultural ideologies. Male Chinese English learners who hold hegemonic masculinity worldviews face more barriers integrating into the second language and culture, whereas, their female counterparts, who take a traditionally subordinate feminine position, keep an open mind and embrace changes to their self-perceptions. This seems to result in a willingness among the females to take on a hybrid identity and thereby achieve more intercultural transformations and integration when learning English.

Despite rapid economic and social changes in contemporary Chinese societies, research indicates that gender roles in China are still very stereotyped by the general public and social service professionals (C. S.-K. Tang, Pun, & Cheung, 2002; C. S.-K. Tang, Wong, & Cheung, 2002). Chinese men, in particular, are more likely to hold on to the conservative gender hierarchy (C. S. Tang et al., 2010). This article has addressed how to prepare Chinese student newcomers to Canada who import such ideologies from their home country which may be foreign to the host educational system.

Notes

1. Could be unintentional or intentional.
2. Academic/social success here refers to Mary successfully graduating from the EAP after only one semester and Maxine getting a part-time job working and learning the local language and culture from people in her workplace.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

About the authors

Chuanmei Lin is a recent graduate of the master's programme and current support staff member in the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary, Canada. Her research interests include second language socialization and newcomer youth social integration. She can be contacted at: chuanmei.lin@ucalgary.ca

Sylvie Roy is a Professor and Associate Dean Research at the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary, Canada. Her research focuses on French immersion, bilingualism, francophone minorities and sociolinguistics. She is a past President of the Canadian Association of Applied Linguistics. She can be contacted at: syroy@ucalgary.ca

References

- Berry, J. W., Westin, C., Virta, E., Vedder, P., Rooney, R., & Sang, D. (2006). Design of the study: Selecting societies of settlement and immigrant groups. In J. W. Berry, J. S. Phinney, D. L. Sam, & P. Vedder (Eds.), *Immigrant youth in cultural transition: Acculturation, identity, and adaptation across national contexts* (pp. 15–46). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Brandon, P. R. (1991). Gender differences in young Asian Americans' educational attainment. *Sex Roles*, 25, 45–61.
- Burnaby, B., James, C., & Regier, S. (2000). The role of education in integrating diversity in the Greater Toronto Area from the 1960s to the 1990s: A preliminary report. . Retrieved from http://ceris.metropolis.net/frameset_e.html
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. London: Routledge.
- Chua, P., & Fujino, D. C. (1999). Negotiating new Asian-American masculinities: Attitudes and gender expectations. *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 7(3), 391–413. <https://doi.org/10.3149/jms.0703.391>
- Connell, R. W. (1995). *Masculinities*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

