

*The stress experience among Chinese young people in Australia*

By

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## Abstract

*Australia is a multicultural country. It has one of the world's most diversified terms of ethnic and culture population. In response to the absorption of migrants from non-English-speaking background in Australia, the population of ethnic young people has increased significantly in recent decades. Many disturbing trends in Australia is of 1990s, affect all the population particular young people with ethnic background. Ethnic youth are usually being confronted with additional burden of stress and conflicts, which arise out of the migration and resettlement process, coping with two cultures and value systems, and being a minority group in the society.*

*Chinese, like other minority youth groups in Australia, are confronted with variety of stressful life events. Little attention has been paid to the psychological stresses experienced by these minority youth. This study is to explore the experience of stress among the Chinese young people in Australia. By reviewing relevant literature, this study will examine the Chinese culture and values, which can influence the experience of stress among the Chinese youth. Other stress factors such as being a minority group in a Western country will also be explored.*

# Chapter One

## INTRODUCTION

Australia, like most other Western countries, is experiencing social and industrial transition, with a great and far-reaching impact on its society. Although these changes will affect all of Australia's citizens, the effect will be more apparent for its young people. The social, economical and technological changes are imposing a growing psychological stress on young people which leads to an alarming escalation in the social and psychological problems facing young Australians today. Eckersly (1988) identifies some of the problems brought about by these changes such as high unemployment, increased family conflict and breakdown, increased poverty and youth homelessness.

These problems are not restricted to youth, but since adolescence is a particular period for life changes and stress (Johnson, 1986), they bear the brunt of the turmoil and confusion created by the rapid changes taking place in Australian society. The consequence of these changes may lead to stress.

Stress is a major concern in young people. Youngs, et al (1990) state that not only it can be related to delinquent conduct, school-related performance, and classroom burnout, it also appears to have a negative impact on self-esteem of young people. Thus it becomes an important concern for parents and helping professionals who work with young people, to understand the issues pertaining to the psychological well being among the youth.

## 1.1 PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this study is to explore the experience of stress among the Chinese youth in Australia. Chinese, being a distinctive ethnic group, have different stress experience which might be associated with their migration experience, the breakdown in the Chinese tradition and lifestyle, and the cultural differences in the Western society.

Although Chinese have migrated and originated from many part of the world to Australia and as a result represent a diversified group, still many consider these migrants as a homogenous group as some of the cultural tradition continue to exist in the course of rapid modernization. They might still share the same belief, value and culture, but they are still unique in their particular life style influenced by the mother country they have physically departed from. This paper, however, looks at a broader picture of these Chinese groups and in particular the youth, who might have migrated to the country as refugees, migrated under their family's free will and finally those who have born in Australia.

The study is not to investigate the factors contribute to stresses in the young people in general as this will be beyond the scope of the study. Instead it aims at investigating the factors which contribute to the stress experience among the Chinese youth specifically. It is acknowledge that the Chinese youth will be confronted with the similar stress factors as the Australia youth in general. However, there are some factors that might be related to the specific life situation and ethnicity among the Chinese youth. Such factors can be understood under three main areas. First, stresses related to the pre-



migration and migration experience; second, stresses related to the Chinese culture confronting a new set of values and beliefs; and third, stresses related to being a minority ethnic group in the Australian society.

Although there is a growing body of literature which has been directed toward the study of ethnic minority youth in recent years, little is written about the Chinese which constitute a significant portion of the ethnic minority youth in Australia. The reason for choosing Chinese as the group for study is partly because of the acquaintance with Chinese culture of the author. Also, it is because the Chinese values and culture differ sharply from those of the Western countries and thus can be a significant factor contributing to the different stress experience among the Chinese youth.

## **1.2 BACKGROUND**

Australia is a multicultural country that has one of the world's most diverse populations in terms of ethnicity, culture and national origin (Guerra & White, 1995). In response to the absorption of migrants from non-English-speaking background in Australia, the population of ethnic young people has increased significantly since 1971 (ABS 1991). Ethnic youth has contributed a significant proportion in the Australian population. According to the 1991 census, there were almost one million young people of non-English speaking background in Australia. However, despite the significant numbers, very little attention has been focused on this group by the government department or agencies, or academic or research institutions (Moss, 1993).

While the cultural diversity in Australia is increasingly acknowledged and studied, there has been limited literature written about the ethnic minority youth. Furthermore, there has been far less attention paid to the psychological stresses experienced by minority adolescents, in spite of the wide recognition of sociological problems, such as poverty, inferior education, and unemployment faced by many of these young people (Gibbs, 1988). Guerra & White (1995) suggest that this reflects a relative lack of concern in academic and political circles about the needs and issues of this major section of the Australian population, which means this minority groups of population were being ignored by the broader community.

There are some disturbing trends in Australia in the 1990s which will commonly affects all young people disregard their ethnicity. These include unacceptable high level of unemployment, poverty, violence, mental illness and suicide, and growing social inequalities and polarization (NYARS, 1994). However, ethnic youth are usually being confronted with additional burden of stress and conflicts, which arise out of the migration and resettlement process, coping with two cultures and value systems, and being a minority group in the society.

Ethnicity, although is a term commonly mentioned in a lot of Australian literature, its concept is exceedingly complex. Barresi (1990) describes the concept of ethnicity as refers to a specific group whose members internalize and share a heritage of, and commitment to, unique social characteristics, cultural symbols, and behavior patterns that are important to be understood and recognized. Therefore the term "ethnic minority" has

been used to refer to those whose ethnic background is different to that of the majority Anglo-Australian population.

Chinese is a distinctive ethnic group in Australia. Chinese migration to Australia dates back more than 140 years although the number of population has increased significantly in recent decades becoming the largest ethnic group in Australia. Despite a growing body of literatures directed toward the study of ethnic minority youth in general, little is known about the Chinese and examine the association between the cultural influence and their stress experience.

## **Chapter Two**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The study is done by reviewing relevant literature to look at what are the possible variables that contribute to the stress experience of Chinese youth in Australia. Since there are very limited literature which address this specific topic, the author tried to approach this topic by looking at other relevant issues from a broader perspective. The literature review covers three main areas that are most relevant to the understanding and analysis of the topic under investigation. The first is the Chinese culture and its influence on young people; second is stress factors confronting the Chinese young people being a distinctive and minority group in Australia; and third is ethnic identity and its formation among the Chinese young people.

# Chapter Three

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### CONCEPT OF YOUTH

#### I. Demographic Trend

At the time of the 1991 census, there were 3,662,200 youth aged 12 - 25 in Australia, representing 22 % of the total Australian population. The number of young people aged 12 - 25 has increased by 17% since 1971. But the proportion of youth in the total population has decreased from 25 % to 22% over the same period. Fifteen percent of young people aged 12 – 25 are overseas-born and from a non-English-speaking country. The main countries were, in order Vietnam, Malaysia, Hong Kong and Yugoslavia.

Compare with the year before 1971, there has been a steady decline of young people arriving from English-speaking countries, but an increase in those arriving from Asian countries. According to the Australian Bureau Statistics (ABS 1992), the proportion of young people who arrived from Asian countries prior to 1971 was only 6% with a considerably increase to 22% between 1976 and 1980, and subsequent increased to 26% between 1986 and 1991.

Since the term ethnic youth also include the category of Australian-born children of one or two parents who had migrated from a non-English-speaking background, the census figure of 330,000 represents only about one-third of all ethnic minority youth. In

1993, it is estimated that there were at least 926,000 young people aged 12 - 25 who can be classified as of non-English-speaking background (NYARS, 1994).

According to ABS (1993), over 650,000 young people aged 12-25 in Australia speak a language other than English at home. The two most common languages spoken are in order Italian and Greek, indicating the tenacity of language maintenance in two of the major post-war immigrant groups, followed by Cantonese and Arabic which share the same position as the major language spoken at home by young people, clearly indicating the shift in immigration source countries.

## **II. Chinese Population in Australia**

Chinese immigration to Australia can be traced back to 150 years ago when Chinese were brought to Australia by their British employers as domestic servants, artisans and contract laborers (Wang 1988). The settlement of the Chinese at the time was mainly driven by social forces and economic opportunities in Australia. The discovery of gold in Victoria and the need of laborers had brought large number of Chinese immigrants to Australia. Gradually, the Chinese immigrants increased to a sizeable population, which then led to hostility and tension against them. In 1901 the Immigration Restriction Act was passes which rejected the entry of Chinese into the country due to racial fear in the gold field community. It was until 1949 when the restriction was relaxed, a small number of Chinese students and professionals were permitted residency in Australia (Churchman et. al., 1990)

It was not until 1973 and the formal adoption of a non-discriminatory immigration policy that induce a migration wave which showed the largest intake of Chinese into Australia since the gold rushes. Significant number of Chinese from various parts of Asia migrated to Australia as a result. In 1976, an influx of Indo-Chinese from South East Asian arrived to Australia as refugees. In 1980s, a large number of Asian students originated from Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore and other Asian countries were granted residency in Australia (Loh, 1988). Recently, in issue of Hong Kong's sovereignty after 1997, and the riots happened in Tianmen Square in 1989 have attracted large number of Hong Kong and China-born Chinese to Australia. As a result, the number of Chinese migrants markedly increased, and the Chinese has become one of the most diversified and the largest ethnic group in Australia.

