

[Research Forum]

**Searching for Manhood:  
Reflecting Growing up in a Chinese Way**

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This article reported a qualitative research based on Giorgi's (1975a, 1975b) phenomenological methodology that studied male identity formation of Chinese Canadian immigrants who grew up in China and later settled down in Canada. The purpose was to explore how their male identity developed, their current ideas about being men, and what they wanted to become in the future. The data yielded a theme that they learnt to be men by their own searching. Their experience of navigating across two cultures revealed some characteristics of growing up in a Chinese culture and the journey of searching for male identity in Canada.

The study of masculinity can be traced back to the middle of the twentieth century when theories such as the psychoanalytic perspective (Reid, Haritos, Kelly, & Holland, 1995; Sears, Rau, & Alpert, 1965), the

socialization perspective (Golombok & Fivush, 1994; Maccoby, 2000), and the cognitive perspective (Bem, 1981; Kohlberg, 1966) were put forward to explain how children took on attributes that were typical of their own gender. The term *masculinity* described male gender characteristics, and was originally conceived as a bipolar opposite to femininity (Constantine, 1973; Petersen, 2003; Spence & Helmreich, 1978). Several authors stressed the importance of distinguishing the biologically determined characteristic of maleness, and the socio-psychologically based concept of masculinity (Good, Borst, & Wallace, 1994; Good & Mintz, 1993; Kimmel & Messner, 1992; Pleck, Sonenstein, & Ku, 1993). The latter area was referred to by other terms such as masculinity ideology, male role norm, and masculine gender role (Pleck et al., 1993; Thompson, Pleck, & Ferrera, 1992). In the past decade, the study of masculinity has changed from understanding the gender development of maleness to the deconstruction of traditional masculinity and the societal and psychological experiences of being men (Levant, 1997; Levant & Pollack, 1995).

The research on the societal-psychological aspects of masculinity identified that traditional masculinity was associated with violence against women (Harway & O'Neil, 1999), depression and anxiety (Sharpe, Heppner, & Dixon, 1995), low self-esteem and negative well-being (Sharpe et al., 1995), perceived physical strain (Stillson, O'Neil, & Owen, 1991), problems in relationships (Campbell & Snow, 1992), and psychological distress (Good, Robertson, Fitzgerald, Stevens, & Bartels, 1996). These quantitative studies reported the overwhelming need for men to develop masculinity other than the traditional masculinity whose attributes were aggressivity, competitiveness, and emotional detachment (Petersen, 2003). Qualitative research findings revealed that though it was not easy to find alternatives besides traditional masculinity (Riley, 2003), there were other positive male experiences such as being caring and involved fathers, pro-feminist men,

voluntary male homemakers (Cornish, 1999; Duindam & Spruijt, 1997; Palm, 1993; Robertson & Verschelden, 1993). Further qualitative study is needed to better understand how male identity can be better developed for men in general, and for male immigrants who have to settle in a very different culture in particular.

### **Male Identity of Chinese Canadian Adult Immigrants**

*Identity* can be understood as an integrative configuration of self over a wide range of different and often conflicting roles and relationships (McAdams, 2001). McAdams's (1985) life story model was based on Erikson's (1963) developmental concept of ego identity. It differentiated identity from self or self-concept by using self to mean self-understanding, and identity was a psychosocially meaningful self-understanding that gives a person some unity and purpose to his or her life. According to the above definition, gender identity is the personal understanding of one's gender and the incorporation of this understanding into a more or less unifying self-concept (Maccoby, 1998); or is an individual's secured sense of one's gender described by masculinity or femininity (Pleck, 1981). Traditional self concept theories viewed self-concept as a stable and uniform construct; but recent work in possible self, past self, working self, and the concept of multiplicity of selfhood meant the construct was more dynamic and relevant to human behaviors in diverse situations (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Similarly, McAdams (2001) emphasized that there were often multiple narratives competing with one another. No integration in identity could be fully captured in one narrative, yet the narrative often brought many disparate features into a more unifying identity (McAdams, 2001). Identity development can then be viewed as a subjective, personal process and is part of our whole personality development (Bauer & McAdams, 2004); and gender identity development refers to the developmental process from infancy into

adulthood in relation to one's acquisition and learning of one's gender identity.

