



PCERII Funded Research

Progress Report

Visible Minority Immigrant Professionals and Evaluation of their Credentials

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1. Research problem

Visible minority immigrants with professional qualifications trained outside of Canada often encounter barriers in the Canadian labour force. Sometimes, such barriers are described as immigrants lacking Canadian experience and linguistic abilities needed for Canadian jobs. Other times, barriers are depicted as institutions failing to recognize credentials of foreign-trained professionals, and professional organizations acting as gatekeepers to disadvantage professional immigrants. Through a survey in Vancouver and Saskatoon, the study examines these barriers and analyzes how foreign credentials are devaluated in the eyes of foreign-trained Indo- and Chinese Canadian professionals. The study particularly investigates how disadvantages result from devaluation of foreign credentials, and to what extent systemic barriers to the recognition of credentials actually affect occupational attainment of foreign-trained visible minority professionals,

2. Research methodology

The data were collected in Vancouver and Saskatoon using self-administered mail questionnaire, Since no comprehensive lists of foreign-trained professionals were available, respondents were obtained by snowball sampling.

3. Research progress to date

The survey in Vancouver has been completed. In total, 404 completed questionnaires were collected from foreign-trained Chinese- and Indo-Canadian professionals, and an initial analysis of collected data was done. We are now in the process of completing data collection from foreign-trained professionals in Saskatoon, and from government credential evaluation agencies and professional organizations.

4. Preliminary findings

- 1) Among 404 respondents, 88 percent reported having worked as professionals in their country of origin before immigrating to Canada. However, only 18.8 percent of them said that they worked or had worked as professionals in Canada.
- 2) In total, 73 percent of these foreign-trained professionals experienced downward mobility, 22 percent held the same type of job after immigration, and 5 percent experienced upward mobility.
- 3) Seventy-nine percent of respondents reported that they experienced difficulties in having their foreign credentials recognized in Canada. Based on their experience and observation, over 50 percent of respondents reported that their foreign education was not fairly recognized by provincial government agencies, professional organizations, and educational institutions, and 48 percent of respondents did not believe that "the foreign education of foreign-trained professionals is compared to Canadian standards fairly."
- 4) Over 90 percent of foreign-trained professionals reported that they had professional work experience in their country of origin before immigrating to Canada, and among them, 47 percent had four to nine years of professional work experience and 35 percent had 10 or more years of professional work experience. However, over 55 percent of respondents thought that foreign work experience is not fairly recognized by provincial government agencies, professional organizations, and educational

- institutions, and over 59 percent of respondents do not believe that "the foreign work experience of foreign-trained professionals is compared to Canadian standard fairly,"
- 5) Eighty-three percent of respondents reported that their occupations in their home country matched their professional qualifications well, while approximately 15 percent reported that their current (or last) occupation in Canada matched their professional qualifications. Sixty percent of respondents reported that they were overqualified for their current occupations in Canada, and 13 percent said they have not worked since their arrival in Canada.
 - 6) Sixty-five percent of respondents perceived discrimination on the basis of their skin colour, while 69 percent mentioned national or ethnic origin and 79 percent indicated that speaking English as a second language was a factor that influenced the evaluation of their foreign credentials and recognition of foreign work experience.
 - 7) Eighty-four percent of respondents reported that "the difficulty in having their foreign qualifications or credentials recognized" was a major factor that affected (66 percent) or might have affected (18 percent) their chances to practice in their chosen professions. Eighty-three percent of respondents think that "unequal opportunity to be hired in the professional jobs" was another major factor affected (66 percent) or might have affected (17 percent) their chances to obtain professional jobs in the Canadian labour market.

The findings suggest that visible minority professional immigrants perceive that they face systemic barriers to their entry into their respective professions. The problem of transferring educational equivalencies and work experience across international boundaries result in professional immigrants taking jobs for which they are overtrained, resulting in downward occupational mobility relative to their occupations held before their immigrating to Canada.

5. Policy implications of the research work

It is evident from findings that professional immigrants bring significant human capital resources to the Canadian labour force. However, a better understanding of how these human resources are actually used after the immigrants' arrival in Canada is needed. It is essential for federal, provincial governments, and professional organizations to understand how highly-educated foreign-trained professional immigrants establish themselves in the labour force and what systemic barriers they encounter. The study suggests that in order for Canada to fully benefit from international human capital transfer, a policy is needed to ensure that the credentials of foreign-trained professional immigrants are properly and fairly evaluated.

6. Staffing for the conduct of research (graduate student support)

Four graduate students at the University of Saskatchewan were/are hired as research assistants on a part-time basis for literature review, secondary data collection, and data entry. In addition, two research assistants were hired in Vancouver Chinese- and Indo-Canadian communities for distributing and collecting survey questionnaires.

7. Dissemination activities

As results of this research, we have submitted a research report to Citizenship and Immigration Canada and presented papers at the annual meeting of Canadian Sociology and Anthropology

(May 31 - June 3, 1998), the Regional Workshop of Prairie Centre of Excellence for Research on immigration and Integration (October 29 - 31, 1998), and the Third Metropolis National Conference (January 14 - 16, 1999). In addition, we published two articles: a) "Systemic Racism: A Study of Credential Devaluation of Foreign-Trained Indo-Canadian Professionals in Vancouver" in Edmonton Social Planning Council, First Reading, March 1998, vol. 16, no. 1; b) "Devaluation of Foreign Credentials as Perceived by Visible Minority Professional Immigrants" in *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, no. 3, 1998.

8. Projected date of completion

The research will be completed by the end of December, 1999.

Other information

1. Funding from outside Sources

Li Zong,
1998. "Barriers to Equality: Credential Devaluation of Foreign-Trained Chinese Professionals"
\$37,500
Department of Canadian Heritage, Federal Government of Canada.

2. The number of M.A. and. Ph. D students working on your research project

Four M. A. students were/are hired as research assistants to work with us on the project.

3. Papers relevant to the mandate of the Prairie Centre presented at professional conferences

Li Zong, "Ethnocentrism or Cultural Pluralism: Chinese Immigrants' Cultural Difference in the Eyes of the Canadian Public ", presented at the International Conference on the Ethnic Chinese, Inter-Cultural Relations and Cultural Transformation of Ethnic Chinese Communities, Manila, Philippines, November 26 - 28, 1998.

4. Other forms of research dissemination that are relevant to the mandate of the Prairie Centre

Gurcharn S. Basran and Li Zong, "Devaluation of Foreign Credentials as Perceived by Non-White Professional Immigrants", presented in the Brown Bag Lunch Seminar, Department of Sociology, University of Saskatchewan, October 23, 1998.

5. Publications relevant to the mandate of the Prairie Centre

Gurcharn S. Basran and Li Zong

1998 "Devaluation of Foreign Credentials as Perceived by Visible Minority Professional Immigrants" in *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, no. 3, 1998.

1998 "Systemic Racism: A Study of Credential Devaluation of Foreign-Trained Indo-

Canadian Professionals in Vancouver" in Edmonton Social Planning Council, *First Reading*, March 1998, vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 16-17,

6. Contributions to policy development within the Prairie Centre's mandate

(See #5)

7. The nature and extent of any university support

- a) The University of Saskatchewan provides mainframe and PC computer facilities for the research project.
- b) Two graduate students were/are assigned to us by the Department of Sociology.