Since the nineteenth century, there has been an increased absorption of Asian migrants in Australia. In 1991, the census figures indicated that the number of Asian-born Australian represents about 4.3 % of the total Australian population (Moss, 1994). Among the Asian migrants, Chinese migrants consist of a major proportion. The number of ethnic Chinese immigrants has increased significantly since 1973. According to the 1991 census figures, China is the ninth most common place of birth for Australians which represents 0.5% of the total population. Cantonese, a dialect spoken by many Chinese, was the third most commonly spoken community language in Australia.

The Chinese are recognized as the most diversified and the largest non-Aboriginal and non-European population in Australia in the later half of the nineteenth century.

They are diverse in their country of origin, socio-economic background and religious affiliation (Ho & Kee, 1988). Many Chinese who arrived as refugees, and others who arrived under the family reunion program, tended to have more language difficulties and experienced high rate of unemployment. In contrast, many who came as professional and business migrants, bring with them great skills and wealth ( Mak & Chan, 1995)

### **III. Chinese culture and values**

#### **Family Values and Filial Piety**

Despite the diversity of their countries of origin and socio-economic backgrounds, Chinese families shares, to varying degrees, a heritage of traditional Chinese values, handed down through the generations (Chu and Carew, 1990 in Mak and Chan, 1995). The historical Chinese culture has been greatly influenced by Confucianism. According to Wu (1992), the philosophy of Confucianism dominates people's ideas and actions in everyday life, and had acted as leading objective in achieving and maintaining an orderly society.

Under the influences of Confucianism, Chinese social orientation can be classified into four major modalities within which familism is an important and prominent one. The familistic orientation endorse the family, not the individual, as the basic and functional unit in the society (Yang, 1995). Individual matters are often treated as family matters and important life choices are made according to family's wishes. Chinese families are proud to be self-sufficient as a unit and therefore will attempt to



mobilize all their resources to cope with difficulties. So it is not uncommon that family members in need often feel obliged to rely on other family members for assistance.

The traditional Chinese value of respecting seniors and filial piety is derived from Confucian principles. Confucianism strongly advocates a society based on strict hierarchical principles, it defines authority within the family according to the seniority of the members which is determined at birth by generation, birth order and gender (Mak & Chan, 1995). Children were taught from an early age to respect their parents and members higher up in the family hierarchy. Also, male domination is a common phenomenon in Chinese family and society. It is often the male who represents the figure of authority in the family who is then accorded highly status and responsibilities. Therefore, the father is expected to be head of family and provider. The eldest son is often under great pressure to achieve academically to set good example for younger siblings.

Filial piety has long served as a guiding principle governing general Chinese pattern of socialization and intergenerational conduct. It demands an individual to provide for the material and mental well-being of the aged parents, perform ceremonial duties of ancestral worship, take care to avoid harm to his/her body, ensure the continuity of the family line, and self discipline to maintain proper conduct so as to bring honour and prosperity to the family name (Ho, 1987). The family and the practice of filial piety are of central importance in Confucius's framework. Although the Confucian code of filial behavior may not be as strictly followed nowadays as it was in the past, this cultural

value has certainly influence the Chinese in the way of parenting and the expectation of parents on their children.

According to Yang (1995), another unique characteristic of the Chinese culture is the emphasis on interpersonal relationships. Individuals are expected to make the most of his/her effort to establish and maintain harmonious relationship within a social environment. Therefore, in order to stabilize family structure and functioning, traditional Chinese families emphasis the importance of maintaining harmony within the family. This is often achieved through deliberate avoidance of conflicts and moderation. Within the family hierarchy, this often requires some family members, usually those of junior rank, to suppress their own views and submitting to the other in the family.

### **Chinese value of education**

Education is highly valued in the traditional Chinese culture. There is wide recognition that education brings increased opportunities for economic and social advancement (Sue & Okazaki, 1990). Hence, it is common that Chinese view better education as a stepping stone for their better career in terms of social status and financial gains.

According to Stevenson & Lee (1996), , there were four classes of people in traditional Chinese society which included scholars, farmers, laborers and merchants. Among the four, scholars were highly respected and valued in the traditional Chinese society. Chinese parents considered it as a pride having a scholar in the family. The old

Chinese sayings, "whatever occupation one chose to be, it would not be as honorable as being a learn person" and "all walks of life are of low quality, only the scholars are superior" clearly illustrated how the Chinese treasure education and the respect they have for the scholars.

At the time when children enter school, parents define their child's primary task as doing well in school. They are expected to study, and parents expected to assume responsibility for creating a home environment that is conducive to academic achievement. Parent will make very few demands of their children, unrelated to their schoolwork. Traditionally, schools are expected to play a central role in the education of Chinese children and youths. Schools are often portrayed by the Chinese as a big family, where teachers are like parents and students are like brothers and sisters. Therefore, school is a place not only to learn but also to develop social interactions (Stevenson & Lee, 1990).

### **Traditional ways of child-rearing**

Ways of child rearing varies greatly among different cultures and between the Chinese and Western societies. According to Ho (1991), the traditional Chinese parents are generally more concerned with impulse control and less tolerant of aggressive behaviors in their children than parents of Western culture. Great emphasis was placed on obedience, proper conduct, moral training and the acceptance of social obligation, while in contrast to the Western culture, little was placed on independence, assertiveness and creativity. Therefore, children tend to be discouraged from independence,

adventurous, or exploratory activities, especially when these entail risks of physical injury to themselves or others.

Furthermore, aggression is strongly suppressed, in particular aggression directed toward authority figure (Ho, 1991). Chinese parents also tend to be severe in controlling the child's aggression with little permissiveness. Ho & Kang (1984) studied the child rearing attitude and practices in Hong Kong and revealed that a child guilty of being aggressive will usually be severely punished by the parents. They were very concerned to let the family and others know that such behavior are not permitted in order to suppress such undesirable behavior from happening again.

It is suggested that the Chinese concern with impulse control is grounded in the Confucian ethics of filial piety. Ho & Kang (1984) support that there is a positive relationship between attitudes toward filial piety with the placing of great emphasis on strictness of discipline and proper behavior, and less emphasis on the child's expression of opinion, independence, self-mastery, creativity, and all-round personal development.

Not only the Chinese parents will prohibit the expression of aggression, especially physical aggression, but also stressed positive values of sharing and non-competitiveness in children. For instance, older children are encouraged to set a good example for their younger siblings such as good manner, unselfishness, and willingness to concede during a quarrel (Ho, 1991). As a consequence, Chinese children from an early age, are taught to

obey authority, to be physically non-aggressive, deference to brothers and sisters, respect to parents and obligation to the family.

Studies supported that Chinese way of child rearing is more authoritative, restrictive and controlling compare with that of the Western society. Studies on child rearing practice between the Chinese and Western culture have found that Chinese parents are more restrictive or authoritarian than are the parents of Western culture (Chiu, 1987; Chiu, 1989).

Ryback et al (1980) also suggest there is a dramatic difference in parental attitudes between the Chinese and American parents based on the study of University students in six different cultures. Findings suggest that American parents were generally more permissive towards, or even the expectation of aggressiveness in their children, Chinese rank relatively high on not allowing children to express aggression and on not encouraging aggressive behavior.

### **Cultural Influences on Achievement Motivation**

Chinese people generally have a strong desire for achievement, especially in economic and educational realms (Ho, 1986). This is also true for the Chinese from modern societies such as Hong Kong. Ho & Kang (1984) study the child rearing and practices in Hong Kong. The authors identify the most frequently mentioned personal characteristics expected of the child were those concerned with competence and achievement, while those concerned with moral character, sociability, and controlled

temperament were secondary. Consequently, child-rearing practices were directed towards training children to become self-reliant, competent, intellectually critical, and achievement oriented. Other study also supports that personal success is highly valued in both adults and adolescents. Apart from the great emphasis on economic success, the Hong Kong Chinese also place emphasis in education achievement particularly in children (Cheung & Tam, 1984).

In the Chinese culture, the children's' achievement is defined primarily in terms of academic achievement while achievement in other areas such as social, personal, athletic or aesthetic are considered to be subsidiary to the major goal of academic achievement (Bond 1991 in Stevenson & Lee, 1991). This might be due to the Confucian emphasis on the moral value of education

The strong motivation for academic achievement among the Chinese is determined by many factors. As discussed earlier, education is highly valued in the Chinese culture and there is general recognition that better education can bring about better opportunities for economic and social advancement. Munro (1969) further suggests another major factor behind the great emphasis on education and commitment to academic achievement among the Chinese is the assumption that education can provide an avenue for moral development, and through which one can advance as a moral person.

Stevenson & Ho (1991) content that the emphasis on moral development has a long history in Chinese thought that has no clear counterpart in the West. In

contemporary society such as Hong Kong, the Chinese still consider moral development as a major goal of education although they also regard it as a means to pursue their economic goals (Wong & Yue, 1991)

The achievement motivation of the Chinese has great influence on the way they discipline the children in order to achieve academic success. It is a general expectation of the Chinese parents on their children to do well in school and devote large amount of time to academic pursuits. Stevenson & Lee (1990) study the everyday experience of Chinese and American students indicated that the Chinese students spent more time in their studies than the American students. Meanwhile, they spent less time in socializing after school with their friends, or engaged in athletics, or worked in out-of-school jobs.