There were some research studies exploring male identity among Asian immigrants in North America (Chua & Fujino, 1999; Da, 2004; Kim, LaRoche, & Tomiuk, 2004; Liu, 2002). However, gender identity development in a cross-cultural context has not been investigated. For many Chinese Canadian immigrants, migration adjustment means not only geographical transition; it is also the formation of a new identity as they acculturate into Canadian society (Lee & Westwood, 1996). New personal identity is established through ongoing interactions with others while the individual makes negotiation with self and the world (Amundson, 1994; McAdams, 2001; McCall, 1987; Schwartz, 2002). In studying Asian American immigrants, Kim et al. (2004) observed the need for immigrants to redefine male gender identity because they faced very different cultural values and practice on gender issues in the Western culture. Comparatively, their former Chinese culture is often more male-dominated with well-defined gender roles as well as strong social expectations and sanctions toward gender behaviors (Goodwin & Tang, 1996). In the past two decades, unlike North America, the actual practice of the gender equity in Chinese society was still slow (Cheung, 1996; Lau & Yeung, 1996). Both Chinese men and women continued to endorse more traditional gender identity that was maintained through the socialization practices of parents and educational system (Cheung, 1996; Lau & Yeung, 1996; Levant, Wu, & Fisher, 1996; Liu, 2002).

When Chinese families acculturated into the more gender-equity-conscious Canadian culture, tension within the families increased as acculturated immigrant women were more egalitarian than their immigrant husbands (Kim et al., 2004). Women expected their husbands to contribute more to the performance of traditionally wife-responsible tasks (Kim et al., 2004). The widening gap of gender identity

expectations between immigrant men and women had pressured men to negotiate their male identity (Chua & Fujino, 1999; Kim et al., 2004; Liu, 2002). However, little was known about how past experiences of growing up in a Chinese culture would affect male identity development of these immigrants in the Western culture. The current study investigated the experiences of these Chinese Canadian male immigrants who navigated across two cultures. The aim of the study was to better understand how men first learnt gender identity from their early experiences in Chinese culture, and how this identity later evolved in Canadian culture. The study explored how they made sense of their past, their current attributes as being men, and what they wanted to be in the future.

## **The Study**

As identity development is a process of continual interaction that takes place in complex personal and societal dimensions, a qualitative approach is an appropriate approach to understand how people make sense of their lives through life histories and the changing socio-historical context (Dien, 2000; Maccoby, 2000; Phinney, 2000). This study was guided by a phenomenological approach (Colaizzi, 1978; Giorgi, 1975a; Polkinghorne, 1989) which explored the experiences or phenomenon for people. The phenomenon studied was how men interpreted and made meaning out of their experiences of learning about being men. The lived experiences consisted of conscious past learning about gender identity, their current meanings and future expectations. The participants' subjective experiences and their viewpoints provided the data for understanding the phenomenon from their perspectives.

## ***Participants***

Participants were recruited in a Western Canadian city through advertisement, from a university campus, social, and immigrant service

agencies. Seven men volunteered to participate. Five of them came from the Chinese mainland and two were from Hong Kong. Their age ranged from 31 to 57. They all grew up in Chinese culture and came to Canada at ages ranging from 18 to 33. At the time of the study, they were all Canadian citizens and had been in Canada for five to thirty-four years. All participants were university graduates and four had post-graduate degree. Six participants had further studies in North America. All identified themselves as being heterosexual. Six participants were in their first marriage and one was single. All their spouses were ethnic Chinese women. Two couples were married in Canada, whereas the others were married in China or Hong Kong before migration. All married participants had one or two children. Two families were living with their parents whereas the others were nuclear families. Five participants were working full-time, one was studying, and one was working part-time. Regarding the participants' spouses, three were housewives, one was working full-time, and two were full-time students. Two participants indicated they were Christians, and five reported no religious affiliation.

### ***Procedure***

All interviews were conducted in English by a male interviewer. Each participant was interviewed for an hour with open-ended questions to examine their current experiences of being a man, to recall past influences and incidents regarding their development of the male identity. At the end of the interview, the participants completed a demographic questionnaire. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed to derive descriptive statements of the essential, non-redundant features of the phenomenon (Giorgi, 1975a; Polkinghorne, 1989). It was a complex back-and-forth process with the purpose to reveal the structure and inter-relationships of the data without losing the sense of the whole (Giorgi, 1975a; Polkinghorne, 1989). The research team

consisted of one male and one female researcher who read the transcripts and thematized them from their personal viewpoint (Giorgi, 1975a). The data were analyzed using the four-step procedure of data analysis proposed by Giorgi (1975a, 1985).

