

How Do Organizations and Social Policies ‘Acculturate’ to Immigrants? Accommodating Skilled Immigrants in Canada

Izumi Sakamoto · Yi Wei · Lele Truong

Published online: 24 October 2008
© Springer Science+Business Media, LLC 2008

Abstract While the idea of acculturation (Berry 1997) was originally proposed as the mutual change of both parties (e.g., immigrants and the host society), the change processes of host societies are neglected in research. A grounded theory study explored the efforts of human service organizations to ‘acculturate’ to an increasingly diverse immigrant population, through interviews conducted with service providers serving Mainland Chinese immigrants. Acculturation efforts of human service organizations (mezzo-level acculturation) were often needs-driven and affected by the political will and resultant funding programs (macro-level forces). Even with limitations, human service organizations commonly focused on hiring Mainland Chinese immigrants to reflect the changing demographics of their clientele and creating new programs to meet the language and cultural backgrounds of the clients. To contextualize these organizational efforts, an analysis of how policy changes (macro-level acculturation) interact with organizational practice is presented. Finally, the meaning of acculturation for the host society is discussed.

Keywords Acculturation · Professional immigrants · Organizational change · Policy change · Mainland Chinese immigrants

Introduction

The field of psychology has witnessed a proliferation of scholarly writings regarding culture and cultural differences in past decades in response to increased immigration and ethnic diversity in the Global North countries (e.g., Harrell and Bond 2006; Hermans and Kempen 1998; O’Donnell 2006). The cultural competency of service providers and community organizations is one such area of inquiry (American Psychological Association 2003; Uttal 2006), while the acculturation of immigrants is another (Berry 1997; Suinn et al. 1995; Yeh 2003).

The idea of acculturation was originally proposed as the mutual change of both parties (e.g., immigrants and the host society; Redfield et al. 1936); however, the change processes of host individuals and groups are often neglected in research. Arguably, the power differentials between the non-dominant individuals/groups (e.g., immigrants) and host individuals/groups may not actually allow mutual change of the dominant and the non-dominant cultural groups. This paper highlights the efforts of human service organizations to accommodate the shifting demographics and needs of immigrant clients. We examine the extent to which these organizations have ‘acculturated’ to the socio-culturally specific needs of immigrants, focusing on the experiences of service providers working with Mainland Chinese skilled immigrants in Canada (the largest skilled immigrant group in Canada). Further, in order to examine how the macro structure interacts with the organizational practices, a case of the provincial legislation designed to facilitate the integration of immigrants will be reviewed in relation to the recent changes made by professional regulatory organizations.

I. Sakamoto (✉) · Y. Wei
Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto,
246 Bloor Street West, Toronto, ON, Canada M5S 1A1
e-mail: izumi.sakamoto@utoronto.ca

L. Truong
Chinese Canadian National Council Toronto Chapter, 215
Spadina Avenue, Suite 124, Toronto, ON, Canada M5T 2C7

Acculturation

Acculturation was originally proposed as: “those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups” (Redfield et al. 1936, p. 149). While after 70 years, the concept of acculturation has become more commonly recognized in the general public, some researchers express concern about the difficulties in trying to understand and operationalize the term (Bhatia and Ram 2001; Sakamoto 2006; Sam 2006; Yeh 2003). Sam (2006) notes that the concept of acculturation is often confused with assimilation, biculturalism, multiculturalism, and integration, all of which may be overlapping but have distinctly different definitions. Bhatia and Ram (2001) critique a universalist approach to acculturation and its implicit assumption that privilege “one end point or one goal” (p. 15). Nonetheless, Rogler’s (1994) definition may capture a prevalent understanding of acculturation in psychology: “the changes in the immigrants’ cultural beliefs and values toward those of the host society” (p. 706). But are the changes associated with acculturation truly one-sided, or does mutual change actually occur between non-dominant and dominant groups?

Despite limited research in this area, some scholars conceptualize acculturation as occurring within both the non-dominant groups and the dominant groups (e.g., Berry 2006a; Sam 2006). Berry (1997) defines acculturation strategies as the extent to which an individual or group is willing to retain an old culture and adopt a new one, resulting in four types of acculturation strategies: *integration* (accept old culture; accept new culture), *assimilation* (reject old culture; accept new culture), *separation* (accept old culture; reject new culture), and *marginalization* (reject old culture; reject new culture). Although most research has applied these acculturation strategies to individuals from non-dominant groups, Berry’s (2006a) theoretic model, *locus of acculturation strategies* suggests two variables: the three levels of society (national, individual and institutional) and two groups (dominant versus non-dominant groups). Working orthogonally, this model creates six cells of acculturation orientations. Berry (2006b) also detailed the kinds of changes that the host society experiences in response to the presence of the non-dominant group(s), termed, *cultural level changes following contact*. These changes include *political* changes (e.g., policy changes), *economic* changes (e.g., economic gain for the society), *demographic* changes (e.g., the population size), and *cultural* changes (e.g., new languages). While these conceptual frameworks are explained only briefly in Berry’s chapters (2006a, b), they have potential for explaining ‘the other side of acculturation,’ the focus of

this paper. Building on and modifying these two conceptual frameworks, the current paper will examine the institutional changes (mezzo-level changes) as in efforts by human service organizations to change their organizational practices. Further, the macro-level changes in policy at the provincial level will be examined along with accompanying organizational changes in regulatory bodies (organizations that issue licensure to self-regulated professions, e.g., teaching).