Despite the outstanding performance of Chinese children in international competitions, very few Chinese parents express high degree of satisfaction with their children's academic achievement. This low level of satisfaction of the Chinese parents is interpreted as they hold high standards for their children's academic achievement (Stevenson, Chen & Lee, 1993).

Stevenson & Lee (1996) consider that the high motivation of Chinese students to do well in school is strongly associated with the parental attitude and expectation on their success. If children believe that their parents are not satisfied with their performance, they assume they are expected to work harder. Therefore, disregard their level of achievement, Chinese students still face the constant pressure from their parents to

surpass their previous performance or , if they already are among the top students, to work hard to maintain their standard.

Stevenson & Lee (1996) suggest degree of parental satisfaction and parental expectation are the two variables which have significant effects on the psychological well being of young people in relation of academic achievement. Chinese students who perceived their parents as having low satisfaction with their performance reported high levels of maladjustment stress than did those who perceived that their parents were very satisfied. Similarly, students reporting high parental expectation tended to show greater psychological distress than did those reporting low parental expectations.

### **Collectivism and Individualism**

Markus & Kitayama (1991) assert that Asian culture tend to be more collectivist while Western culture tend to be more individualistic. Chinese people usually place more emphasis on relationship and familial commitments than those from Western culture and they value the rights and needs of the group and emphasize duty, obligation and hierarchy (Hui & Triandis, 1986). Rosenthal & Feldman (1992) revealed similar finding among Asians which in contrast with the in Western societies in which individualistic values prevail and the focus is on independence, equality, individual achievement, and personal growth.



Chinese achievement motivation is firmly rooted not only in the collectivist but also in the individualistic orientation. According to King (1990), the individual self is given a central place in Chinese culture and great importance is attached to the cultivation and development of the self. Success of the self rather than that of the group is of primary concern among the Chinese. In which cooperative efforts by members of a group toward achieving collective goals are emphasized more than individual competitiveness.

Behind the individual's striving for academic success or recognition, is the influence of large value their success would have for their family and society. Within the concept of collectivism, the consequence of failure or success, will be magnified by the individual's identification with their families and larger society. In other words, success of the individual will enhance the family's status, and in contrast, the consequence of failure will not only be a loss of status and prestige for the individual, but a far more critical shame loss of family "face" (Stevenson & Lee, 1996).

Face includes the positive image, interpretations or social attributes that one claims for oneself or perceives others to have accorded one. If one does not fulfill expectations of the self, then one loses face. When one loses face, one feels tremendous shame, which is collectively shared by the family, as well as feelings of inferiority for not reaching the goals as defined by the family (Toupin, 1980).

Similar to the concept of collectivism and individualism, Hsu(1985) considers two aspects of the self which are the greater self (do wo) and the smaller self (xiao wo). The greater self is oriented to family and society, rather than to the individual (xiao wo) and is considered as the dominant force in the motivation of Chinese student for academic success. Thus, in the Chinese culture, the self-orientation is assumed to be toward the larger group and the student's motivation to do well in school was assumed to be based on family expectation and society values, rather than simply on a desire for self-advancement. Often the smaller self is sacrificed to complete the greater self. Successful self-development is measured by the ability to maintain interdependence between the greater self and the smaller self, rather than by a gradual process of separation and individualization as conceptualized in Western psychological theories (Yeh & Huang, 1992).

In conclusion, Chinese culture places great emphasis on the importance of education and academic achievement. This has particular impact on its young people because they are under constant pressure to study hard and to succeed. The collectivistic orientation in the Chinese culture further reinforces this achievement motivation based on family expectation rather than advancement of one self. Furthermore, the Chinese child-rearing practice emphasis on obedience and proper conduct while the expression of undesirable emotions is being suppressed. These cultural values and practices are important factors that contribute to stresses among the Chinese young people.

#### **IV. Concept of Youth**

The concept of "youth" as a separate stage of life is relatively new. Historically, the distinction was between infant and adult. It was at the end of the Middle Ages when children were given more opportunities to take part in some of the adult activities, were the finer distinction of life stages made (Aries, 1962). When Western industrialized societies became more complex and organized, finer distinctions was made between stages of life based on age. Furthermore the increased differentiation of jobs, and the advent of schools to prepare the work force required for new occupation also have contributed to increasing age distinctions (NYRAS, 1994). As a consequence, childhood was distinguished from infancy and adulthood, then adolescence established as a distinguished stage from childhood. Later, long period of education, delaying entry into adult responsibility and independence, leads to the establishment of "youth" as a period of life separate from adolescence and prior to adulthood (Klein, 1990).

Youth is a socially constructed age category, which might vary from one society to the other. White (1990) asserts that the category of "youth" or "adolescence" is not universal in conception nor these labels are used in a consistent way in specific societies and culture. Although the concept of youth, to a certain extend is firmly tied to age, the upper and lower boundaries of the category of youth are not exact (NYRAS, 1994). Ambiguities of the boundaries delineating childhood from adulthood exist in which the term young people or youth is an inexact term which can embrace a range of ages.

White (1990) points out that even within the Australia context, there are considerable differences in how it is applied. If it is used in relation to legal system, it could refer to all those people below the age of majority which is 18 years of age. It could refer to broader age definition used by government department and agencies, which usually include those age between twelve to twenty-five. In Australia, the legal system recognized 18 year old as an adult who can take any decision without parental consent. The NYRAS recommended that the age range of 12-25 years be chosen as the standard for research analysis. The Australian Bureau of Statistics uses the cohort 15-24 years when collating census information while the report Australia's young people chosen age range for this was 12-25 (Zelinka, 1995). A more generous span of 12-25 years has come to represent the current literature the consensus view of "young people", which is also the age range adopted by the United Nations in its description of young people. The Youth Ministers at their 1992 council also accepted the United Nations definition of young people as those between 12 and 25 ( Australia & New Zealand Youth Minister Council, 1992).

Buchmann (1989) supports that age is not an accurate indicator of experience because life stages have become more blurred while experience is less specific or relevant to the stage of life in general. For example, extended education postpones economic independence for many young people, and the status of student is less tied to a particular age range. NARAS (1994) argues that despite there is no clear relationship between age and particular life experience, age cannot be totally disregarded since it is broadly related to biological and psychological development, and is an important

consideration in the assumption of rights and responsibilities. There appear to have some characteristics that are seen as common to all young people which constitute the core of the experienced shared by people of the same age. Frith (1984) describes youth as a stage of movement between dependence and independence, from less responsibility to full legal and social responsibility.

According to Pepua (1996), youth is a concept that is mainly dealt with in the two social science disciplines of psychology and sociology. From the psychologist's point of view, youth or adolescence is regarded as "a bridge between childhood and adulthood". During this time, the individuals continue to make significant progress in cognitive, moral and social development. Weiten (1990) supports other areas of development that are important in adolescents, there are the changes and related transitions in emotional and personality development. The concept of youth is, therefore viewed from a developmental perspective which is more focused on the individual. On the other hand, youth for the sociologists, is a concept which describe aspects of people's social position which are related to their biological age but not completely determined by it. From the sociological point of view, societies play an important role in shaping and organizing the process of growing in young people. Therefore, the concept of youth is not simply an age group, but the social organization of an age group. (Pepua, 1996)

## V. Transition from Childhood to Adulthood

Adolescence is a time of immense biological, cognitive and emotional growth and change. According to Erikson (1968), adolescence is a developmental period in which the person prepares for adulthood by establishing a coherent identity. Young people try to work out a stable concept of themselves and embrace an ideology for system of values that give them a sense of direction in life.

As mentioned earlier, ambiguities exist in defining the age category of youth or adolescence. However, it is clear that moving from childhood dependence to more independence is to some extent age-related, although the timing and sequence of transition may vary in different culture and society. The transition from childhood to adulthood is considered to be a significant developmental period as this life stage brings with it numerous biological, cognitive and social changes (Conger, 1984) It requires the adolescents to work through internal drives, both sexual and aggressive, through values and ideals in the context of the broader society, and integrate different personality areas to constitute a sense of self-identity (Hepperline, 1991).

Hepperlin (1991) emphasizes that the separation or individualization and identity formation are major psychosocial tasks of adolescents which may be influenced by the biological and psychological factors in the individual, the individual's family and the society beyond. Although there may be variations and different emphasis in different cultures, the tasks of separation and identity formation remain essential the same. Therefore, the meaning of transition from adolescence to adulthood is essentially the

same as it requires separation from previous attachment figures and formation of self-identity. However, societal and cultural differences also play an important role in affecting the timing and process of this transition.

Changes in the Australia society have effect on the transition from childhood to adulthood. According to Hepperlin (1991), over the past 15 to 20 years, increased school retention rates, poor employment opportunities, greater participation in post-secondary education and family formation factors such as the tendency to delay marriage, have all influence the ways in which young people move to adulthood. Changes in access to employment and education participation have a direct impact on other transitions, such as moving away from parents to an independence household.

The overall effect of employment and education changes has prolonged the period for which young people are financially dependent, and to delay the time when they can set up an independent household. Young people staying on at school or higher education institute increases financial dependence and the tendency to live with parents. According to the Australian Bureau Statistics (1994), students studying full-time are more likely to be living with their parents than those who are not studying. In 1991, about half of young students aged 20-24 lived with their parents compared to just over one-third of those aged 20-24 who were not students.