First, researchers read through the protocols to get a general sense and identify the natural meaning units as expressed by the participants without reference to the specific study objective. Second, the natural meaning units were examined according to the specific objective of the study (Colaizzi, 1978; Giorgi, 1975a), and those meaning units that had nothing explicit about the research topic were discarded. Only natural meaning units that were agreed by both researchers were extracted to bring into the next step of data analysis. The third step was to tie together related natural meaning units into descriptive statements of non-redundant clusters of themes (Colaizzi, 1978; Giorgi, 1975a). The themes left out particulars of the situation and centered on aspects of male identity development. Finally, those themes that were valid across all participants were reported as a common structure that described the phenomenon (Giorgi, 1975a). These common themes were validated by referring them back to the original protocols to check against interpretation (Colaizzi, 1978). The research team also invited participants to validate the transcripts, and to give feedback on the derived themes so as to improve reliability of the data analysis (Colaizzi, 1978).

### **Results: The Common Story**

Presentation of the results of a phenomenological study can take different ways (Giorgi, 1985; Polkinghorne, 1989). Polkinghorne (1989) suggested a condensed presentation of a general structure of the phenomenon or a longer presentation in case synopses using participants' own words. McAdams (2001) suggested that "identity

itself takes the form of a story, completed with setting, scenes, character, plot and theme” (p. 101). In this study, the common structure of the development of male identity for these seven Canadian Chinese male immigrants comprised of four common themes. These four themes were: (1) feeling a deep sense of responsibility; (2) accepting gender equity with a willingness to compromise; (3) familial events influenced male identity development in adulthood; (4) learning to be a man by searching. While the first three themes exemplified the essence of their male identity, the last theme described the male identity development process which was the focus of this article. The common story presented their male experiences around the “learning to be a man by searching” as the central theme. Quotations from the original transcripts were woven through the descriptive story to substantiate understanding of the lived experiences (Colaizzi, 1978; Creswell, 1998). One participant talked about his learning by searching experience:

When I was small, my parents, they didn't have a very high education. My father was a workaholic; he left for work before I woke up. Sometimes he didn't come home until dinnertime or even past dinnertime. And a lot of times he worked seven days a week, I didn't have much to look up to my father when I was small. He didn't have much time to talk to us, partly because he was very busy trying to make a living, and also he didn't have a very high education. So he didn't really talk to us that much at all. So I don't think he taught us to become what I have become today. It is probably my own searching and my own observation, and my own development.

When they recalled experiences during childhood, the common experience was that they received very little direct teaching about how to be a man from their parents. Half of the participants recalled that their mothers were more preoccupied with their obedience rather than having conversation. Some mothers might explain certain underlying meaning



of life and personal events in some detail. The involvement of father in their parenting was absent and only two participants recalled their father spent adequate time with them. Others described their fathers as busy in making a living for the family, or as not having the necessary knowledge to parent, and usually not talking much to their children. Family was more a place allowing them to observe and learn rather than being taught to prepare for manhood. Yet they still regarded their fathers as their most important role models in childhood. They modeled after the character of their fathers described as being hardworking, persistent, responsible, and self-reliant, and derived their own image of being a man. It was this kind of observational learning that characterized their early journey to learning to be men. One man described this observational learning of how to be a person during childhood:

Well, it is mainly from my observation. Especially my mother, she teaches more by example. She would point out things especially when there are major events in the family say wedding, funeral things like that. She would explain some of those meaning behind some of those practices. So she would give more direct instructions, whereas my father would be the example, just observe how he does things, how he works things out, how to talk with people.

For the two participants who reported spending significant time with their fathers, their interaction with their fathers was often about “how to be a person?”; and gender-related messages were not obvious to them. Their father taught them how to be a person in general rather than specifically as male, eventually they had to learn about gender-related issues by themselves. The following experience was typically shared by these two men:

I learnt my role as a man in the family by myself. My father just taught me how to be a person and it was understood that he and I were men, needless to mention. My father’s top priority was to teach me about

coping with life, have social responsibility, respect others and to get respect, deal with adversity, and attitudes towards life. That's very important to me, even today I think about these ideas when I get some problems. . . . I just take it for granted that these messages are applicable to me as a man. My father did not directly teach me how to be a man as it is so obvious that we are male. I learn how to be a man by myself.