Context of Research

Canada became the first country in the world to adopt an official multiculturalism policy in 1971, and in 1988, the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* was proclaimed, defining multiculturalism as “a policy of inclusion that aims to help people overcome barriers related to race, ethnicity and cultural or religious background” (The Department of Canadian Heritage 2005, p. 3). Subsequently, various initiatives and strategic changes were developed across all levels of the public service system to implement the principles of a multicultural society. For example, in 2006, Canada accepted over 250,000 immigrants and the majority of these immigrants were classified as economic immigrants, including skilled immigrants accepted to Canada on the basis of their professional and educational backgrounds through the point system (CIC 2007b). The 2006 census revealed that one in five (19.8%) of the total population were foreign-born (the highest proportion in 75 years; Statistics Canada 2007). Faced with the challenges of meeting the service needs of an increasingly diverse population, government agencies, funders, and advocacy organizations began to promote social and health services that were more responsive to the circumstances of specific ethno-cultural communities (Tator 1996).

Despite efforts by government and service sectors, immigrants continue to face difficulties in settlement process, particularly in accessing employment (Man 2004; Reitz 2005). Researchers, community advocates, and immigrant organizations have made various recommendations for changes in social policy and social/health services, such as increased social services provided in immigrants’ native languages to facilitate improved access to services and ameliorate the settlement process, and improved programming to facilitate employment (George et al. 2003; PROMPT 2004). In response, some changes have been observed in the provincial and federal government levels, such as the creation of social policies to address social services for recent skilled immigrants in the areas of employment and language services. This paper examines the implications and effects of such changes at the macro

(policy) and mezzo (organizational) levels. Do these changes constitute ‘the other side of acculturation’?

The Present Study

The study presented here is the second phase of a larger research project examining the psycho-social experiences of Mainland Chinese immigrants in Toronto, the largest city with the largest proportion of immigrants in Canada (CIC 2007a). The first analysis of the project focused on the immigrants’ experiences, which indicated that unemployment and underemployment were indeed major problems facing skilled immigrants from China (Sakamoto et al. under review). These employment challenges permeated their lives in many ways, including mental health status, identity, socio-economic status, and family issues (Sakamoto et al., under review). Further, social and health services available to them at the time of their arrival (i.e., 1994–2001) were primarily provided by English-speaking mainstream organizations or Chinese community agencies in Toronto which primarily offered services in English and Cantonese (reflecting the earlier demographics of the Chinese community), as opposed to Mandarin, the language spoken by most Mainland Chinese immigrants.

For the current study, the same phenomenon of skilled immigrants’ employment difficulties is examined from ‘the other side’—from the perspectives of human service organizations and their staff working with skilled immigrants. To narrow down our investigation, the study specifically examined service providers working with the Mainland Chinese skilled immigrants. Human service organizations are defined as non-profit organizations that offer free or low-cost social and health services to, in this case, skilled immigrants. Services range from general settlement services, language training and employment programs, to mental health/health services, which are usually funded by federal or provincial governments and, to a lesser extent, charitable foundations such as the United Way.

To offer a fuller context for the changes in the human service organizations and the constraints that they experience in trying to change, the policies under which these service organizations operate are discussed as examples of *cultural level changes following contact* (Berry 2006b). The discussion will focus on what constitutes ‘acculturation’ for human service organizations (mezzo-level; ‘institutions’ as in Berry’s model, 2006a, mentioned earlier) and social policies (macro-level; national/provincial government). How do human service organizations ‘acculturate’ to skilled immigrants? What constitutes ‘acculturation’ in the (mezzo and macro) levels of institutions and larger society?

Method

To examine how the ‘host society’ changed in response to the increased presence of Chinese immigrants, an area in which literature is lacking, our study adopted techniques articulated by grounded theory (Charmaz 2000; Strauss and Corbin 1998). As previously noted, the present study is the second phase of a larger study; thus only the methodological information most pertinent to this phase is presented here, with a more complete description presented in the authors’ publication elsewhere (Sakamoto et al., under review). In grounded theory, data collection and data analysis are conducted simultaneously to allow explanations of the phenomena to emerge from the data (Charmaz 2000; Strauss and Corbin 1998). As the research process continues, emerging ideas are applied back to the rest of the data, and the research process moves from inductive (e.g., open coding) to deductive (thematic coding, selective coding). At the point of inquiry for the current study, emerging themes from the first set of data analysis provided the basis for further exploration. Thus, the segment of the research presented here may seem more particularly deductive to readers since discussion of the earlier inductive analysis is presented in other manuscripts (Sakamoto 2007; Sakamoto et al. under review).

Data collection methods included 22 semi-structured interviews with service providers and key informants working with Mainland Chinese skilled immigrants, as well as an archival review of the federal and provincial (Ontario) government policies supporting skilled immigrants and documents from regulatory bodies. The community partner agency (Chinese Canadian National Council Toronto Chapter), a grass-roots advocacy organization for Chinese Canadians which is well-connected to the larger Chinese community, provided consultancy and facilitated the multiple feedback sessions with different stakeholder groups (member check, confirmability (Drisko 1997; Janesick 2000)). The study received approval from the university’s institutional review board, and all participants were voluntary and signed informed consent forms prior to participation.

Semi-Structured Interviews with Key Informants and Service Providers

Participants

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 22 key informants and service providers (11 women, 11 men). Purposive sampling guided the recruitment strategy, in which multiple recruitment methods were used including rich case sampling (those identified as key resource persons), venue-based sampling (through e-mail list serves for

Chinese professionals working in the human service sector), and snowball sampling (interviewees referred additional participants with different experiences and information; Patton 1990). First, a list of potential key informants was generated in consultation with the community partner and academic researchers knowledgeable in the area of Mainland Chinese skilled immigrants. Potential key informants were then contacted, resulting in fourteen key informants, all of whom had extensive experience working with Mainland Chinese skilled immigrants, who were then interviewed in nine sessions (3 interviews included 2–4 participants, as per their request; 1 interview conducted in Mandarin, 8 in English). In the later phase of the research process, eight service providers who were recent Mainland Chinese immigrants themselves, working with Mainland Chinese immigrants in Toronto (4 women, 4 men; 7 interviews conducted in Mandarin, 1 in English) were identified and interviewed. Unlike earlier key informants, these individuals participated outside of their work roles (as opposed to acting as agency representatives), sharing their candid opinions about their work experiences.