Furthermore, gender, cultural background and family socio-economic status significantly influence individual circumstances. In modern, industrialized society, like

Australia, to move from childhood to adulthood, the adolescents must separate from earlier attachment figure, usually parents. This involves a move from dependence to independence, from family to group or peer attachment (Hepperlin, 1991). Hence leaving home is probably the most significant step towards independence in the Western culture.

Since young people's lives and opportunities are significantly shaped and influenced by their family resources and experiences, cultural background plays a important role in determining how long young people remain living with their parents. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS 1993), young people aged 12 to 25 years from non-English-speaking background are less likely than young people in general to be living with one or both parents (16% compare with 22%). This might probably be due to the earlier marriage age in the first generation of some of these groups, and the position of some refugee young people who arrive without parents. While in general, young people from non-English-speaking background are less likely to be living with one or both parents, there are differences among some cultures that young people are more likely to be living with parents. According to BIRP (1994), couple families where the primary reference person was born in Lebanon, China and South East Asia, were more likely to have non-dependent children living at home than couple families where the reference person was born in Australia or other English-speaking countries. Chinese being a major group of immigrants coming from these countries, the young people are more likely to be living with parents.



To summarize, the concept of youth is socially constructed which means that different culture and society may have different meaning and expectation on young people. The transition from childhood to adulthood may also vary with society situation and other factors such as culture, family socio-economic status and other individual circumstances. The Chinese great emphasis on family unity and the importance of education are possible reasons which explain that more non-dependent children were more likely to be living with parents.

# Chapter Four

## I. Experience of being minority group

Chinese although constitute a significant number among the ethnic youth, still it belongs to one of the minority group. Being a minority ethnic group, Phinney et al (1990) suggest two primary issues or conflicts that need to be resolved that stem from the status as member from a minority group. The first issue is the existence of ignorance, stereotyping or prejudice towards themselves and their group. The second issue is the existence of two different sets of norms and values, those of their own culture and those of the majority, which have varying degree of impact on their lives.

Tajfel (1978) states that individual who belong to a group that is treated stereotypically by the majority group face a threat to their self-concept. Young people who are members of larger, more established ethnic groups might have a more extensive cultural and social network. However, they are likely to experience the pressure of being part of a minority group, and so experience a sense of isolation even within a large community setting (Knights, 1996).

The second issue is the existence of two different sets of values and norms with have impact on young people's lives. this can be referred as cultural conflict. According to Insights (1996), cultural conflict arises out of the inherent differences between the heritage culture of non-English-speaking youth and the dominant Anglo-Australian culture evident in the Australian society in which they live. These conflicts range from a subtle feeling of unease, to a much stronger tension. Such conflict may occur between

Anglo-culture and any number of ethnic culture, or between one ethnic culture and another.

Rotheram & Phinney, 1987) summarize the four dimensions of cultural differences, based on the writings of a number of psychologists and sociologists, have been suggested as possible sources of conflicts among different groups. They are individual against group orientation; active against passive coping style; authoritarian against egalitarian interaction style; and expressive against restrained communication.

Insights (1995) studied the social situation among the ethnic youth in Newcastle and Hunters Region. It revealed that the conflicts inherent between the ethnic culture in the home of a young people from non-English-speaking background, and the dominant Anglo-Australian culture of the wider community affects the lives of most ethnic youth in varying degree and with varying effect.

## **II. Chinese Young People in Australia**

### **a. Young People Migrants**

Migration from one country to another is a stressful experience which involves major disruption in the individual's life (Chung, 1994). Similar to the adult migrants, young people also face problems during the resettlement process in a new environment when they are exposed to a different culture and values, different way of living, different education system and perhaps, to various forms of discrimination and prejudice.

Migrant youth, similar to their parents, have to deal with problems associated with migration during the resettlement process. Some of the common stresses experienced by migrants in resettlement in the host country include reduced social support, financial difficulties, loss of status, cultural conflicts, problems with employment and education during their resettlement process in the host countries (Baker et al, 1994).

Happerlin (1991) supports that migrant adolescents, particularly those from non-English-speaking background are in a vulnerable position regarding psychological development because of the double social world in which they usually live.

#### **b. Migrant Refugee Youth**

Australia has a recognized commitment to accepting refugees and has developed a humanitarian program to accommodate the diverse range of people seeking asylums. A significant number of the refugees coming to this country are young people. The vast majority of migrants from Indochina have come to Australia under refugee or special humanitarian migration program. Among the Indo-Chinese, minority of them are ethnic Chinese. Among the Indo-Chinese young people, war and political upheaval, experiences of separation and loss, dangerous escape, torture and trauma, malnutrition, illness and protracted time in the refugee camps, are significant factors that contribute to the stress experiences of these young people. Among the young people who arrived from Indo-china, many were unaccompanied who were given no choice, but were nominated to go to foreign countries to get an education, to establish themselves in a good job, and eventually sponsor the remaining family for resettlement in the new country.

It was due to the prolonged war and political instability in Viet Nam, that the Indo-Chinese migrants often arrive experiencing long periods of physical hardship and emotional distress in their homeland. Many were subjected to the threat of war, persecution, imprisonment, discrimination, economic deprivation, violence, the loss of family and other stresses. Furthermore, the hazards of the escape, lengthy stays in refugee camps, the trauma they experienced in their forced evacuation and the uncertainty about the future during the migration make them at high risk of development psychological problems prior to their settlement in Australia.

In addition, the Indo-Chinese often arrived in Australia without money or other personal belongings. They had to establish themselves economically which was an enormously difficult task particularly in times of economic recession in Australia. Separation from family and social support networks, makes the Indo-Chinese migrants very isolated and vulnerable especially at time of stress. Difficulties they encountered during the migration and settlement process put them at risk of depression. These included social isolation due to family separation and language difficulties, bereavement of loved ones or homeland, major family disruption with little hope for reunification, role changes in a new society, poor socio-economic status, unemployment and social discrimination (Lewins & Ly, 1985).

The refugee status of immigrants from Indo-China reveals not only their forced resettlement in another country, but also the torture and trauma they experienced of war and during the escape from their home country. These experiences are thought to place

them at higher risk for stress related or psychological problems. It is estimated that the effects of torture and trauma have lead to long lasting physical and psychological damage in about 10-30% of refugees (Reid & Strong, 1987).

DuBoi et al (1994) in their study investigating the effects of socio-environmental conditions on adjustment during early adolescence, found that both stressful events and social support made significant contribution to the prediction of psychological distress and conduct problems in young adolescents. Young people who experience multiple conditions of socio-environmental disadvantage were found to demonstrate heightened vulnerability to stressful events as well as greater potential to benefit from social support received from adults in the school setting.

### **c. Second Generation Chinese**

According to Vasta (1995), there are two broad definition of second generation. The first is a statistical definition, which refers to the Australian-born children of overseas-born parents. This definition is useful as it provides clear-cut data about the birthplace of population. The second is the sociopolitical definition which not only include those people born in Australia whose parents were born overseas, it also include those who arrived in Australia during the early years of life.

### **III. Identity development and ethnicity**

#### **a. Identity Development**

Central to adolescent development is the task of achieving an identity which is a subjective sense of sameness and continuity that serves as a guide for one's life; failure to achieve an identity can lead to confusion and despair. Erikson (1968) also considers an achieved identity as desirable for healthy development. Failure to achieve a satisfying identity can have negative psychological implications for all adolescents. However, the empirical work based on Erikson's theory has not directly examined culture or ethnicity as important component of self-identity.

According to Erikson (1968), identity is achieved during adolescence through a process of exploration of identity followed by a commitment that results in a confident sense of self-identity. Marica (1980) identify four identity statuses, based on the presence or absence of identity search and commitment. These four statuses are diffusion, which is evidenced by the absence of both search and commitment; foreclosure is characterized by a commitment without search; memoratorium is characterized by current involvement in identity search; and achievement is indicated by a clear commitment that follows search.

Waterman (1982) develops a model of ego identity development which proposes that adolescence move from diffusion to identity achievement over time. Research on ego identity using the identity status paradigm has shown a strong relationship between higher stages ego identity and positive psychological adjustment (Waterman, 1982).

However, the earlier work has focused on the development of ego identity and ethnic identity has not been an important topic of study among adolescence researchers. It was until recent decade when a number of studies have drawn attention to the domain of racial or ethnic identity development, and have demonstrated its importance to minority group members.

#### **b. Ethnic Identity**

LaFramboise, Coleman & Gerton (1993) state that identity comprises an individual's sense of self-sufficiency and ego strength which is independent of the environment, and an individual's sense of self in relation to his or her culture of origin. Therefore, ethnic identity is a significant component of identity, since the resolution of issues related to ethnicity attains particular importance during adolescence (Phinney & Rosenthal, 1992). Therefore, it is appropriate to study ethnic identity in a developmental framework, comparable to the study of ego identity.