They often had to respond to differences and conflicting circumstances in a changing world. As one participant recalled: "But the world is changing so fast, there are so many things beyond parents' understanding: the knowledge, the technology, all the things happened today, well totally upside down. Personally you review things and reflect things. Many things had been rejected and revised." As they grew up, they had to surpass their parents' expertise and limitations to search for new ideas. For example, one participant recalled the following experience:

When I grow older, then I have more chance to think about how to be a man. My parents and I are in different generation right. So they get less opportunities to go to different cities, they are less educated. And I have more chance to go to different places to meet more people. I think it is also personality because my father is not a very outgoing person, quite a conservative person. He doesn't want to talk too much to other people. For me, I go to different cities to study in universities, and also work in different places. So I experience more things and meet more people than my parents do. When I meet other people, I also compare to them right. In this case, I get a higher standard for myself than my parents do. To be frank, honestly my father is not a talkative person; he just influences me by doing things. What I get influenced from him is from watching what he does. In my impression, he always works overtime, even in the weekend; and also he sacrifices for the family. So what he does gradually influences me. He doesn't really talk too much.

Sometimes when they had a tough time to integrate conflicting notions about masculinity, their parents were unable to provide direction and help. For example, one participant described how he lived through his childhood with his non-masculine personality:

During my childhood, I was described by my parents as a weak-will person, sentimental. I wasn't like a boy or a man; I cry easily. That's not the image of man, being not physically active, as opposite to my sister who was always jumping around. But I was quiet, and I am like that, my sister always got outside and disappeared. Yes, so she is like a boy. There was such a big contrast.... My parents did not try to change me, they just said that was my type, my personality. Sometimes they would blame me for being not successful because of my personality. That type of person, who is sentimental, always hesitating, can't decide on anything, it's weak will, not strong will. Yeah, but they never try to change me, they just explain or criticize, not really criticize but give me feedback.

Family influence continued to decrease as two-thirds of participants left their hometown to elsewhere for secondary education. Other influences such as peers, church, television, radio, and magazines had stronger impact on them. Half of them recalled they searched through others' stories and biographies of great people to learn to be a man, and to read articles in popular magazine to understand more about male and female. They were more active to become the person they desired. Dating experiences and talking with male peers also helped them to form more solid male identity. Four out of the seven participants mentioned some searching experience in exploring their male identity during adolescence. Here was one example:

By the time I was 14 years old, I felt I'm a man, I should be strong. I changed myself consciously in all aspects. Such as I even took cold showers in winter. My dad one time asked me, "Are you using hot water

in bathing?" Because he saw steam coming out from my body. I said, "No, that's cold water." I took heroes and other great man such as political figures Chairman Mao, Premier Chou, and scientist like Einstein as my role models. I liked to read their stories and novels about heroes. These novels described the men to be brave, strong and often challenging themselves.... And I thought a man should be like that.... These biographies and novels had great influences on my character.

Eventually all participants had moved away from their hometown for tertiary education and influences from the family continued to diminish. Some went far to North America for university education. They started to make their own choices and decisions in life. They became involved in social organizations such as student unions and churches, and further absorbed other values of being a man. For example, one participant recalled some experience of this period:

In church, we discussed about behaviors of boys and girls, how male and female should complement each other, so in that sense we had some kind of instruction on gender. Basically the complementary principle influenced my idea of man and woman fitting each other functionally in a family. I also picked up gender information from magazines and newspapers; it's picked up in general reading. I guessed around college age, I learnt about this problem of macho image, the gender image we got in popular film. I got exposure to other different roles or different images of what a male was.