The total of 22 informants included 19 service providers of different levels (senior or middle-level administrators, front-line workers), one coordinator of an advocacy organization for skilled immigrants, one clergyperson, and one academic researcher (11 women, 11 men in total; see Table 1 for additional information). The service agencies included ethno-culturally specific (so-called “Chinese agencies”) and multicultural (“mainstream”) agencies providing settlement, employment, health, mental health or language services (or a combination of these). All but one informant had immigrated to Canada, including eight from Hong Kong and 12 from Mainland China. In the text hereafter, participant narratives include only minimal identifying information in order to protect confidentiality and anonymity.

Interview Guide

Semi-structured interviews focused on the types of services that were provided by the informants’ agencies, the informants’ role and experiences in working with Mainland Chinese skilled immigrants, the major needs and strengths of Mainland Chinese skilled immigrants, service gaps, best practices, organizational changes, and the government’s role in helping skilled immigrants settle in Canada. These questions were slightly modified later through the research process to encompass emerging themes from prior interviews as they were analyzed.

Archival Review

Publicly available documents on the newly announced social policies, descriptions of existing government initiatives and funding programs, and research reports were collected mainly through Internet and reviewed (e.g., Centre for Research and Education in Human Services 2006; websites of federal and Ontario governments, regulatory bodies and media reports). The focus of the analysis was on changes that occurred in recent years to accommodate the needs of skilled immigrants in the domains of employment and language.

Data Analysis

Semi-structured interviews (an average length of 2–2.5 h) were audio-taped and transcribed for analysis. Interviews in Mandarin were translated into English, and NVivo qualitative software was used to assist data management and analysis. The constant comparison method (Charmaz 2000) was used to compare different narratives and explanations within the data, as well as to compare the data to existing

Table 1 Characteristics of interview participants ($n = 22$)

Participants	Gender	Positions	Ethnicity/Race	Immigrant status
Service providers	9 women	2 executive directors	1 Caucasian	1 Canadian-born
	10 men	1 board member	7 Chinese from Hong Kong	17 immigrants
		3 senior/middle-level managers	11 Chinese from Mainland China	(8 living in Canada for more than 10 years)
		11 direct practice service providers (employment counselor, settlement worker, etc.)		
Other key informants	2 woman	2 volunteers		
	1 man	1 clergyperson	1 Chinese from Hong Kong	3 immigrants (1 in Canada for more than 10 years)
		1 academic	1 Chinese from Mainland China	
Total ($n = 22$)		1 coordinator of an immigrant advocacy organization	1 other Asian background	
	11 women	19 service providers	21 Chinese	1 Canadian-born
	11 men	3 other key informants	1 Caucasian	20 immigrants (9 in Canada for more than 10 years)
			1 other	

theory at a later stage of the research. The core research team was comprised of the principal investigator, an East Asian skilled immigrant herself, and three research assistants, who were all immigrants from Mainland China with high educational and/or occupational backgrounds, similar to the study participants. To balance the viewpoints provided by the research team and add a broader societal perspective to the findings, the former co-president of the community partner agency (who subsequently became the coordinator of the provincial-wide advocacy organization for skilled immigrants) was invited to co-author this particular article to add to our discussion through her experiences and insight in policy analysis, informed by both substantial community and lobbying experience and her social location as a Vietnamese Canadian of Chinese origin.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data analysis, the research team made efforts to suspend its prior knowledge of Chinese skilled immigrants as much as possible (bracketing; Caelli 2001) by utilizing cultural review (reflecting upon one's social locations in relation to the study), triangulation (multiple coders on the same data, regular team meetings to flush out the emerging ideas and alternative hypotheses), and open coding techniques to help build explanation of the data from the ground-up (Charmaz 2000; Creswell 1998; Drisko 1997; Janesick 2000). Other methods to increase trustworthiness of the analysis included: (1) documenting an audit-trail through memo writing (e.g., keeping track of how codes were created and assigned); (2) prolonged engagement with Chinese communities in Toronto (e.g., each author has been involved in the community for 5 years or longer); and (3) negative case analysis (data disconfirming emerging hypotheses were sought and analyzed; Creswell 1998; Drisko 1997).

Results and Discussion

As noted, a grounded theory approach facilitates the cyclical process of data collection and analysis (Charmaz 2000) so that the process of interpretation occurs as the data is collected. In reflection of this process, the results and discussions are presented together below, beginning with an examination of efforts to change organizational practices in response to the needs of the immigrants, along with limitations and challenges.

Organizational Changes as Mezzo-Level 'Acculturation' of the Host Society

Hiring of Mainland Chinese Staff

One of the striking findings of this study was that human service organizations have made major strides in

'acculturating' to changing client demographics, specifically through the increased and strong presence of Mainland Chinese immigrants. The key informants confirmed the significance of linguistic challenges faced by Chinese immigrants in their help-seeking activities. They also identified the employment of Mandarin-speaking service providers as the major approach adopted by service agencies in adapting to the language needs of Chinese immigrants:

As we saw the increasing needs for Mandarin services, we first hired the Mandarin speaking MSW [Master of Social Work], and gradually, we have several Mandarin speaking workers now. Some of them have recently arrived in Canada, actually. (male senior administrator)

This trend of hiring Mainland Chinese human service providers to meet the changing demographics of immigrants was observed in both "mainstream" English-speaking organizations and in Chinese agencies that had been mainly Cantonese-speaking prior to the influx of Mainland Chinese immigrants more recently. However, these hiring efforts were not without obstacles, as there were very few Mandarin-speaking social workers available due to differences in the Canadian and Chinese social systems.