Phinney & Alipuria (1987) define ethnic identity as "an individual's sense of self as a member of an ethnic group and the attitudes and behaviors associated with that sense." (p36) Ethnic identity involves past cultural traditions, present sociological factors and a psychological dimension arising out of early socialization. Thus ethnic identity is a product not only of the individual and his/her relation to the ethnic group but also of the relation between that group and the wider social setting (Roseenthal & Feldman, 1992)



Erikson (1968) sees that an achieved identity is desirable for healthy development in which an achieved identity is associated with measures of high self-esteem and self-acceptance. This view is supported to be applicable in the achievement of ethnic identity. In a study with tenth graders from Asian and Black and Hispanic background, it was found that self-esteem differed significantly by stage of ethnic identity development; subjects who had not engaged in ethnic identity search scored the lowest while those with an achieved ethnic identity scored the highest (Phinney, 1989).

Ethnic identity is considered important because of its relationship to the psychological well being of ethnic minority group members. Study found that low level of ethnic identity is associated with low self-esteem, and ethnic identity development among minority adolescents from various backgrounds is positively associated with self-esteem. Minority youth are faced with the necessity of choosing between their own cultural attitudes and behavior and those of the dominant group or of attempting to combine them in some way.

In a study of college students from four ethnic groups, Phinney & Alipuria (1990) found that ethnic minority students rated ethnicity as a central identity concern, equal to religion and above politics. Likewise, Helms (1990) also demonstrated that ethnic identity being a central concern for Black Americans. Ethnicity was considered to be an important area of identity and was related a significantly more important by minorities than by while.

Phinney & Chavira (1992) also revealed results that are consistent with previous research emphasizing the importance of ethnic identity in the development of minority youth. This study suggested that personal self-concept also plays a fundamental role in the development of minority youth. Therefore, efforts to promote healthy psychological development among young ethnic group members should focus not only on promoting ethnic awareness and identity development, but also on enhancing self-esteem. High personal self-esteem may then provide the basis for individuals to explore their own cultural background and to develop a secure, positive view of themselves as minority group members.

Youth from minority ethnic groups, especially those from non-White groups, face stresses associated with their membership in the minority group. Membership of an ethnic group may not necessarily have positive feeling about their group membership. Indeed, the presence of negative attitudes can be interpreted as problematic in terms of social identity theory that asserts that individuals attempt to maintain a positive self-image. Therefore, if membership of a social group is unsatisfactory, attempt may be made to dissociate from that group ((Rosenthal & Feldman, 1992)

### **c. Ethnic Identity Development**

Phinney & Alipuria (1987) define ethnic identity formation as "the process of development from an unexamined ethnic identity through a period of exploration, to arrive at an achieved ethnic identity." (p38) For minority youth, ethnicity is an essential component of the identity process, and the development of an ethnic identity is essential

to a health personality (Arce, 1981). Studies have found that adolescents with an achieved ethnic identity show better psychological adjustment and higher self-esteem (Phinney, 1989; Phinney & Alipuria, 1990; Phinney, 1990).

Atkinson et al (1983) propose that minority identity development follows five distinct stages. They are conformity in which individuals prefer values of the dominant culture instead of one's own cultural group; dissonance which is confusion about the dominant culture and one's own cultural traditions and customs; resistance and immersion in which individual actively reject dominant cultural system and accept one's own cultural group; introspection in which individual questions the values of both the dominant and minority culture; and synergistic articulation and awareness is the final stage in which individual resolves conflicts in previous stages and develops a cultural identity that selects elements from both the dominant culture and minority culture.

Similarly, Phinney (1990) identifies the process of ethnic identity development into four separate stages. First is the stage of diffusion in which the ethnic identity is not yet explored. Second is the stage of foreclosure in which commitment is based on parental values and not made independently. Third is the stage of moratorium in which individual is exploring his or her ethnic identity but is not yet committed to one; and lastly is the stage of achieved identity in which the individual has explored his or her ethnic identity and is firmly committed in it.

Cahill & Ewen (1992) identify three different ways the ethnic youth deal with their ethnic identity. First is the young people emerge themselves in the culture of their parents rejected the culture of the dominant society. Second is the young people absorb themselves completely into the dominant culture and reject their own culture background and heritage. Third is that young people reconcile their identity by selecting and adapting aspects of two cultures and development a bicultural identity they feel comfortable with.

Tajfel (1978) identify a number of possible responses that the young people employ to deal with ethnic identity conflicts which can be summarized as followed:

- a. Alienation or marginalization: individual accept the negative self-image imposed on them by the society, become alienated from their own culture and do not adapt to the dominant culture.
- b. Assimilation: individual strive to become part of the dominant culture by taking by values and attitudes of the majority, and rejecting their own culture.
- c. Withdrawal or separation: individuals emphasis their own ethnic identity and withdrawn from he dominant culture.
- d. Integration or biculturalism: individuals retain their own ethnic culture and adapt to the dominant culture. It requires individuals to be able to assert their own ethnic values and traditions without those of the dominant culture.

Tajfel (1978) emphasizes that acceptance of the major view of their cultural group being inferior may lead to the sense of inferiority and often self-hatred among the ethnic groups. Berry & Kim (1988) also support that those who do not value their own culture

and cannot adapt to the dominant culture will lead to feeling of alienation or marginalization, and loss of identity. As a consequence, such marginalization is associated with high level of stresses that is predictive of poor mental health.

Assimilation, although appears to be a simple approach in dealing with ethnic identity conflicts, it is an uneasy compromise as it involves the individuals to reject aspects of their own culture and distancing themselves from other members of their own cultural group. Phinney (1997) adds that assimilation is more difficult in some cultural groups than the others. For example, for white immigrants from European countries, assimilation may result in one or two generations if individuals choose not to maintain their ethnic identity. However, complete assimilation is more difficult or impossible for those who are immediately identifiable as member of a group.

In order to maintain a positive self-concept when facing negative evaluation by the major group is to withdraw from the dominant culture and embed in one's own ethnic culture. According to Tafel (1978), this can minimize the loss of self-esteem that results from comparisons with the majority group. And through cultural and psychological isolation, minority groups can avoid dealing with negative stereotypes. Tajfel (1978) sees integration or biculturalism as the most favorable solution in dealing with ethnic identity conflicts for minorities. There is some empirical evidence that maintaining both one's ethnic culture and contacts with the dominant culture affords the best psychological outcomes. The development of a bicultural identity is ideal both for children of immigrants and also for those who have come here during teenage years (Guerra &

White, 1995). Berry, Kim, Mindy & Mok (1987) study the response in dealing with ethnic identity conflicts with a variety of Canadian ethnic groups found that individuals favoring integration experienced least stress, and those preferring separation or withdrawal experience the most.

Yeh & Huang (1992) argue that the current theories of identity formation do not recognized the role of external forces, relationship and social context in shaping identity as this conceptualization is especially important for members who come from a culture that emphasis interdependence. It is suggested that ethnic identity is strongly influenced by the social context which contradicts previous stages theories describing identity in static and deterministic terms. Furthermore, Asians including the Chinese are strongly influenced by external factors than internal forces in developing their ethnic identity. Also, the avoidance of shame was found to be a strong motivating factor in shaping ethnic identity.

Rosenthal & Feldman (1992) explored the ethnic identity of first and second generation Chinese in Australia and American revealed that responses of Australian Chinese and American Chinese were remarkably similar. There was erosion over time of ethnic identification and behavior but not of the importance and evaluative components of ethnic identity. Among the Australian Chinese adolescents, there was some erosion of ethnic identity in term of behavior and knowledge. However, in spite of their apparent shift away from Chinese culture norms in the behavior or knowledge domain, second

generation Chinese adolescents considered it to be as important as did their more recently arrived peer to maintain the Chinese culture and practices.

Another interesting finding from the study was that the Chinese who were born in Australia considered themselves to be less Chinese than did the recently arrived adolescents which suggested that many members of the Australian-born group perceived themselves to be more assimilated to the majority culture. The responses of the American Chinese were remarkably similar with the exception that friendship networks were more likely than the Australian sample to be primarily Chinese and were the same across generation. This could be due to the different distributions of Chinese in the respective school system and neighborhoods that Chinese were more concentrated, whereas in Australia, the Chinese adolescents form a small minority group compare with that in America.

#### **IV. Conflicts with Family**

Adolescence is often a stage when many young people come into conflict with their parents. This is common in different cultures. However, the challenge of raising children in a culture with traditions and expectations that are different from one's own culture often places more stress on the family. According to Choi (1975), many Chinese migrant parents are caught between the strict and authoritarian discipline of their native culture and the more democratic and consultative approach to child rearing found in Australia.

Many young people feel that their parents were adhering to culture norms that were inappropriate for modern Australia and that are no longer practiced in the home country. With the Chinese culture in particular, there is an inherent tension between the various values, beliefs and customs that are vastly different from those in Australia. It is common that young people feel they were torn between two different cultures. At home, the culture is dominated by their background culture where their parents try to adhere to, while outside their home, they experience a culture with very different values, expectations and traditions.

While most parents of the ethnic minority youth who arrived in Australia as first generation migrants would enforce the retention of their cultural heritage, some would encourage their children to assimilate into the Anglo-Australian culture. According to Insights (1996), many parents feel that their children readily forget their cultural heritage when they are in Australia. They recognized that although young people may come back to an interest in the culture, it is difficult to keep cultural heritage as an important part of their lives. Some parents fear their child's assimilation into the dominant culture, while other parents will encourage it. It is suggested that the action of many parents reflect their own experience of racism and problems when they first arrived in Australia. They aim to protect their children from the same experience of racism and isolation by either enforcing the retention of their cultural heritage, or encouraging their assimilation into the dominant culture.