During adulthood, their own family lives dominated these men's experiences of being men. They reported that their current male gender identity was influenced primarily by spouse, children, and events inside their family, but not by influences outside the family. Their interaction with spouses and children created new perspectives to be resolved such as the priorities between career and family. Life events such as marriage

and fatherhood not only gave them a huge sense of responsibility but also created conflicting notions to resolve such as being career-minded persons or family men. The male identity issues became real-life problems when they tried to resolve conflicting personal, spousal, and societal expectations on them as men. The following was a composite story of such struggle:

The first major event was my marriage. Before marriage, I had no idea of how woman thought of or expected from man. When I got married, I knew more about woman, and what she expected of me. After marriage, I felt that it was so complicated and complex to be a man. With my wife, I guessed we learnt to adjust to each other. In marriage, you can't get what you want by fighting, you have to compromise. It's working out with the family members of how to fit together and fill in each other's functions and needs in the family. Then being a father was also a very important thing and was very happy to me. The kids were so important to me. And they made you had more reflection, more realization on love, on people, on life, on the human side of value. And that started changing my focus. I really wanted to spend more time with the children. Perhaps when they grew older, I would go back to spend more time on my second career.

They mentioned that immigration to Canada also influenced them. The egalitarian culture in the Canadian society created a general awareness of gender equity among these Chinese Canadian immigrant men. One participant reflected like this: "I gave up something, totally gave up like the dictatorship in the family, the idea from traditional Chinese society, as I got into the Western world." Besides giving up the attitude of being the dominant gender in the family, they were ready to compromise with spouse, and became more flexible in their gender identities. One participant described his newly found flexible and egalitarian attitude:

I understand that there is the issue of gender equity. For me, it means that man and woman should have the same right and are equal in status. It does not mean man and woman are doing the same thing or sharing duties by half and half. I think every man should find his role according to his personality, ability and interest; and I don't agree that man and woman's roles are fixed by their gender. I feel that the definition of a man should be done according to one's individual character and his own family context. Every person can have their style and is normal and acceptable.

Overall, when these participants were asked to recall their personal past, to perceive the present, and to anticipate the future, there was a theme of continual personal searching for an integrated male identity, prompted by new relationships and events occurred in their life courses and social context during adolescence and adulthood.

## **Discussion**

The personal searching experiences for male identity in the common story carried a strong sense of personal agency (DeCharms, 1968), and self-discovery (Schwartz, 2002; Waterman, 1984). DeCharms (1968) emphasized the individual's ability to develop and maintain distinct self, and Waterman (1984) described self-discovery to mean one's searching of a pre-existing optimal self. The following sections discussed the above phenomenon of male identity development with the existing literature.

### ***Gender Identity Formation During Childhood***

Three important perspectives on gender identity development — the psychoanalytic approach, the socialization theory, and the cognitive theory — were often applied to explain gender identity development among children and adolescent (Golombok & Fivush, 1994; Maccoby,

2000). These theories suggested that gender identity was influenced by direct socialization such as education and reinforcement learning by parents and teachers, and by indirect socialization such as observational learning (Blee & Tickamyer, 1995; Cheung, 1996; Goodwin & Tang, 1996; Lynch & Kilmartin, 1999; McCreary, 1994; Synder, Velasquez, Clark, & Means-Christensen, 1997). In this study, participants did not report substantial explicit gender education from parents and schools. This lack of reported experience could be due to the fact that the interviewer did not ask participants about this specific area, and it was difficult for them to retrieve distant childhood memory. Moreover, it could be further understood from the cultural context that Confucianism, the main source of value in the Chinese culture, was a gendered construction for man for most part of the last two thousand years. One of the main teaching of Confucianism was *zuoren*, which meant becoming competent human beings who had moral characters, good manners, achievement in education, and harmonious social relations; and these were all implicitly supposed to be for man (Lau & Yeung, 1996; Wu, 1996a, 1996b). There was no gender education besides this already gendered cultural norm. The strongly sex-role differentiated Confucian teaching also had clear behavioral gender expectations with rules like “what a man or a woman must behave” (Cheung, 1996). Therefore, gender education was achieved largely through behavioral sanction.