Being Flexible in Hiring Practices and Staff Training

Reflecting the more communist nature of the country's social policies, social work as a profession was non-existent in China until recently. While dozens of social work programs now exist in universities across China, the recognition of the profession in the general public is relatively low, especially among those who had immigrated to Canada several years ago. For example, a Mainland Chinese social service worker, previously a teacher in China, stated that her family back home has expressed that it is "stupid" for her to pursue a career in social work which they view as working with "people at the bottom of the society," an opinion she felt was shared by some Chinese immigrants here, too. Given the lack of previous education in social work, identifying Mainland Chinese individuals who are qualified to work in the human service sector may not be easy, even though these individuals may be highly qualified in other professional fields. In response, human service agencies employed more flexible hiring practices while also maintaining credibility. This required being open-minded enough to look beyond certification and think creatively in terms of integrating the cultural and language knowledge of Mandarin-speaking service providers:

We do hire people who don't have experience in Canada. We are aware of the fact that we are not able

to hire certified social workers from Mainland China, so as long as they have the caliber, as long as we see their potential, we will hire them. (male senior administrator)

Many agencies also provided resources to train the Mandarin-speaking staff, not only to meet the technical requirements of work in community settings, but to aid in a smoother adjustment to the Canadian workplace. These agencies promoted their newly available resources with enthusiasm; service information that was translated into Chinese language became available in all agencies, which was then disseminated through various channels into the broader Chinese Canadian community. Government funding allocated for Mandarin-speaking services also forced service agencies to respond to these changes efficiently:

The funder will also say that the funding depends on whether we have Mandarin-speaking staff. So during the last few years all the EDs [executive directors] of social service agencies knew what was happening and they tried to hire Mandarin-speaking staff. So we make the joke that nowadays if you don't speak Mandarin you may have difficulty in getting a job in social services. (male senior administrator)

Challenges Faced in Changing Organizational/Human Service Culture

Interestingly enough, the hiring of Mainland Chinese, Mandarin-speaking service providers did not necessarily result in the use of their unique cultural/linguistic skills to help clients in their respective agencies. In fact, another Chinese service provider shared with us that Chinese services were only offered in her agency on a failure-basis when clients could not communicate fluently in English:

Our agency provides employment workshops in English, Mandarin and Cantonese. Some clients were referred to our agency after they failed the English assessment at another mainstream organization when trying to register for the same type of workshops. So they [Chinese clients] had the worry that workshops provided in Mandarin and Cantonese by our organization may not have the same quality as those provided in English. (female direct service provider)

Similarly, another service provider explains:

A Chinese community service agency was delivering a workshop in Mandarin on workplace culture. I passed the workshop flyer to all the English speaking counselors, but none of them referred their Chinese clients to it. [The workshop] should be very helpful to Chinese immigrants, and I believe my communication

was clear, too. However...I understand that the mainstream services are in English, and counselors may feel that this workshop in Mandarin was only a 'side-service', a 'by-service'. (male direct service provider)

As these narratives illustrate, services provided by ethno-cultural community agencies (often in the native language of immigrants) are, in some cases, not viewed as an important part of the human service repertoire. Instead, ethno-specific community services may be stereotypically perceived as lower quality services for people who speak little or no English. This perception may be compounded by beliefs held by service providers (including immigrant service providers) about what is 'helpful' for service users: i.e., facilitating acculturation of immigrants through English language services. For example, this service provider from Mainland China states:

In our program we have four staff. Two Canadians, plus my team leader who can speak Arabic and I can speak Mandarin and Cantonese. But we don't promote [speaking other languages]... unless the client can't speak any English, we won't offer to speak other languages, because we encourage our clients to integrate into the Canadian society. (female direct service provider)

These examples raise the question of whether the hiring of human service staff who matches the ethno-linguistic backgrounds of clients has truly been effective. It seems that despite being hired for their cultural knowledge and language skills, ethnic service providers are faced with the expectation of using English as the 'first service-language.' Some of the narratives of these Mainland Chinese female immigrant service providers highlight this point:

I work for...a mainstream organization. I'm an ethnic-minority there. I'm the only one who can speak Mandarin...Once a Chinese service provider visited me...I spoke Chinese. [Later] My supervisor came and told me that "you should speak English when other people are present." Actually it was a meeting between us two, but because it was an open space, my supervisor overheard it. So no one says that you can't speak Chinese, but...

As suggested in this narrative, service providers who speak English as a second language and who are immigrants themselves face challenges in navigating complex roles in a complicated and unfamiliar work environment. As frontline workers, they represent the organization and extend the organization's service profile by offering their cultural knowledge and language skills. At the same time, they tend to be minorities within the professional

workplace, who share the same cultural and social characteristics of many of the clients they serve. They are expected to abide by and maintain the norms of the Canadian workplace. As a result, these service providers may attempt to survive the Canadian workplace by avoiding behaviors that mark them as too ‘foreign’ and reducing features that differentiate them from the majority staff of the organization, such as minority language usage. Participants expressed that the culturally specific practices, supposedly an asset to the organization, are valued only within isolated and specific contexts by immigrant service users, so that the organization has not truly ‘acculturated’ at an institutional level, over and beyond hiring of the frontline staff members.