When migrant children enter Australian schools, the ethnic language may begin to recede in importance to them. At the same time, adults at home may fail to learn English. Therefore, effective communication between family members can become increasingly difficult. The difficulty in communication might exacerbate conflicts between the children and their family members. For instance, the parents often do not speak English well, while adolescents may not speak the language of their country of origin. Hepperlin (1991) adds that for the refugee adolescents who experienced interrupted schooling may have difficulty in writing to family still in homeland. This can be frustrating and becomes a source of further stress.

The conflicts between parents and children is not just made worse by different level of language acquisition, but also the level of adaptation to the new country. When migrant children entered school, they learn the new language quickly, made friends rather easily and in general adapt to the Australian way of life more successfully than their parents. They readily accept new values and behavior patterns and gradually rebel against the values and culture of their parents. As a consequence, these conflicts of different values and behavior might cause families concern and tend to disrupt the family and generate conflicts.

## **V. Unemployment**

High ethnic youth unemployment has always been a major issue that affect this group of people in the society (Cahill & Ewen, 1992; Cahill, 1993). Unemployment is not evenly spread across the population of the youth. Young people of disadvantaged socio-

economic background and young people from non-English-speaking background are those more likely to be affected by unemployment. The situation was worse with immigrant youth. Holton (1990) studies the experience of immigrant and second generation ethnic young people revealed that second generation ethnic young people are not as disadvantaged in employment as first-generation young people, and that immigrants young people are more at risk.

The State of the Nation report of Australia found that oversea-born young people have higher unemployment rates than both the second and third generation peers. The combination of a recessive economy and the recent arrival of younger groups from non-English-speaking countries has had the effect of diminishing the opportunity for the youngsters of non-English-speaking background to secure a place in the labor market (Moss, 1993). The group which is most disadvantaged in the job market is those young people who arrived as refugees from non-English-speaking countries to Australian more recently (HREOC 1993)

Occupational choices of unemployed Indo-Chinese young people are concentrated in unskilled or lowly skilled areas. They are seeking employment in a narrow band of occupation in which employment demand and opportunities are declining. These occupational choices may be influenced by things such as poor education, English language difficulty and lack of skills (Hastleton & Rawsthorne, 1995).

## VI. Discrimination and Racism

Most migrant group, particularly those who are minorities or less in number out of the total population are often target of discrimination, misunderstanding and intolerance (Lin, 1982). While all migrants can experience racism, it is a dominating and common issue for ethnic youth. It is experienced in action and word, both directly and indirectly. Racism is identified by the ethnic young people as a key issue in their lives. For some ethnic youth, assumptions based on their appearance will make their acceptance into the wider community more difficult.

Young people are more likely to be influenced by racism. As discussed earlier, adolescence is stage of identity formation. In order to experiment with and formulate a sense of identity, young people require constant feedback from others. For the ethnic minority youth, this is complicated by the reaction of the society in which racist attitude and the devaluation of minority groups exist. Hence, some young people might react to these negative attitudes in extreme either by shunning mainstream culture or over-identify with the host culture rejection their own heritage completely.

Hepperlin (1991) supplements when young people are feeling rejected by the host culture, sometimes they are drawn into a marginal sub-culture which appears to be neither Australian nor that of their culture of origin, but something in between. These subgroups can sometimes be quite supportive and benign, but equally, they can be more prone to be engaging in anti-social or self-destructive behaviors and can become the targets for criminal elements from within and beyond the minority group.

Zelinka (1995) emphasizes visible difference is a key factor in membership of an ethnic minority group. Membership of an ethnic minority is a status conferred not only by self-identification but also by the dominant culture. For example, the later generations of Chinese descendents may simply refer to themselves as Australian, their language is English, and their home life may be typically Australian. However, they may still be confronted with questions assuming that they are familiar with the Chinese culture but not the Australian culture. Therefore, non-acceptance of these Chinese young people as Australian is obvious. Unlike the later generations of European descendents, Chinese young people face additional problems of being accepted into the dominant culture, which is associated with their visible difference of their physical appearance. Therefore, third or fourth generation descendents of Chinese settlers can still encounter prejudice and discrimination with the Anglo-Australian context.

Racial discrimination happens not just between the dominant and minority ethnic groups, but also within ethnic communities. Some ethnic communities will discriminate against people who are nominally in the same ethnic group. Insights (1995) asserts that cultural hierarchy exist among ethnic communities which is imposed by the dominant Anglo-Australian culture and also the ethnic communities. This hierarchy is affected by both the recency that the particular ethnic group has begun to emigrate to Australia, and the general reception they receive in the media. Asian immigrants are at the bottom of the hierarchy and suffer racist comments and actions from other ethnic youth more established in their place. The State of the Nation Report also supports that there was

evidence of racism directed towards people who were visibly different, and nominated Asia-Australians and Arabic or Muslim Australians as such target groups (Moss, 1993).

# Chapter Five

## DISCUSSION

People from different countries will have different culture which affect their interaction with the social environment, their coping mechanism with psychological stresses that in turn will influence their experience of stress. The aim of this study is to explore some of the factors that might have impact on the stress experience of Chinese youth as a group. Clearly, not all the factors discussed can be applied equally to all Chinese young people because each person is a unique individual whose life experience and response to stresses may vary. However, in order to understand the life situation and stresses experienced by these Chinese youth as a group, it is appropriate to explore generally on their collective experience.

In this study, Chinese youth is considered of comprising of three distinctive groups. They are those who recently arrived in Australia as migrants and who share many of the difficulties of resettlement faced by their parents. Others are the Australian-born who have adopted some of the values and attitudes of the Western society; and those who arrived as refugees who might have experienced torture and trauma. Some of the stress experiences of these young people are common as they all share a similar cultural heritage although their country of migration varies, while some may be unique and related to their migration experiences.

### **a. Transition from childhood to adulthood**

Being 12 to 25 years of age, the young people are undergoing a transition from childhood to adulthood which is a stage in life often referred to as a stage of turmoil because of the erratic physical changes and confusion about self-identity. Young people are often confronted with challenges that they have to make adaptation to cope with all those changes, as well as to struggle to achieve a sound sense of self-identity and future direction of life. Their success in managing these challenges depends on both individual and social factors.

Chinese youth, being one of the ethnic youth groups, like other young people in general are confronted with similar challenges when undergoing this transition of life. Research evidence suggests that the major concerns of ethnic young people do not appear to be different substantially from those of their Anglo-Australian counterparts except for the greater emphasis they place on family matters, work and career considerations. As well as the greater concern that the more recently arrived immigrant groups have about occupational and educational opportunities (Cahill & Ewen, 1993). Studies identify issues particularly affecting ethnic young people to a greater extent than non-ethnic young people are self-identity, family conflicts arising from cultural differences, peer pressure, violence and racial discrimination (Pepua 1993; Moss, 1993).

For the Chinese youth, these issues will be more of a concern and contribute significantly to their stress experiences. Since Chinese culture different significantly from that of the Western societies, it is more likely that this will generate family and

inter-generation conflicts between the youngsters and the parents. Furthermore, the physical differences of the Chinese youth also make them easily identifiable as belonging to their ethnic group, therefore they are more subjected to prejudice and racial discrimination which will influence their sense of self-identity. Other factors associated with the migration experiences further exacerbated the stress experienced by this group of minority young people in Australia.

**b. Migration as a stress factor**

Reason for migration is an important factor that determines the coping ability and stress perceived by migrants. For some, the decision to migrate was made voluntarily of their free will. For others, they may be forced to leave their home country because of war, political upheaval or violation of human rights. The different motivations for migration may lead to what was described as either the settler or exile mentality (Hepperlin, 1991). This mentality is important as it influences the ability of the migrant to resettle in the new country and their perception and response of stresses experienced during the process.

However, when considering the young people, the reason for migration may well be beyond the control of them. Parents wishing to enjoy a better standard of living might have made the decision. Even for those migrant families who arrived the country motivated by the settler mentality, often the decision to migrate were made by adults while young people, particularly children and adolescents were not actively involved in the decision making process. The decision by parents to migrate may precipitate a



process of grief and longing for the old country in young people, which have significant impact on their emotional and psychological well being.

For those Indo-Chinese who come to Australia, apart from having to learn a new language, they have to adjust to the different value, culture and system of the society which is often very difficult. Since they come from a society, which is less complex, less industrialized and structured differently from Australia, they often lack of knowledge and experience in dealing with the new system. Unlike those who arrived from the more industrialized and westernized countries such as Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore, where young people had already gained some English language proficiency, adaptation in the new society and language acquisition are not as difficult compare with those who arrived from Indo-China.

For those young people who arrived with little language skills, communication is a major obstacle for them. Inability to speak English causes a lot of settlement and schooling problems such as looking for work, resuming education and returning to former professions. On the more day-to-day level, the lack of fluency in English deprives them from communicating with other people, understanding the environment and using government and community services which further intensifies the experience of isolation. When a person does not have much language skill, membership of an ethnic minority is unequivocal. The choice of friends, acquaintances, and helpers is dictated to those with whom the person can communicate. Therefore the smaller the language group, the smaller the circle of contact will be.

