

TOWARDS A TRANSCULTURAL PERSPECTIVE ON MOTHERING AND LEARNING FROM CHINESE IMMIGRANT MOTHERS IN CANADA

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ABSTRACT: Drawing on theories from transcultural theory, I examined Chinese immigrant mothers' transcultural perspectives on mothering and learning. Recent adult educational studies contain limited research on the effects of cultural influence on mothering and learning by immigrant mothers from their perspective. Based on 30 semi-structured interviews among Chinese immigrant mothers in Canada, this study revealed there are not only interactions between the fluid cultural values and the understanding of mothering and learning by immigrant mothers, but also race, gender, and class relations behind Chinese immigrant mothers' mothering and learning practice. This paper contributes to a better understanding of cultural influence on Chinese immigrant mothers' learning and mothering practice. The findings help foster adult educational programs for immigrant mothers in multicultural societies.

Keywords: transcultural perspectives, immigrant mothers, China, Canada

During the past decade, immigrant mothers' learning gradually became a significant phenomenon in North America (Zhu, 2017, 2020). A growing number of new immigrant mothers were enrolled in programs of settlement, language learning, and parenthood education. However, few studies have explored Asian immigrant mothers' learning practice at home or in the community in transcultural contexts. To fill this void, I examined Chinese immigrant mothers' transcultural learning practice in Canada. I particularly focused on the intersectionality of race, gender, and class in shaping Chinese immigrant mothers' informal learning in transcultural settings.

Limited research exists on the effects of cultural influence on mothering and learning by immigrant mothers from their perspective (e.g., Holloway & Pimlott-Wilson, 2014). Drawing on theories from transcultural theory (Guo & Maitra, 2017), I discuss Chinese immigrant mothers' transcultural perspectives on mothering and learning. First, the paper revisits concepts of mothering and learning from a transcultural perspective. Second, the paper provides data analysis of Chinese immigrant mothers in Canada and draws on findings from their mothering and learning practice. In this paper, I conclude a transcultural approach is necessary for examining immigration and refugee studies in adult education.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts a transnational theoretical framework while aiming to propose a transcultural framework for promoting transformative learning in adult education. Based on that construction, immigrants' knowledge and skills are unrecognized and devalued (Guo, 2009). Immigrant mothers are usually imagined as "unprofessional" or "without any Canadian/local experience" (Zhu, 2020, p. 9). Unequal power

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relations exist between immigrant mothers' knowledge and the knowledge they need to learn in both formal and informal settings.

“Transnationality” has become an important framework for studying migration and mobility in the global world (Glick Schiller et al., 1992; Guo, 2013, 2016; Xiang et al., 2013). Since Glick Schiller et al. (1992) proposed “transnationalism” as a framework for studying migration, researchers have started to examine how migrants build social fields in which they link together their country of origin and their country of settlement. Scholarly debates in transnational migration studies concern the changing meaning of “home” (Levitt et al., 2011; Taylor, 2015), integration and assimilation across borders (Kasinitz et al., 2002; Waldinger, 2017), and connections between return migration and transnationalism (Guo, 2016; Xiang et al., 2013). This research offers new insights that compel researchers in adult education to reconsider the essential debate in the study of transnational migration—the concept of transculturation. Transculturation is not a new term; it is used in cultural studies and suggests a process through which “individuals and societies chang[e] themselves by integrating diverse cultural life-ways into dynamic new ones” (Guo & Maitra, 2017). Transculturation sees individual cultures as fluid and places them in constant interaction with other cultures (Guo & Maitra, 2017).

This study aims to propose a transcultural framework in adult education through exploring the changing meaning of mothering and immigrant mothers' non-linear, dynamic, mixed, and fluid culture and learning experiences. I argue the transcultural framework contributes to research on adult educational studies and preparation through three aspects: 1) re-examining mothering in the transcultural context; 2) developing a just and transformative learning curriculum in adult education; and, 3) proposing a transcultural framework for guiding future research on adult education.

Literature Review

Motherhood learning, as a form of adult learning, must be understood from the epistemological and ontological foundations of mothering and learning. Mothering is a practice; a definition from O'Reilly (2010) focuses on experience and practice of mothering as distinct and separate from the identity of mother. Expanding on O'Reilly, I treat mothering as a praxis that links the practice of mothering to ideology of mothering and mothers' knowledge production. Learning is socially organized by a set of ruling relations. *Ruling* relations refers to relations, as forms of consciousness and organization, that are objectified in the sense they are constituted externally to particular people and places (Smith, 2005). In immigrant mothers' learning, ruling ideas represent interests of the hegemonic dominant group or ruling class. Knowledge of mothering represents interests of the globalized regime of ruling that shapes immigrant mothers' learning, mothering, and everyday practice. Locating motherhood learning in a transcultural discourse, ruling ideas of mothering represent interests of the dominant ideas, while knowledge of mothering represents interests from the marginalized who produced unequal social relations.

Methodology

The data come from a two-year critical ethnographic study I undertook in a Vancouver-based immigration settlement organization that provided workshops and motherhood learning courses for new immigrants in Canada. Critical ethnography, which is different from traditional ethnography in emphasizing the social conditions of people's daily lives as "the foundation for inquiry," enables the examination of institutions, regime of knowledges, and social practices that limit choices, constrain meaning, and denigrate identities and communities (Madison, 2005, p. 5). Critical ethnography refers to the use of anthropological qualitative, participatory, and observational methodology (Masemann, 1982). In my fieldwork between 2015-2017, I conducted in-depth ethnographic interviews with 30 Chinese immigrant mothers in this immigration settlement organization in Canada. In the interview, I asked questions including how they understood mothering, how they practiced mothering in Canada, how they made work-life balance, and how they experienced cultural barriers in the host country.