More Organizational Efforts Needed

While human service agencies working with skilled immigrants have made major strides toward accommodating the needs of Mainland Chinese skilled immigrants, further agency efforts were called for in promoting awareness of available services:

I know that there’s a general feeling across the sector that some of the services are not, are not advertised well enough. For all of the trying that people have done, people still don’t know about the services. (female senior administrator)

Mainland Chinese service providers also identified additional improvements needed at the organizational level, including changes in organizational culture to be more inclusive of socio-linguistic and cultural differences, achievable partly through the recruitment of more Mainland Chinese managers and board members, as well as efforts towards increasing cultural competence and improving service quality among all staff serving Mainland Chinese immigrants. At the same time, some service providers felt that immigrants’ needs are basically the same, so that effective services could be provided by non-Mainland Chinese service providers as much as by Mainland Chinese providers, so long as they are culturally competent. The issue of whether human services should be provided by the ethno-culturally matched service providers or by any provider who has cultural competence, is a contested issue that has been debated for more than a decade (de Anda 1997). Interview data highlighted a paradoxical dynamic; while culturally specific services and ethno-culturally specific service agencies are seen as second rate to ‘mainstream’ agencies, these ethno-culturally specific services/agencies prided themselves for being able to offer optimal services for culturally matched clients. Regardless, efforts towards hiring Mainland Chinese staff or increasing the cultural competence of existing

staff who may not be Mainland Chinese requires organizational resources, pointing to the kinds of structural barriers that organizations themselves face in accommodating the needs of skilled immigrants.

Structural Constraints

Acculturation does not take place in a vacuum. The context in which acculturative changes occur needs to be taken into account. Participants commonly articulated that positive changes within their respective organizations to respond to the needs of skilled immigrants were limited by larger social structures (macro-forces). For example, a female senior administrator called for better coordination between the federal immigration and labor market policies, which affects the employment opportunities for immigrants, and role of government in increasing public awareness on this issue:

...the biggest issue is just, the federal government needs to obviously better coordinate between their immigration policy and their labor market policy. ... I think that ...people still think [these employment issues] are immigrant issues, not all of our issues and so I think that’s the strong message that the federal government should take responsibility, too.

One of the major obstacles mentioned in providing human services to skilled immigrants was the lack of funding, succinctly captured by a female direct service provider: “There is dream if there is funding. No funding, no dream.” Funding for social service programming is distributed under increasingly stricter guidelines for accountability, so that future funding dollars often directly correspond to the number of clients served by the funded program. This also impacts the ability of agencies to truly benefit from newly acquired culturally diverse human resources:

Our agency is a multi-cultural community service organization and my coworkers are from all different countries. However, there are very few opportunities for people to talk about their own cultures with each other, or to discuss how to provide better service to our clients using the [cultural] knowledge.... After all, our biggest pressure comes from how to help our clients find jobs. (male direct service provider)

Other funding limitations expressed by key informants and service providers included: (1) insufficient funding for the social service sector in general, and in immigrant services in particular; (2) ethno-cultural and/or single-service agencies receiving less funding as compared to ‘mainstream’, multi-service agencies; (3) reliance on donations to pay for core expenditure (telephone, rent, supervision);

(4) government use of business model strategies, such as matching formulas, which disadvantage smaller agencies with more constrained budgets; (5) increase in project-based funding versus long-term funding, resulting in increased contract positions and decreased full-time positions (directly impacting the sustainability of programs and smaller, ethno-specific agencies); and (6) no funding for collaborating and developing partnerships with other agencies (a time and resource intensive effort).

Given these structural constraints, it is necessary for our analysis to examine potential macro-level policy changes and the intended effects in supporting the integration of skilled immigrants into the Canadian society. In the following section, the case of Ontario *Bill 124, Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act* and resultant changes are discussed as a case study to highlight how mezzo-level, organizational practices working with skilled immigrants are affected by, and interact with, macro-level policy practices.

Macro-Level ‘Acculturation’: Case of Ontario Bill 124

What follows is an analysis of the archival policy documents and organizational documents, along with the insights of the third author, who was the co-president of the community partner of this research project and a former coordinator of the Policy Roundtable Mobilizing Professions and Trades (PROMPT), an advocacy coalition for skilled immigrants. In 2004, PROMPT published an influential study entitled *In the public interest: Immigrant access to regulated professions in today’s Ontario*. The study advocated for the legal obligation of regulators to ensure the elimination of systemic barriers. It was at the launch of this report that former Ontario Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU), Mary Anne Chambers announced the establishment of the *Review of Appeal Processes in Ontario’s Regulated Professions*. Justice George M. Thomson was commissioned to review the registration appeals process for self-regulating professions (Thomson 2005). *Bill 124, Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act*, is a policy response to reduce systemic barriers in the licensure and registration process in Ontario.

Bill 124, Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act became law in March 1, 2007. The purpose of Bill 124 is to help ensure that regulated professions and individuals applying for registration by regulated professions are governed by registration practices that are transparent, objective, impartial and fair (Colle 2006). The provisions of Bill 124 include: (1) establishment of Fair Registration Practices; (2) appointment of Fairness Commissioner; and (3) establishment of the Access Centre for internationally trained individuals. Under this legislation, the Fairness Commissioner is responsible for assessing the registration

practices of 35 regulated professions (14 non-health and 21 health) to ensure that the credentials of internationally trained professionals are evaluated fairly and transparently.

Bill 124 is not intended as a one-time change, but rather a long-term effort aimed at facilitating the credential recognition process for skilled immigrants, and subsequently enhancing their employability and integration process. The provision of ‘fair access’ to a profession is a process of ‘the other side of acculturation’ on the part of regulatory bodies and the host society, as the certification processes and requirements had long operated out of the assumptions that their applicants are Canadian-educated professionals, in effect excluding internationally educated professionals from being able to acquire Canadian credentials.

One of the key issues that Bill 124 promoted was skilled immigrants’ fair access to settlement services and programs. Competition to enter bridging programs was cited as hindering fair access for qualified skilled immigrants. Moreover, there is a substantial burden of cost in obtaining a third party assessment of equivalency of credentials required by the licensure process. Many skilled immigrants also experience difficulty in accessing transcripts and records from home countries, so that they become trapped in the revolving doors between the credential evaluation agency, professional associations and regulatory bodies. All of these issues highlight the issue of the ‘fair access.’