Competence in English is not only important in interacting with the social environment, it is an important factor which influence school experience and learning outcomes of students from non-English -speaking background. Competence in English is dependent on the availability of an English language environment, which young people have access to outside of the school and the level of support for English language development which parents or other family members are able to provide. However, the Chinese migrants are less likely being able to provide this environment for their youngsters either because of their strong desire of retaining their native language as cultural heritage, or their inability to provide such environment due to poor English skills of their own. Therefore, the Chinese youngsters are in a disadvantage position in acquiring competence in English, which will in turn affect their learning at school.

### **c. Stress and family pressure**

Chinese youth experience enormous pressure from family to succeed. Most Chinese migrants often pressure their children to study hard and perform well at school. This reflects the traditional Chinese emphasis on education as the most effective avenue to social and economic advancement and for the improvement of the person morally. The motivation of the Chinese students is also derived from this cultural emphasis which in turn lead to the willingness of these young people to devote large amount of time to academic pursuits and high motivation they have to do well in school academically. However, this is not without problem as it is due to their dedication to schoolwork at the expense of peer activities, they may become ostracized by peers and leads to problems with interpersonal relationships.

The high expectation on children to success is not necessarily solely influenced by the Chinese culture. When deciding to come to Australia, migrant parents often hope for a better life, including better education and career opportunity, for their children and for the family. In many cases, the opportunity for children to have a better education was a reason for the family's migration and this can be one of the reason that lead to the immense pressures upon Chinese migrant children to person well in school. Furthermore, status dislocation for parents may also pose problems for young people. When adults are unable to find consistent with the their level of education and skills may become frustrated and angry. Therefore, they may place inordinate demands on their children to make up for parental loss of status, and hence young people are under pressure to achieve.

However, we need to bear in mind that while some young people might succeed in the education system due to their personal potential and dedication. Not all the Chinese youth are intelligent, highly motivated and perform well in school. Some may be burdened by the need to achieve because of family expectation. Some may perform poorly in the Australian educational system despite considerable parental pressure to do well in school. According to Vietnamese Australian Welfare Association (1991), the situation is worst among those young people born in Indo-China who are most likely to have arrived in Australia speaking little or no English. In addition, many would have experienced little or disrupted formal education due to their disrupted educational background and life experiences. They are often the group of students who experience great difficulties in succeeding at school. Study of the Laotian youth experience revealed

that a combination of the high expectations place on Laotian youth by parents and the difficulties they were experiencing at school had lead to the increasing incidence of school absenteeism and in some cases dropped out of school early (Yamine & Associates in Hasleton & Rawsthorne, 1995).

#### **d. Stress related to different education system**

The experiences of Chinese migrant youth in Australian can become more stressful because adaptation to an educational system by these Chinese migrants children often bring on conflicts in the home between the youngster and older generation. The educational system in Australia places expectation upon parents to be involved in their children's education and in the affairs of their children's school. This is in contrast to the role of parents in the education their children in the Chinese culture in which home and school domains are separate and teacher take on parental role as well as educational responsibilities for young people while they are at school. For instance, in Hong Kong the involvement of parents in discussions with teachers at school is often perceived by parents and students as academic problems or misbehavior on the students' part.

The low participation of parents in school activities is not only due to the different cultural beliefs and expectation of the role of teachers and schools. The language problem experienced by he parents may also contribute to their low participation in school activities of their children. The ways in which the school responds to the cultural distance which may exist between itself and students of ethnic background and their

parents will in turn affect the ability of these students to feel comfortable and confident in school context, actively participate in the curriculum.

Most Chinese migrants often pressure their children to study hard and perform well at school without realizing that their child may be facing adaptation problems and difficulties at school who require support and assistance. For some families, the parents will try hard to establish themselves in the new country. They will work long hours to support themselves and their children, therefore, leaving little time for family leisure and recreation. For others, young people are expected to take on the role of caring for their younger siblings, or helping their parents by working or taking on extra household responsibilities or assuming primary responsibilities for younger siblings when parents are devoting their effort in establishing the family.

Young people who have moved away from things that they are familiar with such as their homeland, their friends and family, disregarding their country of origin will face certain level of grief and a period of adjustment to the new social environment and culture. For those who had experienced war, torture and trauma will bring with them memories that further compound the settlement process in Australia. The situation is worse for those who try to settle in the country without the support of their parents. For instance, those young people who were sent to the country from Indo-China and those "parachute children" of the astronaut families from Hong Kong. Having to deal with all that is involved in adjusting to a new life in a new country will obviously be an extremely difficult task for these young people.

#### **e. Culture and inter-generation conflicts**

Ethnic communities are suffering the combined effects of cultural conflicts and inter-generation conflicts, whilst trying to retain the involvement of young people in their community activities. Some ethnic communities fear that they are losing their young people and are experiencing a sense of grief about their inability to hand on their culture to the next generation. While some families are internalized in dealing with such emotion, some are more explicit and will create a lot of pressure and anxiety on the young people.

Young people generally learn a new language quicker and adopt to new culture more successfully than their parents. Parents may interpret English acquisition as an abandonment of traditional culture and values. While young people adopt to new culture more successfully, many parents do not feel entirely at ease. Therefore, young people may find themselves torn between loyalty to family and a desire to fit in with the peer group of the host culture of which parents disapprove. In the Chinese culture, filial and family loyalty is a highly valued tradition, behavior interpreted as a loosening of these loyalty can cause interfamilial and inter-generation stress and conflicts.

While for some migrant families, parents may interpret language acquisition as an abandonment of traditional culture and values, it can lead to parent's heavy reliance on the young people as interpreters or to take on those household responsibilities which require English language skills. This reliance is not without problems as it can lead to role change within the family that not all parents feel entirely comfortable with. While

some parents or adults of the family might feel at ease of this role change, some might find this experience frustrating and humiliating which further increase the tension between the two generations and therefore more likely to generate conflicts and stresses.

As discussed earlier, education for children ranks very high among the Chinese migrants. However, due to language problems and cultural differences, children of some migrant families find it extremely difficult to take advantage of educational opportunities in Australia. Many Indo-Chinese young people experience difficulties in the education system as a result of poor English language skills. Although these Indo-Chinese youth who had arrived in the country over recent decade had been place in intensive English centers which provided specialized assistance, it is inadequate to prepare them for entry into mainstream classes which demands higher level of English proficiency.

Many of the Indo-Chinese young people who arrived the country in isolation without the support of the parents. They are expected to establish themselves financially and academically, as well as to sponsor the remaining family for settlement in the new country. This causes enormous pressure on the youngsters at the stage of life when family support is crucial for the development of their self-identity. Reunion of the family after a lengthy period of separation can also be problematic. The arrival of parent years after the child's arrival, may lead to role changes and power conflicts between the newly arrived parents and the more established youngsters. Particularly in the Chinese culture in which the family system is hierarchical, any challenges of the parental authority are likely to cause family disharmony and inter-generation conflicts.

#### **f. Stress and age of arrival**

Age of arrival to Australia is an important factor in determining the stress experienced by the Chinese young people. Young people who arrived in an early age of life is in a more advantageous position compare with those who arrived in adolescence. Young migrants who arrived in Australia in early childhood have the advantage of language acquisition by adolescence and longer period in the education system which enable them to adjust better to school life. The situation for the older children who arrived at adolescence can be different because the main problem they face is a language problem that leads to difficulty in adapting to the new education system. These Chinese youth who arrived as migrants or refugees during adolescence are often confronted language difficulties and problems of education achievement at a very demanding life stage. Attempts to meet family or personal expectation of high educational achievement may be a cause of frustration and stress. Hepperlin (1991) adds that it could also be due to the reason that older students experience difficulties coping with the changes accompanying adolescence compounded by migration which make it very difficult for them to success in the education system.

The situation is often worse for those young people who arrived in Australia as refugees because they might had years in refugee camps without access to education or had little access to schooling during the war. For those young people who arrived from more affluent countries where they already learn English, such as Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan, they are in a more advantageous position compare with those who arrived form Indo-China as refugees. However, these young people might still experience



problem when they enter the education system in Australia. Due to different method of teaching, some Chinese migrant students may find it difficult to adapt to the new education system and teaching style. For instance, students from Hong Kong who get used to the method of teaching which has been described as "duck feeding" might find it hard to adapt to that in Australia which encourages participate learning and creativity.

Language acquisition can be an issue for the Australian-born Chinese youth. For some young people, retaining their cultural language is of great importance to them and to their families. However, the struggle between being competent in the English language and retaining their native language can be a difficult task particularly when there is high expectation from the family for the children to do well academically at school.

Many factors such as intellectual ability, language acquisition, home environment, previous education experiences and other psychological factors determine being able to succeed in the educational system. Migrant youngsters, particularly those arrived as refugees are vulnerable in some or all these areas which make their coping at school extremely difficult. The high expectation and strong emphasis on the value of education in Chinese cultural add further pressure on the youngster to perform well at school. Furthermore, the collectivistic characteristic of the Chinese culture also reinforces the idea of failure at school may intensify the sense of failing the family.