The lack of the father’s involvement in parenting could be termed as the absent father phenomenon (Lynch & Kilmartin, 1999). Those fathers might not be physically missing but often were emotionally absent or silent fathers. This phenomenon is common in a culture that has sharp division of roles such as “men work outside, women work inside,” and father is usually a distant figure in the family (Cheung, 1996; Goodwin & Tang, 1996). The participants revealed some social context behind this absent father phenomenon such as fathers needed to work hard, and many families went through economic and political turmoil in the

past few decades. Others reflected that the personality of their fathers was introverted, and inexpressive. In the past, it was common that Chinese parents did not show their affection because of the fear that they would spoil their children (Ho, 1996; Wu, 1996a). Parents took their responsibilities as moral teachers, transferring value and expectations to their children. They were also less concerned with the psychological and interpersonal development of their children (for example, not allowing boys to show much of their emotions), and these practices often lead to a general lack of emotional skills among boys (Cheung, 1996; Levant, 1996; Murray, 1999; Wu, 1996b). Often Chinese parents wanted their children to be *dongshi*, which meant children understood age equivalent or even mature moral values and interpersonal issues, and emphasized them to observe and learn diligently (Wu, 1996a, 1996b). Consequently, these socialization practice often neglected the creation of personal meaning of being men (Cornish, 1999).

### ***Gender Identity Development During Adolescence***

For many participants who had their gender development projects during adolescence, their gender development during this period seemed to shift from direct socialization to a self-regulatory control of gender-linked behavior with increasing age (Bandura, 1977; Bussey & Bandura, 1992). Cognitive schema theory and social learning theory of gender development (Bandura, 1977; Bem, 1974, 1981; Bussey & Bandura, 1992) suggested that individuals were self-motivated to regulate their behavior so that it conformed to the culture's definition of maleness and femaleness. Adolescents became more active in search of gender identity because of the eruption of genital sexuality in this period (Erikson, 1959; McAdams, 2001). These participants reported having dating experiences, and some of them started their identity projects as both society and the emerging adult were ready to construct a personalized identity in the adult world (McAdams, 2001). The interest



in reading biographies for inspiration and modeling was a common experience among participants. Similar to observing their parents during childhood, adolescents looked for models to follow. Modeling after successful and trustworthy people was perhaps one of the most feasible ways to learn to be a man during adolescence (Bandura, 1977; Bussey & Bandura, 1992; Cunningham, 2001).

### ***Gender Identity Shifts During Adulthood***

There are two different perspectives on the status of male identity development in adulthood. A static perspective views gender identity as being internalized during childhood and adolescent (Gerson & Peiss, 1985). Another more dynamic perspective views gender boundaries as being subjected to challenge and re-negotiation (Bussey & Bandura, 1992; Dien, 2000; Ferree, 1990; Kim et al., 2004; Phinney, 2000). In this study, participants described their current male identities as products of long-term influences from their family, education, learnt value, and their personality, but they also reflected that they had changed gradually in adulthood. It seemed that their earlier learning experience was an important foundation upon which later gender-related practices were built upon. McAdams (2001) described that such integration of self took a step-by-step and scene-by-scene process, and moved forward under a strong desire to integrate new experiences/insight into a more integrated male identity. In this study, participants took steps to balance career and family, to reconstruct boundary of power and authority in the family, to compromise with their spouse, to understand the partner, to involve in parenting so as to have a more integrated male identity. These experiences reflected that their selfhood seemed to be a predominantly relational self of the Oriental culture (Ho, Chan, Peng, & Ng, 2001) that valued harmony in relationship.

However, participants admitted that immigration experience also had major influence in their male identity development. Often when

immigrants faced a more egalitarian Western culture and the reality of having economic disadvantage as being immigrants, it would be hard for them to maintain their former roles as provider of the family, to maintain male privileges, and to deny gender equity (Chua & Fujino, 1999; Kim et al., 2004; Liu, 2002). So despite the endless different ways of constructing one's male identity, social norms, historical context and one's personal history often set the limits for possible choices (Dien, 2000; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Phinney, 2000; Riley, 2003; Zuo, 1997). The search for manhood might come to an end when one becomes successful and confident with mastery experiences over one's role (Bandura, 1977, 1997); however, identity might also appear to be a near-insoluble problem for modern self because of the multiple and dynamic nature of the self in this era (Buchbinder, 1994; Markus & Nurius, 1986; McAdams, 2001).

### **Counseling Implications**

The present study on the male identity development of these Chinese Canadians helped to understand how male identity developed from childhood to adulthood among these men. These Chinese Canadian immigrant men were influenced by their Chinese values learned in their earlier developmental years, yet they also went on to search new definitions of being men as they immigrated to Canada. They were able to develop a more socially adaptive male gender identity that accepted the value of gender equity there. The male experiences in this study contributed to the growing literature of the development of a new psychology of men that was psychologically and socially constructive for both genders.