Another key issue that Bill 124 focused on was enhancing the host society’s capacity to serve diverse social and cultural population groups. Many service providers are aware of the need to increase cultural competence and address linguistic differences. An increasing number of initiatives to provide multilingual settlement services include the *New Multilingual Referral Service* by *Employment Ontario* to help newcomers access information on job counseling and training (since August 2007) and *Job Connect*—an Ontario Government employment support program available in 23 languages (Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities 2006).

Impact of Bill 124

What is the impact of Bill 124 since its implementation? The Fairness Commissioner was appointed in April 2007, after the passing of Bill 124. The Fairness Commission is scheduled to release its findings on the registration practices of the 35 regulated professions in the spring of 2008. At the time this manuscript was written, this report was yet to be released. Additionally, our consultations with various key stakeholders indicate that it is still too early to make any conclusions on Bill 124’s impact with respect to improving ‘fair access’ for skilled immigrants to practice in their professions.

Nevertheless, progress has certainly been made in some professions, perhaps in keeping with the level of public awareness and thrust of community efforts that led to Bill 124, if not the direct result of the Bill 124 itself. Some regulatory bodies have initiated reviews of how their regulations apply to international trained individuals. For example, an internationally educated teacher may request intervention by the Ontario College of Teachers to obtain documentation from his/her home country, if that applicant has not been successful in previous attempts (Ontario College of Teachers 2008).

The case of a provincial regulatory body, Professional Engineers Ontario (PEO) is of particular interest. Ontario receives the largest number of skilled immigrants (CIC 2007b), and engineers accounted for the largest group of skilled immigrants in Canada: 25% of all immigrants with university degrees (compared to 6% of Canadian counterparts in 2006; Statistics Canada 2008). Despite the large proportion of internationally educated engineers, analysis of the 2001 Census on immigrant engineers (Boyd and Schellenberg 2007) found that “only 26% of foreign-trained engineers hold jobs in engineering occupations, as compared to 41% of Canadian-born engineers” (p. 6), even though these immigrant engineers were older and better educated than their Canadian counterparts.

In 2006, PEO worked closely with then Minister of Citizenship and Immigration (who had forwarded Bill 124) to reduce barriers to licensure for internationally educated engineers (IEE’s), so that “international engineering graduates are better able to use the skills, education, and experience they bring with them” (Allen 2007, p. 4). In fact, PEO is seen as “breaking new ground” (Grewal 2007) in facilitating the smooth licensing of internationally trained professionals. For example, PEO has created a database of 1,600 different educational institutions world-wide that offer engineering degrees. Prospective immigrants can now apply for licensing and credential assessment prior to their arrival in Canada (PEO 2007a). Further, since May 2007, PEO has waived its application fee (normally \$230 CDN) for newcomer engineers within 6 months of landing (PEO 2007b). These efforts have led to more affordable, effective and prompt assessments of the diverse backgrounds of IEE’s, who now compose a third of PEO’s 70,000 members (Kim Allen, Personal communication, April 16, 2008). In fact, PEO has licensed more IEE’s than those trained in Canada since 2005, resulting in 1,137 IEE’s licensed in 2006, compared to less than 100 per year in the early 1990s (Grewal 2007; PEO 2007a; Kim Allen, Personal communication, April 16, 2008). Although these changes have taken place over the span of past several years, Bill 124 has driven PEO to conduct a comprehensive organizational review and refine its policy to be more fair, objective and transparent (Kim Allen, Personal communication, April 16, 2008).

Ultimately, the far-reaching impacts of PEO’s organizational efforts have to be examined through comprehensive research of the experiences of IEE’s and their employers. However, it does seem that PEO’s efforts to accommodate immigrants (institutional-level acculturation) are substantial in that its institutional practices have been transformed. While other regulatory bodies may still be lagging behind in smoothing the licensing of internationally educated professionals (Grewal 2007), PEO’s efforts are commendable. At the same time, Bill 124 has been also criticized for a lack of clear accountability measures, particularly in terms of what enforcement measures are available to the Fairness Commissioner. Additionally, any regulatory bodies opposed to Bill 124 during the deputations may not be as cooperative as organizations like PEO in accommodating immigrant professionals. However, many advocates and researchers agree (Legislative Assembly of Ontario 2006) that Bill 124 is a societal step toward fully integrating skilled immigrants (societal acculturation).

Discussion About Acculturation of the Host Society

The current inquiry set out with the assumption that changes in human service organizations and social policies in response to the increased presence of skilled immigrants are examples of acculturation by the host society. Applying Berry’s model discussed earlier (2006a, b), organizational changes may be seen as acculturation of the *dominant* groups at the *institutional* level of the host society (see Table 2 for the summary). Further, the policy changes as exemplified in Bill 124 highlight the acculturation of the *dominant* groups at the larger level of the host society (in Berry’s model, *national level*, but in this paper the changes are at the provincial level). These *political changes* are ultimately aimed at *economic changes* in the host society: i.e., more skilled immigrants working in their professional fields of expertise. Further, it could be argued that potential *cultural change* could follow these political and economic changes if the general public’s attitudes (e.g., employers, co-workers, consumers) toward immigrants change as a result of seeing more immigrant professionals working successfully in their respective fields.