#### **g. Culture conflicts and stress**

It is common that many young people from migrant families, including the Chinese feel trapped between two cultures and confused about which value to accept or reject. Many of the Chinese youth live in two sets of cultures and values. This will apply not only on those Chinese youth who arrived in Australia either as migrants or refugees, but also those who were born in the country. They live in two cultures, one at home and one in the wider community and they have to cope with different roles and face numerous demands within each of the roles they play.

Culture plays an important role in shaping one's attitudes, values and beliefs that in turn will affect their interaction within the social environment and their coping mechanism with psychological stresses. Hence, the experience of stress is strongly determined by culture. Kleinman (1982) states that while culture can protect against stress, it can also make it more likely to occur. In other words, certain cultural beliefs and practices are likely to cause stresses for an individual while others may reduce them. For instance, the emphasis of family cohesion and unity in the Chinese culture can be a protective factor against stresses. However, some aspects of the Chinese culture can contribute to more stresses or even being perceived as a burden for an individual.

Focusing on the Chinese young people as a group, the strong community tie and family support of the Chinese may have both positive and negative outcomes for young people. Some young people may find this environment very protective and supportive, while others may find it inflexible and a hindrance to their emerging independence.

Since Chinese culture is considered to be of collectivistic rather than individualistic, therefore, relationship and interdependence are crucial to the very existence of the self and the withdrawal of support by the greater self or the social group, may threaten the individual identity.

For individuals whose sense of self rest on interdependence and group membership, the withdrawal of support will be an extremely painful experience. Furthermore, Chinese have long emphasis the notion of face and this fear of shame or loss of face act as a powerful motivating force for conforming to interpersonal expectation. As a result many concepts of the self and social identity of the Chinese are determined by the social outside, rather than the psychological inside. Chinese are generally influenced more by external rather than internal forces and they stress attending to others and fitting in which contrast with the Western culture in which the emphasis is on separating and individuating the self. This can contributes to enormous pressure on the young people as they try hard to conform to the expectation of their social group.

The confusion about one's ethnic identity is not so much a problem with young children. At this stage of life, the home environment has a great influence on the child's ethnic identity as children are totally immersed in the dominant culture of the family. Parents are often instrumental in promoting an interest in their child's cultural background, such as by focusing on their ethnic community and traditions, or sending the children to ethnic school to learn their native language. However, when the children enter school and began to interact with the broader community, they encounter the

dominant culture as their everyday experience. They become curious about their cultural heritage and even challenge the parent's cultural values and beliefs. This is often the time when the parents worry that their children will forget their heritage and be consumed into the Anglo-Australian culture. This will then generate conflicts between the youngsters and their parents

#### **h. Racial discrimination**

Racism is a dominant and common issue affect ethnic young people. Individual's sense of self in relation to his or her culture of origin contributes to positive self-concept and better self-esteem. Since ethnicity influence cultural identity, racial discrimination may lead to confusion regarding cultural group membership. An individual may desire dominant group membership after an experience with racism. However these changes in ethnic identity may negatively affect one's self-concept and psychological function while the individual try to compensate by over emerging into the dominant culture.

Moreover, cultural identity, while for some minority youth, it can be a choice. for the others it is imposed by others because of the physical traits that make them identifiable as from a minority group. Seemingly, the Chinese youth, cultural identity is imposed on them because of their physical appearance. Chinese young people often identify themselves as different, and they react to this situation in varying degree from immersing themselves in their cultural background, to assimilating into the Anglo-Australian culture. For the Chinese young people, it is more difficult for them to accept their ethnic identity when their physical identity, is distinctly different to the majority

group. And therefore, they are more susceptible to racial discrimination and complete assimilation into the Anglo-Australian culture for them is a difficult or impossible task. This can easily leads to feeling of inadequacy in not fitting in to the standard childhood mould.

#### **i. Parental support and family conflicts**

Adolescence is a stage of life when young people still require support, care and protection from the parents. Hence, encouragement and support from parents are crucial to help the gradual process of transition from dependent to more independent life of the youth. The quality of the family relationship is of great importance and has an important bearing on the Chinese youth's school performance, their emotional well being and their indulgence in problem behavior. Notter & Patton (1990) identify the ideal family environment for adolescents as one where communication is positive and effective, where adolescents receive support form parents, they feel free to discuss their feeling and opinions, as well there are rooms for negotiation and adolescents can make decision with a growing sense of their own competence.

Within the Chinese family environment, a change of power relationship between parents and children is necessary to transform it into the so call ideal family environment as mentioned. However, this change in power relationship is not always achieved easily or without conflicts. Education for parenting in a cross-cultural setting is necessary in exploring the experience of ethnic youth, the roles and expectations of parenting in Australia.

In Australia, parents and adolescents may have different views about issues relating to the transition from dependent childhood to more independent adulthood stages of life. Such issues include dating, sexual freedom, leaving home, and educational and career choices. These differences may be exacerbated in migrant families especially in those who come from a markedly different culture from that of a Western and urbanized society like Australia. The timing and sequence of the transition from childhood to adulthood has also varied over time and differed according to gender, social class and culture. Since the Chinese culture differed markedly from that of the Anglo-Australian culture, there is considerably diversity of patterns, timing and sequence in relation to the transition from childhood to adulthood.

Since racism is a dominant and common issue concerning ethnic young people which is associated with cultural conflicts which arises from the interface of two or more different culture. Much of the conflicts arise form a lack of understanding of different cultures and an inability to cope effectively with diversity. the more cultural understanding that is engendered in society between cultures, the ore likely it will be that cultural conflicts is dealt with positively. Furthermore, since most mainstream youth workers have not received training in cross-cultural issues, and so they are often unaware of potential or existing issues of cultural conflicts. Therefore, cross-cultural awareness training is necessary to educate people who are involve with ethnic youth in a variety of context in order to promote their understanding about issues pertaining ethnic young people.

Since cultural awareness is an integral component of anti-racism programs. It is important to ensure that the Australian social institutions to create a positive environment for young people to develop a sense that they are part of the society, to have an identity that is valued and respected. While a large proportion of the young people are students, schools are therefore the key institutions which should have a responsibility to ensure young people of ethnic minority background are accorded equal opportunities and rights.

Studies have found that adolescents with an achieved ethnic identity show better psychological adjustment (Phinney, 1989) and higher self-esteem (Phinney & Alipuria, 1990). The implication for those who provide counseling or therapy to minority youth is that they should be encouraged to explore their feeling and attitude regarding their ethnicity. Hence, it is important that the helping professionals should have knowledge about the significance of ethnicity and social identity in the development of young people. They should learn about the history of their group within the multicultural society and discuss ways of dealing with two cultures with the ultimate goal in achieving a more secure sense of self and healthier adjustment.

To retain one's cultural identity, it is crucial to maintain contact and support of a larger cultural community. For some minority young people, particularly those who arrived as migrants or refugees, socializing with friends of the same cultural heritage is essential for their self-identity. The young people's relationship to their ethnic community also determines their actions in accessing help. Therefore, availability of ethnic community networks is important in promoting better access of services. Like the

adult migrants, some of these Chinese youngsters feel more comfortable and benefit from services that can provide a sense of continuity of their culture they have departed from.

Although culture, gender and class exercise considerable influences over young peoples' lives, they do not totally determine pathways to adult rights and responsibilities. Even within the Chinese community, there are differences among individuals families in the extend to which they are able or willing to support and facilitate the transition from childhood dependence to adult independence. Furthermore, other idiosyncratic factors such as family changes, parental death may be factors that determine the nature of young people's pathways to adulthood.



## Chapter Five

### CONCLUSION

The factors that influence the stress experience of Chinese young people both as individuals and as a group are diverse and complex. This study has attempted to explore some of the factors that contribute to the stress experience of the Chinese youth in Australia as a group. However, it is important to bear in mind that Chinese youth is not a homogenous group. Similar to other minority ethnic youth, their experiences are diverse as it can encompass second and third generation link. Furthermore, a variety of other factors can influence them being identified as Chinese. According to Insights (1996), the diversity of influences included the degree of an individual's identification with an ethnic group, peer group associations, ages and stages of development, the level of physical differences from the majority group and the extend of geographic and social isolation from other non-English-speaking background youth. Such identification can affect the individual's ethnic identify and self-concept which in turn will influence his/her stress experience.

Chinese young people, being a group who are physically distinctive and easily identifiable as an ethnic group, face stresses associated with their membership in a minority group in the Australian society. This study has assumed two fundamental sources of stresses that are likely to be experienced by the Chinese youngsters which include the pervasive negative stereotypes projected by the majority culture and the conflicts between ethnic and mainstream values and attitudes. Other stress contributing

factors, which are associated with the Chinese young people's migration experience and their cultural background were also discussed.

Various ways of responding to these stresses have been discussed, including alienation, assimilation, withdrawal and biculturalism. However, none of these outcomes is completely satisfactory. The stage model of ethnic identity development has been presented to describe the process by which minority youth achieve an ethnic identity and useful in demonstrating the importance of this process to the psychological well being of the minority youth. To conclude, there are a variety of outcomes for minority youth in dealing with their status as minority group members in the Australian society. Despite the fact that many of the Chinese young people are confronted with factors that contribute to their stress experience, they do not necessarily have to become alienated or marginal people in society. By exploring the options and developing their own sense of the meaning of ethnicity, these young people can develop a confident sense of themselves and secure ethnic identity.

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