Experiences of these male Chinese Canadians showed that they were often isolated in their search for personal development, yet they often avoided any social service. There is a need for men to develop a community that can support each other in their search for better male

identities; an open, supportive, affirmative place that men can learn from one another, share their search for manhood, manage male role stress, and acknowledge the identity problem and its many manifestation possibilities. When counseling Canadian Chinese immigrant families with marital or familial problems, it is important for the counselors to be aware of the existence of gender roles conflict, and to help men and women involved to communicate and navigate from power struggle to harmony and balance. With the increasing autonomy-seeking behavior of women among acculturated Chinese Canadian immigrants, there is a need for couples counseling and gender-awareness communication programs to help men and women to bridge this widening gap of gender expectations (Levant, 1996).

Parenting programs in Chinese Canadian community often attract very few male participants. Programs that emphasize and accommodate father involvement would create chances for men to further integrate male identity through developing meaningful male roles in the family (Duindam & Spruijt, 1997; Palm, 1993). These parenting programs often encourage parents to develop positive and strong relationship with their children that help their psychological and identity development. It is also important for parents themselves to model respect in gender relationships, thus preparing their children to have smoother gender identity formation in their later life stages.

People are often socialized according to the dominant social ideology. Progressive ideas and practices beneficial to integrative male gender identity should be made accessible and understandable to immigrants and would support negotiation of healthier gender identities. Clear social messages supporting gender equity and convincing role models in the community can encourage personal change and social transformation (Freeman, 2003). Role modeling and story are powerful ways that influence young adolescents in their search for identities as

they look for examples to follow. It is more helpful for role modeling and mentoring programs to produce a range of masculinities that are made available to boys and young men to negotiate, rather than merely reflect one dominant stereotype (Mac an Ghaill, 1996; Murray, 1999). Searching for manhood may be a life-long process for many as they have an intrinsic desire for knowledge and integration of self to achieve personal meaning and self-esteem. Meaning-centered counseling can be an effective approach to help those who are searching for manhood to take actions that bring personal meaning and integration of selves.

### **Concluding Remarks**

This qualitative study had the limitation that the observation could not be generalized to any other population outside the study sample, and inference could not be drawn on male identity development in general. The current study is also limited that participants were highly educated Chinese Canadian immigrant men from Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland who spoke fluent English. Their experiences might not be the same as the general population of Chinese Canadians and it is necessary to further investigate men's experiences from a wider spectrum of Chinese Canadians. Further studies that differentiate male immigrants from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the Chinese mainland to understand their differences and similarities regarding male identity among the Chinese communities will be valuable. Participants in the interview procedure might try to present a different part of themselves to the interviewer and the experiences reported here might not be their own. The semi-structure interview in this study limits the researchers' ability to investigate other factors related to male identity, since the researchers tried to understand the phenomenon from the participants' subjective experiences. It will be beneficial for future studies to use critical incident techniques so as to investigate other factors that might have impact on male identity development.

Further research on male identity can also take into consideration how the interweaving effects of the family micro-system and the macro-social influences would affect male identity development. For the family micro-system, further research can include voices of the spouse in describing the development of male gender identity as a common family project, and to look into how the inter-gender dialogue affects development of gender identity. Research of gender identity development can take into consideration the bigger picture of their personal identity formation. One theoretical framework suggested is to study identity development using four levels of history including the individual's personal identity history, the concurrent social history, cultural history, and the general history of humanity (Dien, 2000). Overall, this study explored the male identity of Chinese immigrants from a developmental approach of lived experiences, through earlier childhood learning and social experiences during adulthood. The result was a common story of continual search for manhood for a more integrated meaning of being man. Their gender identity development was influenced by their original Chinese values, the current sociocultural context in Canada, and their personalized family life experiences.

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### 尋找男性身分：華人反思成長歷程

本研究利用 Giorgi 的現象學，探討男性如何建立性別角色認同。參加者是一批在中國長大，其後定居於加拿大的加拿大華裔男士。這項研究旨在了解男性如何發展出性別認同，他們對身為男性有何想法，以及他們對未來的展望。結果顯示，參加者透過摸索，學懂成為男性。他們生活在兩個文化的經驗，揭示了他們在中國成長的特徵，以及在加拿大尋找性別認同的旅程。