Having reviewed the strengths and limitations of the efforts made by both organizations and provincial government, the questions arise: How much change is necessary to constitute acculturation of the host society? Who decides if the host society’s acculturation efforts are sufficient enough to result in successful integration between the host and immigrants’ cultures? Hiring of staff in human service organizations to respond to the needs of skilled immigrants is thought of as a positive organizational practice. However, if these new staff (often in direct

Table 2 Examples of Mezzo-level and Macro-level changes observed

Levels of changes	Changes observed	Locus of acculturation strategies and kinds of changes observed ^a
Mezzo-level changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immigrant service organization hire more immigrants service providers • More language and cultural specific programs are available • Regulatory bodies change their policies to facilitate more fair and transparent assessment of skilled immigrants' credentials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acculturation of the <i>dominant</i> groups at the <i>institutional</i> level of society
Macro-level changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Politicians, bureaucrats and funders become aware of the issue of credential recognition • Policy changes • Funding become available to meeting the needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acculturation of the <i>dominant</i> groups at the <i>national</i> level of society • <i>Political change</i> that could possibly affect <i>economic change</i> (increased professional employment for skilled immigrants) and <i>cultural change</i> (public's attitudes toward immigrants)

^a Berry (2006a, b)

service or 'frontline' work) experience difficulties in trying to utilize their cultural and linguistic knowledge within the more mainstream organizational context, to what extent does this effort fulfill its intended goal? These questions lie beyond the scope of this paper; however, they evidence the need for continued research towards a more comprehensive sociologically oriented 'acculturation' theory and articulation of related concepts and applications. Such inquiries may benefit from interdisciplinary efforts employing theories of community, organizational, and social changes (e.g., organizational studies, social movement theory). In doing so, various questions such as what would lead the host society to acculturate, who are the actors of acculturation, how much change is observed, and why such change occurs at a given time may be articulated.

Limitations

Since the current study employs an interpretive, qualitative approach, it was not the authors' intention that the participants' experiences be generalized to others; thus, transferability of the results should be approached with caution. Most of the interviewees in this study were Chinese as the focus of the study was on Chinese skilled immigrants; it is unknown if non-Chinese would have different experiences than those presented in this manuscript. Further, some of the interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese, but analyzed in English after the text was translated, which may have impacted the data analysis. The researchers were all of Asian descent, and either immigrants themselves or children of immigrants, which might have affected how we interpreted the data, with perhaps more sympathy toward immigrants' experiences. In addition, since interviews were conducted between fall of 2004 and summer of 2005, changes occurring since are

not reflected in the participant narratives. This limitation is partially augmented by reviewing the more recent policy changes in 2006–2007. The analysis of institutional acculturation was also limited by the focus of this paper, that is, human service organizations and regulatory bodies. Lastly, although Bill 124 is no doubt a significant change in legislation, the discussion of its impact is limited by the fact that only a year has passed since its implementation. Some stakeholders consulted for this research estimate that it may take 5–10 years to fully evaluate the Bill's effects. Further research and on-going monitoring of this issue is required to truly assess whether the society has 'acculturated' to its immigrant citizens via Bill 124.

Conclusion

A qualitative study with service providers working with Mainland Chinese skilled immigrants explored the efforts of human service organizations to 'acculturate' to an increasingly diverse immigrant population. Acculturation efforts of human service organizations (mezzo-level acculturation) were often needs-driven and affected by the political will and resultant funding programs at the macro levels. Human service organizations commonly focused on hiring Mainland Chinese skilled immigrants to reflect the changing demographics of their clientele and were flexible in hiring practices and training of staff who may not have professional qualifications. However, these efforts were met with structural constraints such as funding requirements which pressure agencies to raise numbers of clients served, which may hinder fully highlighting the diversity of the workforce toward institutional-level acculturation. To contextualize these organizational efforts, an example of how policy changes (macro-level acculturation) interact

with organizational practice was presented. Although the evidence of the impact of the changes in provincial legislation is yet to be seen fully, preliminary reports suggest that the regulatory bodies are moving toward accommodating immigrants through changing organizational practices and procedures. Overall, ‘the other side of acculturation’ was evidenced in human service organizations, regulatory bodies, and provincial legislation, even though these changes were at times uneven and constrained by various factors. These efforts made by the host society at the institutional and larger societal levels are welcome and deemed positive in fully integrating immigrants through mutual changes of immigrants and the host society. It could be argued that only through these gradual but constant changes, will we see the full ‘acculturation’ of the society in the foreseeable future.

Acknowledgments The authors would like to thank the special section editors, Drs. Meg A. Bond and Khanh T. Dinh and anonymous reviewers for their helpful suggestions. The authors would like to also thank those who contributed to the research: Chinese Canadian National Council Toronto Chapter, Jane Ku, Fei Wu, Shenyu Huang, the participants of the research, and Billie Allan. The research presented in this paper was sponsored by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (Multiculturalism Issues in Canada award), the Joint Centre for Excellence in Immigration and Settlement—Toronto (now CERIS—The Ontario Metropolis Centre), and the University of Toronto Connaught Matching Fund.

