

Chinese Newcomers in the 21st Century

By: Kimberly Fu

(Not Published)

Pearson International Airport was a dismal appearance five years ago when Rachel Liang's plane, en route from China, landed on Canadian soil. Her father's friend wrapped a coat around her, the thickest and warmest coat she has ever worn in her life, and escorted her into the short-term visitor parking lot. And as she looked down at the unfamiliar slushy substance under her sneakers, she realized she had just entered the other side of the world.

Liang never figured that the feeling would be so strange. That is, the feeling of coming to a foreign country and suddenly being expected to start the rest of her life from scratch. With no family and friends present, and an acceptance package into Fleming College in Peterborough at hand, she knew that the new chapter of her life was being written.

Liang is one of the many Chinese individuals that made the decision to come to Canada to advance their livelihoods. But she is also a member of a very exceptional society that her parents cannot relate to: the young, "fresh-off-the-boat" Chinese of the 21st century and prized products of the booming westernized Chinese economy. Liang is well aware of this membership and realizes how different it would have been if she were to live in a previous generation.

"Pretty much everything from back home is available here," she says with near-perfect grammatical sentences and

a clear, crisp accent. "Nowadays, you can get the same thing in China."

The 25-year-old, after completing ESL courses, transferring to McMaster University and graduating with a degree in business, is now working at Fulcrum Communications, an administration company based in Kitchener-Waterloo.

Jack Pan, also 25, is another member of this society. He is planning to get a post-graduate work permit after he graduates from the University of Waterloo this August. His student visa expires in November of next year, after which he will apply to receive his immigration papers.

Having only arrived in Canada not too long ago, he speaks with a heavier accent than Liang, but the confidence in his voice is distinctive.

"I don't plan on ever going back to China," he says, leaning forward in the worn-out teal lounge chair in the student's centre of U of W. "I love Canadian people. I made friends."

Pan folds his hands loosely in front of him, his hair slightly tousled having just woken up on a Sunday afternoon. He had thrown on a plain, black Nike sweatshirt so to be recognizable for the interview. He flashes a boyish smile when asked if he underwent any discrimination during his journey to come to the Great White North.

"No struggles. I wanted to come here," he says. "I don't get discrimination. My parents would have gotten discrimination a long time ago, but I don't want them to come here because they don't know English. They don't

know how to say certain things. Their friends are in China. Why would I want them to come here?"

Pan says that he may have developed more adaptable skills if he lived in the generation before him, when resources, employment opportunities and education were not as easily accessible.

"I think [my parents] would have had a better life than me if they came here at my age," he says. "My parents were very hardworking. At my generation, it's much easier. I know how to use the computer. I can speak two languages."

Pan's logic would have come as a surprise a hundred years ago when Canada was considered to be a place that had a better life waiting for new immigrants. China was in shambles, having to answer to the rapid population growth and keep up with the economical demands from the agricultural industry.

Although it was certain that the grass was greener on the other side, immigration was a rather difficult process. In fact, the Chinese were the first group of individuals that were banned from Canada based solely on race at one point.

The head tax for the Chinese was introduced in the early 1900's, rising from \$5 to \$500 for each Chinese immigrant that entered the country. In November of last year, the Canadian federal government issued a formal apology to all Chinese immigrants that received the head tax. The head tax was lifted in 1967 when they were allowed to enter Canada at the same criteria that the Europeans, the more favoured of overseas immigrants.

The brunt of race discrimination lied firmly on the Chinese's shoulders in the 40's, causing several immigrants to create their own employment opportunities. Subsequently, Chinatowns were created and are now considered as primary hubs of Chinese culture in major Canadian cities.

Somehow, these trailblazers managed to create one of the biggest minority groups in Canadian society. Even Canadian government has now seen its share of rearing Chinese heads.

In 1957, Douglas Jung became the first Chinese Canadian Member of Parliament. Vivienne Poy followed suit as the first Chinese Canadian Senator. And clearly, Adrienne Clarkson is no stranger to firsts either, as the first Chinese Canadian Governor General.

Needless to say, this all adds to the melting pot that is our nation. And while the mix is suitable for some Chinese, others aren't so eager to blend straight into society.

Tina Xu, 24, comes from Heilongjiang, the northernmost province of China, and believes that although the benefits of living in her generation are great, it won't keep her here in the land of the free. Unlike Pan's enthusiastic response, she plans to return to China when she receives her degree.

"[My parents] would have had less money if they immigrated to Canada," she says. "They would not have that much as money like us, so they would work hard and study hard. And now we have support. I don't care about money."

“The future would be for me to go back to China,” she says, sitting upright and speaking softly, as if not wanting to disturb the considerable number of students milling around her. “I have a Canadian degree and I will be able to work in my city and I will be able to find a job there. If I stay in Canada, it will be more of a challenge for me.”

Xu is currently in her third year of the general arts program at the University of Waterloo on a student visa.

“I like China better because I have family there, friends there, everything there. Everything there I know,” she adds. “My parents say: If you can immigrate to Canada, that’s good. If not, come back. We need you!”

According to Liang, China has become more westernized, which only means that it is finally catching up to the rest of the world and doesn’t necessarily affect the way the Chinese adapt to Canadian society.

“I think China has got sucked into western culture and also Japanese culture and Korean culture,” she says. “But I don’t see a direct linkage with people coming to Canada and losing their culture.”

“China has developed quite rapidly and because of that, I could see the Chinese community growing much bigger now [in Canada].”

Then how about the name change?

“My decision in changing my name [from Sin Ling] was because I felt people would have a hard time pronouncing my name,” she explains. “It

wasn’t my intention to blend into culture.”

Pan, known in Chinese as Pan Yueh, agrees.

“I got an English name in China and it was Romeo,” he says with a chuckle. “One of my friends said that Romeo is not a good name. It was a playboy’s name, he said. So I chose Jack. It’s easy.”

- 30 -

Interview Contacts:

Rachel Liang
Home: (519) 885-9067
Cell: (519) 500-1170
E-mail: ultramanling@yahoo.ca

Jack Pan Yuen
Cell: (519) 721-6125
E-mail: digital_tribe30@hotmail.com

Tina Xu Shen
Cell: (519) 721-3258
E-mail: pingpinglove20@hotmail.com