

Janet W Salaff, Ph.D
Department of Sociology
University of Toronto
Phone: (416) 2011113
Email: salaff@chass.utoronto.ca

Extended Abstract to PAA 04

Our study examines the career achievements of 50 professional couples that immigrated from China to Canada. We compare their job attainment when they left China with that gotten several years after immigration. We contrast these immigrants' past careers in their country of origin with those in the host country. We further compare types of barriers for different occupational subgroups, and finally, the performance of women and men in the two countries.

We find that it is hard for those that grew up in one society to move their skill set effortlessly to another country. Although they seek jobs abroad as good as those they left behind, they are often mismatched. Arriving in Canada, these skilled immigrants face social and institutional barriers in regaining the careers like those they had held. They lack recognition of their education, professional status, and their work experiences, and encounter a gendered labor market that does not match that of China. Different occupational subgroups faced different challenges, depending on the degree of control by Canadian professions. Women and men also fared differently. Women did poorly partly due to their lag behind their husbands in suitable human capital in China. Even more, they are squeezed into fewer available jobs due to the gendered job profile in Canada which differs from that in force in China when they developed their careers.

We apply concepts of human capital and institutional theory to understand why the job status of the majority drops after immigrating. Human capital and institutional perspectives both underscore the specific skills that professional and technical jobs require, but contest the link between educational and occupational structures.

Human capital concepts explain career advancement in terms of people's education and training. International migrants have left one institutional setting which had shaped their human capital for another. Human capital theorists ask whether the skills of new immigrants are suited to those demanded in the host country. We found that human capital theory explains their past career achievements in China. Human capital theory describes how opportunities follow credentials in those occupations where skills can be valued. However, this construct explains poorly why job contenders are shunted away from fields in which credentials are entrenched. In sum, human capital interprets the lack of recognition and consequent drop in status of these immigrants in Canada to only a limited extent.

The institutional framework explains employees' career attainment in terms of social recognition of career paths. Institutional concepts do better in explaining the structural barriers to achievement that affect those in the controlled professions,

and especially women, in Canada. Institutional theory takes us further in spelling out how labor markets and choice of education and careers follow institutionalized patterns. Since these international migrants have left an institutional setting which had shaped their human capital for another, they are often mismatched. The institutional perspective expects that those that grew up in one society cannot move their skill set effortlessly to another. In sum, institutional theorists are best able to outline the structural barriers to immigrants' employment in established occupations.

Men and women have gendered education and careers, but the ways they are gendered differ in China and North America. Armed with education and experiences from their country of origin, immigrants must match Canadian employers' definitions of suitable human capital. Because the professions limit entry, the credentials of only a few women and men boost them to professional jobs. The best they can do is to become technicians. However, technical jobs are gendered, as seen in our comparison of three professions. Excluded by the engineering profession, women who were formerly engineers rarely enter blue collar technical jobs. Those who were formerly doctors more easily enter the feminized sector of medical technicians and do better. In these two professions institutional factors override market mechanisms in hiring for higher status jobs. In sharp relief, both women and men get good positions in information sciences, which is a less institutionalized field and outside professional control.

Literature on other Canadian high skill immigrant workers similarly finds that those immigrating after completing their education cannot find employment corresponding to their training. Using an constructed cohort analysis from the 1996 census Beaujot (2002) finds birthplace differences in the percentages who are working in managerial, engineering, technical, and all other occupations most pronounced for those immigrating after age 27. These cannot be attributed to differences in measured human capital stock. Accreditation requirements are one likely explanation,.

Other studies that focus on gender similarly note that women's education and credentials in the labor market are valued differently from those of men. American immigration policy has a strong skill component as well, although movement towards citizenship is slower and entry level of most groups is lower (Adelman, 2002; Reitz, 2002). A comparative study controlling for gender, ethnicity skill and length of residence in Los Angeles similarly finds Asian women face institutionalized barriers to a good wage (Wright & Ellis, 2000).

The poor match between the social structures that surround jobs in a migrant's home country and their new destination makes it difficult to continue careers abroad. Women have more trouble following up their former careers because the highly institutionalized professional system in the receiving country affects them more than men. Their gendered experiences underscores institutional theory's contentions. Careers are rooted in structured labor markets, and a labor market based on human capital does not exist.

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