Findings

Research findings indicate Chinese immigrant mothers' experiences as they encounter work-life balance issues, cultural barriers, and transnational family relationships are crucial to challenge post-colonial relations behind motherhood learning. This study found social, cultural, and political construction of good mothers in a Canadian context forces Asian immigrant mothers to learn mothering, which was constructed as advanced, Western, and scientific mothering knowledge. This finding is borne out by the fact immigrant mothers who learn to parent their children based on Western and scientific approaches consider themselves to be good mothers. Examining Chinese immigrant mothers' fluid identity and transnational experience in Canada could help challenge the hegemonic ideology of mothering.

Transcultural Perspectives on Mothering

In my interviews, I found Chinese immigrant mothers faced many challenges in terms of mothering and parenting. Participant "Lisa" said

I think the biggest problem is that the first is really anxious. It is because this anxiety also comes from many aspects. The first problem is that sometimes I am always worried, because the children are trapped at home and there is nothing they can do. They used to have their own football team and played football, but now they dare not go. I feel that their behavior will change a little bit gradually, for example, if they don't like going out so much, they may not go. I always worry about this aspect. Then the third child, he is about 3 years old, in the development stage of language and social interaction, although I will also take him out for a walk, in a place with no one around. I usually take him to a church around here. He has almost no contact with people. I am very worried about this child. I feel that he has no

contact with the outside world. I am always a little worried, because I can also feel that they are not doing things like before. Although I have online classes at home every day, I am not as happy as I used to be at school, and now I sometimes feel a little...how to say? It's just that they may be in a bad mood, and then we see that he doesn't work hard. Anyway, this is one of the anxiety (Interview data, interviewee 01).

Chinese immigrant mothers have anxiety in terms of communicating with the outside world. The mothers are trying hard to help their children and family communicate with people in their new living environment. At the same time, the mothers are shifting their parenting by focusing more on children's social skills and integrating into the local society. Furthermore, "Lisa" told me her relationship with her children has been changed during the COVID-19 pandemic. She said

I feel that there are still some changes, although I don't live with my parents, a phone call or something should not have an impact. But I think there are still some changes in the relationship with children. Because of the current COVID-19, adults and children are a little anxious, so the relationship can sometimes be a little tense. For example, when the kids do things, we feel that they are not doing well, or that they are not serious. We will talk to them, and they will correct their behaviors, but they feel more nervous than before. In the past, because everyone went to school and went to work every day, there was not so much time to get along. The kids feel more nervous while stay with us together for such a long time...Sometimes I also reflect, I feel that sometimes I get angry with children and criticize them, and sometimes I also think, it is difficult for everyone, because I am indeed very anxious, and then sometimes they also notice that I'm very anxious. So, I think I need to be calm, and I can't get angry easily if something happens, I think that kind of mother may be the best for children. I try to lean in this direction, but I think I did not very good (Interview data, interviewee 01).

Due to different situations during the pandemic, participating immigrant mothers' parenting style and relationship with their children changed. They started reflecting on how to best parent their children and best assist their studies. However, from a transcultural perspective, immigrant mothers actually learned to control their emotions and try to be calm. They started using a reflective way of re-learning how to be mothers and parent their children.

Transcultural Perspectives on Learning

Participating Chinese immigrant mothers shared their learning experiences with me. For example, "Jamie," an immigrant mother in Calgary, Alberta, told me

I bought a lot of books from China, books about parenting, because I felt that I needed to grow up. I think how to raise a child is really a big problem. It doesn't mean that you just do it casually. I think this is very irresponsible, and we are not aware of the impact of the original family on the child. Yes, in fact, it may be

difficult to avoid most of the time, because people will make many decisions subconsciously, and it is difficult to change, but I think there are some things that can be changed. In fact, sometimes I still believe in learning good parenting methods, because I believe that the experiences and lessons that I have summarized will actually be more helpful to myself (Interview data, interviewee 08).

Based on Jamie's interview, I found most immigrant mothers take learning as a way of enhancing their parenting skills. Chinese immigrant mothers not only learn from local parents and teachers, but also from books, social media, and the internet. Specifically, they take opportunities of learning from Chinese books, social media, and different transnational parenting networks to increase their self-esteem; they become self-directed learners. From a transcultural perspective, mothering or parenting is no longer with a single cultural perspective; it is more mixed with different beliefs, values, and expectations. Participating Chinese immigrant mothers' learning experiences mixed both their own understanding of mothering and others' parenting/mothering practice to generate their own mothering practice.

Conclusion

This paper examined Chinese immigrant mothers' learning experience as an example to understand how motherhood learning is socially organized with transcultural relations. Aiming to decolonize motherhood learning, this study explored immigrant mothers' learning activities in a Canadian immigration settlement organization. Findings from this research suggest adult educational researchers and practitioners should pay more attention to transcultural aspects of mothering and learning to ensure they treat immigrant mothers as self-directed adult learners. This paper concludes examining Chinese immigrant mothers' experiences could help adult educators and researchers raise consciousness on immigrant mothers' ways of knowing and knowledge production in a transcultural era.

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