References

- Allen, K. (2007). Registrar’s report. In Professional Engineers Ontario. *Annual review 2006: Delivering accountability* (p. 4). Retrieved April 11, 2008 from <http://www.peo.on.ca>.
- American Psychological Association. (2003). Guidelines on multicultural education, training, research, practice, and organizational change for psychologists. *American Psychologist*, 58, 377–402.
- Berry, J. W. (1997). Immigration, acculturation, and adaptation. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 46(1), 5–68.
- Berry, J. W. (2006a). Contexts of acculturation. In D. L. Sam & J. W. Berry (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of acculturation psychology* (pp. 27–42). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Berry, J. W. (2006b). Design of acculturation studies. In D. L. Sam & J. W. Berry (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of acculturation psychology* (pp. 129–141). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bhatia, S., & Ram, A. (2001). Rethinking ‘acculturation’ in relation to diasporic cultures and postcolonial identities. *Human Development*, 44, 1–19.
- Boyd, M., & Schellenberg, G. (2007). Re-accreditation and the occupations of immigrant doctors and engineers. In *Canadian Social Trend, Winter 2007* (Vol. 84, pp. 2–8). Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
- Caelli, K. (2001). Engaging with phenomenology: Is it more of a challenge than it needs to be? *Qualitative Health Research*, 11(2), 273–281.
- Centre for Research and Education in Human Services. (2006). *A national review of access to professions and trades (APT) processes for immigrants*. Retrieved October 20, 2007 from <http://www.cassaonline.com/capacitycanada/www.capacitycanada.ca/index.html>.
- Charmaz, K. (2000). Grounded theory: Objectivist and constructivist methods. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 509–535). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC). (2007a). *Facts and Figs 2006: Immigration overview, permanent and temporary residents*. Ottawa: Author.
- Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC). (2007b). *Annual report to parliament on immigration, 2007*. Ottawa: Author.
- Colle, M. (2006). *Ontario Bill 124, An Act to provide for fair registration practices in Ontario’s regulated professions*. (2nd Session, 38th Legislature). Toronto, Ontario: 55 Elizabeth II.
- Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- de Anda, D. (Ed.). (1997). *Controversial issues in multiculturalism*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- The Department of Canadian Heritage. (2005). *Annual report on the operation of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, 2003–2004*. Ottawa: Author.
- Drisko, J. W. (1997). Strengthening qualitative studies and reports: Standards to promote academic integrity. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 33, 185–197.
- George, U., Fong, E., Da, W. W., & Chang, R. (2003). *Recommendations for the delivery of services for Mandarin speaking newcomers from Mainland China*. Toronto: Joint Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement—Toronto.
- Grewal, S. (2007). Engineers breaking new ground. *Toronto Star*, September 13, 2007. Retrieved April 11, 2008 from <http://www.peo.on.ca>.
- Harrell, S., & Bond, M. (2006). Listening to diversity stories: Principles for practice in community research and action. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 37, 365–376.
- Hermans, H. J. M., & Kempen, H. J. G. (1998). Moving cultures: The perilous problems of cultural dichotomies in a globalization society. *American Psychologist*, 53(10), 1111–1120.
- Janesick, V. J. (2000). The choreography of qualitative research design: Minuets, improvisations, and crystallization. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 379–399). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Legislative Assembly of Ontario. (2006). *Official report of debates (Hansard): Standing committee on regulations and private bills. Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, 2006*. Toronto: Publications Ontario.
- Man, G. (2004). Gender, work and migration: Deskillling Chinese immigrant women in Canada. *Women’s Studies International Forum*, 27, 135–148.
- O’Donnell, C. R. (2006). Beyond diversity: Toward a cultural community psychology. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 37(1), 1–7.
- Ontario College of Teachers. (2008). *Frequently asked questions*. Retrieved April 10, 2008 from <http://www.oct.ca/IET/questions.aspx?lang=en-CA>.
- Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. (2006). *Job connect*. Employment Ontario. Retrieved March 30, 2008 from <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/tcu/apprentices/jobconnect.html>.
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Policy Roundtable Mobilizing Professions Trades (PROMPT). (2004). *In the public interest: Immigrant access to regulated professions in today’s Ontario. A PROMPT policy paper*. Toronto: Author.
- Professional Engineers Ontario (PEO). (2007a). *Annual Review 2006: Delivering accountability*. Retrieved April 11, 2008 from <http://www.peo.on.ca>.

- Professional Engineers Ontario. (2007b). *Media release: Foreign-trained and Canadian engineering graduates to benefit from new licensing program* (May 2, 2007). Retrieved April 10, 2008 from <http://www.peo.on.ca>.
- Redfield, R., Linton, R., & Herskovits, M. J. (1936). Memorandum for the study of acculturation. *American Anthropologist*, 38, 149–152.
- Reitz, J. (2005). Tapping immigrants' skills: New directions for Canadian immigration policy in the knowledge economy. *IRPP Choices*, 11(1). Retrieved April 21, 2008 from <http://www.irpp.org/choices/archive/vol11no1.pdf>.
- Rogler, L. H. (1994). International migrations: A framework for directing research. *American Psychologist*, 49(8), 701–708.
- Sakamoto, I. (2006). When family enters the picture: The model of cultural negotiation and gendered experiences of Japanese academic sojourners in the United States. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology Journal*, 12(3), 558–577.
- Sakamoto, I. (2007). A critical examination of immigrant acculturation: Toward an anti-oppressive social work with immigrant adults in a pluralistic society. *British Journal of Social Work*, 37(3), 515–535.
- Sakamoto, I., Ku, J., & Wei, Y. (under review). *Luocha* (falling down): The experience of “earlier” skilled immigrants from Mainland China.
- Sam, D. (2006). Acculturation: Conceptual background and core components. In D. L. Sam & J. W. Berry (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of acculturation psychology* (pp. 11–26). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Statistics Canada. (2007). *Immigration in Canada: A portrait of the foreign-born population, 2006 Census: Immigration*. Ottawa: Minister of Industry.
- Statistics Canada. (2008). *Educational portrait of Canada, 2006 Census: Immigration. Field of study*. Retrieved April 15, 2008 from <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census06/analysis/education/engineering.cfm>.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, A. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Suinn, R., Khoo, G., & Ahuna, C. (1995). The Suinn-Lew self-identity acculturation scale: Cross-cultural information. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 23, 139–148.
- Tator, C. (1996). Anti-racism and the human-service delivery system. In C. E. James (Ed.), *Perspectives on racism and the human services sector: A case for change* (pp. 152–170). Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Thomson, G. (2005). *Review of appeal processes from registration decisions in Ontario's regulated professions: Report to the Ontario minister of citizenship and immigration*. Toronto: Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration.
- Uttal, L. (2006). Organizational cultural competency: Shifting programs for Latino immigrants from a client-centered to a community-based orientation. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 38, 251–262.
- Yeh, C. J. (2003). Age, acculturation, cultural adjustment, and mental health symptoms of Chinese, Korean, and Japanese immigrant youth. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 9(1), 34–48.