- Darvin, R., & Norton, B. (2015). Identity and a model of investment in applied linguistics. 35, 36-56. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190514000191>
- Dion, K. L., & Dion, K. K. (1996). Chinese adaptation to foreign cultures. In M. H. Bond (Ed.), *The handbook of Chinese psychology* (pp. 457-478). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Garcia-Coll, C., Szalacha, L., & Palacios, N. (2005). Children of Dominican, Portuguese, and Cambodian immigrant families: Academic pathways during middle childhood. In C. Cooper, C. Garcia-Coll, T. Bartko, H. Davis, & C. Chatman (Eds.), *Developmental pathways through middle childhood: Rethinking contexts and diversity as resources* (pp. 207-234). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Gilmartin, C. K. (1994). Gender, political culture, and women's mobilisation in the Chinese nationalist revolution 1924-1927. In C. K. Gilmartin, G. Hershatter, L. Rofel, & T. White (Eds.), *Engendering China* (pp. 195-225). Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Guo, Y., & Beckett, G. H. (2012). A critical analysis of English language teaching in today's market economy in China. In K. Sung & P. R. (Eds.), *Critical ELT practices in Asia: Key issues, practices, and possibilities* (pp. 55-70). Rotterdam, the Netherlands: Sense Publishers.
- Hibbins, R. (2003). Providers, protectors, guardians: Migration and reconstruction of masculinities. In M. W. Charney, B. S. A. Yeoh, & T. C. Kiong (Eds.), *Chinese migrants abroad: Cultural, educational, and social dimensions of the Chinese diaspora* (pp. 23-40). Singapore: Singapore University Press and World Scientific Publishing.
- Jin, L., & Cortazzi, M. (2006). Changing practices in Chinese cultures of learning. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 19(1), 5-20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07908310608668751>
- Kanno, Y., & Norton, B. (2003). Imagined communities and educational possibilities: Introduction. *Journal of Language, Identity and Education*, 2(4), 241-249.
- Leung, A. (2003). Feminism in transition: Chinese culture, ideology and the development of the women's movement in China. *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, 20(3), 359-374. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1024049516797>
- Marshall, T. C. (2008). Cultural differences in intimacy: The influence of gender-role ideology and individualism—collectivism. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 25(1), 143-168. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407507086810>
- McKeen, C., & Bu, N. (2005). Gender roles: An examination of the hopes and expectations of the next generation of managers in Canada and China. *Sex Roles*, 52(7), 533-546. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-005-3719-5>
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Norton, B. (2000). *Identity and language learning: Gender ethnicity and educational change*. London: Longman.
- Norton, B. (2013). *Identity and language learning: Extending the conversation* (2nd ed.). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Paechter, C. (2006). Masculine femininities/feminine masculinities: power, identities and gender. *Gender and Education*, 18(3), 253-263. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540250600667785>
- Peirce, B. N. (1995). Social identity, investment, and language learning. *TESOL Quarterly*, 29(1), 9-31.
- Portes, A., Rumbaut, R. G., & Rumbaut, R. G. (2001). *Legacies: The story of the immigrant second generation*. Berkeley: Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Qin-Hilliard, D. B. (2003). Gendered expectations and gendered experiences: immigrant students' adaptation in schools. *New directions for youth development*(100), 91.
- Qu, W. G. (2005). On issues concerning English and identity research in China. *The Journal of Chinese Sociolinguistics*, 5, 93-116.
- Riley, N. E. (1996). Holding up half the economy: Women face new uncertainties in a changing China. *China Business Review*, January-February, 22-24.
- Rong, X. L., & Brown, F. (2001). The effects of immigrant generation and ethnicity on educational attainment among young African and Caribbean Blacks in the United States. *Harvard Educational Review*, 71(3), 536-565. <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.71.3.464r24p1k6v1n43t>
- Shu, X. (2004). Education and gender egalitarianism: The case of China. *Sociology of Education*, 77(4), 311-336. <https://doi.org/10.1177/003804070407700403>
- Statistics Canada. (2016). International students in Canadian universities 2004-2005 to 2013-2014. from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/81-599-x/81-599-x2016011-eng.htm>
- Suárez-Orozco, C., Pimentel, A., & Martin, M. (2009). The significance of relationships: Academic engagement and achievement among newcomer immigrant youth. *Teachers College Record*, 111(3), 712-749.

- Tang, C. S.-K., Pun, S. H., & Cheung, F. M. C. (2002). Responsibility attribution For violence against women: A study Of Chinese public service professionals. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 26(3), 175-185. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-6402.00057>
- Tang, C. S.-K., Wong, D., & Cheung, F. M.-C. (2002). Social construction of women as legitimate victims of violence in Chinese societies. *Violence Against Women*, 8(8), 968-996. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107780102400447096>
- Tang, C. S., Chua, Z., & O, J. (2010). A gender perspective on Chinese social relationships and behavior. In M. H. Bond (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of Chinese psychology* (pp. 533-554). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Tang, T., & Dion, K. (1999). Gender and acculturation in relation to traditionalism: Perceptions of self and parents among Chinese students. *Sex Roles*, 41(1), 17-29. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1018881523745>
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- West, C., & Zimmerman, D. H. (1987). Doing gender. *Gender and Society*, 1(2), 125–151.
- Ylöstalo, H., & Brunila, K. (2018). Exploring the possibilities of gender equality pedagogy in an era of marketization. *Gender and Education*, 30(7), 917-933. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2017.1376042>