8. ACHIEVING CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN WILDERNESS RECREATION: A STUDY OF THE CHINESE IN VANCOUVER
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Achieving Cultural Diversity in Wilderness Recreation: A Study of the Chinese in Vancouver

by

Karin Hung

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ABSTRACT

As Canada welcomes immigrants from around the world, planners increasingly strive for policies and initiatives that meet culturally diverse needs. In Greater Vancouver, British Columbia, park planners have directed more attention to wilderness use by ethnic minority groups, particularly the Chinese population. Nowhere in Canada are people of Chinese ancestry more prominent than in Greater Vancouver, where they comprise 47% of the visible minority population and 17% of the total population. However, the rate of Chinese participation in wilderness recreation is less than that of the general population. This exploratory study examines the cultural nuances and institutional barriers that impede Chinese participation in wilderness recreation activities. It is primarily based on 51 in-depth interviews with members of the Chinese community in Greater Vancouver during 2002. Recruitment was by a hybrid convenience-purposive-snowball sampling method, which resulted in a non-random sample. Interview questions addressed views about wilderness, outdoor recreation and wilderness experience, awareness of local recreation opportunities, means to retrieve park information, and preferences for park settings and facilities. The Vancouver Index of Acculturation was used to measure participants' levels of acculturation. Interviews were tape recorded and transcribed, and information from field notes and transcripts were organized into main themes and triangulated with secondary data sources for analysis.

Results indicate that Chinese who are more acculturated to Canadian culture ("High Mainstream Chinese") visit a greater number of parks and are willing to travel a further distance to access them. They also tend to visit parks more often, stay longer, and tend to be attracted to more physically demanding or "hard adventure" activities, whereas less acculturated individuals ("Low Mainstream Chinese") are inclined to more passive outdoor activities. The study points to reasons that explain why Low Mainstream Chinese – particularly recent immigrants – are participating less in wilderness recreation. Factors include fear of the wilderness environment, preference for more highly developed parks, a lack of awareness of wilderness opportunities, and inadequate access to park information. Subtle aspects of the Chinese subcultural identity, such as importance of cleanliness, emphasis on academics, priorities on work, and clannishness, also play a role in Chinese under-participation.

Thus if park planners want to facilitate Chinese use of designated wilderness areas, they should address issues such as safety, level of park development, availability of information, and

awareness of wilderness opportunities in a culturally sensitive way. Doing so would promote more equitable access to a public resource. Increased awareness and appreciation of wilderness by ethnic minority groups may also help garner political support for future conservation initiatives and build a stronger local economy.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 CONTEXT

Planning for diversity is vitally important as Canada continues to welcome immigrants from all around the world. Since 1966, the country's immigrant population has almost doubled, increasing from 2.8 million (15.6% of the total population) to 5.4 million in 2001 (18.4%) (Basavarajappa & Ram, 1999; Statistics Canada 2001a). Between 1996 and 2001 alone, over 477,000 new immigrants arrived in Canada, bringing with them a variety of recreation needs and preferences. Since recreation is presumed to be a basic right of all citizens (Pawlik & Karlis, 1998), policy makers have consciously facilitated ethnic minority access to public recreation programs, events, and facilities, especially in major urban centers, where immigrants tend to settle. School Boards offer adult recreation and hobby courses in a variety of languages. The Vancouver School Board, for instance, has classes in Cantonese, Mandarin, Japanese, and Spanish for immigrants who prefer instruction in their heritage language. Governments allocate public funds to support ethnic non-profit organizations that offer, among other services, recreation programs (e.g. Canadian African Women's Organization in Ottawa). They also allocate funds to support ethnic festivals (e.g. Montreal Asian Heritage Festival, Toronto's Caribana™). Planning departments approve permits and grant other permissions related to building ethno-specific recreation centers (e.g. Jewish Community Center in Vancouver). In spite of these efforts, ethnic minority populations are still under-represented in many recreation activities. Outdoor recreation, particularly wilderness recreation, is one example (BC Parks Research Services, 1991; Floyd, 1999; Gramann, 1996).

It is uncertain whether ethnic minority groups are being excluded from participating in wilderness activities or whether they are simply choosing to participate in other forms of recreation. If wilderness park managers are indeed excluding ethnic minorities – albeit without intent and unknowingly – then the situation should be corrected. Parks are a public trust. Park managers have the responsibility of meeting the public's needs. They should not only determine whether current recreation opportunities and park services meet visitor expectations, but also mitigate the barriers that prevent participation among non-users. If ethnic minority groups simply do not aspire to participate in wilderness recreation and choose other types of leisure activities, park managers are still faced with a challenge. How will park managers and wilderness lobby groups receive enough political support for future conservation initiatives if ethnic minority groups are apathetic towards wilderness values? It is essential that we

determine why ethnic minorities are participating less than the general population in wilderness recreation and encourage use of wilderness parks by culturally diverse groups.

Over the last forty years, researchers have developed a number of theories on ethnic under-participation in outdoor recreation (e.g. ethnicity theory, Washburne, 1978; marginality theory, Scott & Munson, 1994). While there is general agreement that ethnic minority groups visit wilderness parks less and participate less in certain outdoor recreation activities than the general population, there is little consensus regarding the *causes* of this phenomenon (McDonald & Hutchison, 1987). Few researchers have sought to develop a more comprehensive, explanatory theory of variations in recreation participation among different ethnic groups, especially for wilderness recreation activities. Moreover, most research has focused on African-Americans (e.g. Phillip, 1995; West, 1989) and Hispanic-Americans (e.g. Carr & Williams, 1993; Floyd & Gramann, 1993). The present research aims to strengthen earlier claims of ethnic under-participation in outdoor recreation by examining the Chinese culture group. The researcher is hoping to make a theoretical and social contribution by developing a more comprehensive explanation of wilderness under-use appropriate for ethnic minority groups in Canada, with specific reference to Chinese populations.

Nowhere in Canada is the Chinese population more prominent than in the Greater Vancouver area of British Columbia. The 2001 Canadian Census shows that almost two million people reside in Greater Vancouver. Of these, over 342,000 are of Chinese origin. This constitutes 47% of the visible minority population in the area and 17% of the total population[1] (Statistics Canada, 2001b).

While the size of the Chinese population in the Lower Mainland is significant, this is not reflected in park visitorship. BC Parks Research Services (1991) reports that 37 percent of Asians and East Indians have never used a provincial park. This is almost three times the percentage of non-park visitors in the general population. Provincial and regional park authorities have also found that in general, the Asian population has lower rates of participation in outdoor recreation activities than the Euro-Canadian population (Ibid, 1991; Rethink Group & Praxis Pacific, 1994). The *causes* of these recreation behaviour patterns have yet to be determined. Greater

[1] As compared to Toronto Census Metropolitan Area's Chinese population which constitutes 23% of visible minorities and just under 9% of the total population. Figures for Calgary are 31% and 5.5% respectively.

Vancouver thus provides a suitable context for examining the reasons that might be inhibiting park visitation and wilderness recreation participation by the Chinese community.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTION AND OBJECTIVES

The research question formulated for this research is as follows:

> *Why is the Chinese population in Greater Vancouver less inclined to visit wilderness-oriented parks and participate in wilderness-oriented outdoor recreation activities as compared to the general population?*

The specific objectives of this research are:

1. To determine the relative strengths of competing theories of ethnic variations in outdoor recreation participation.
2. To investigate the extent, pattern, and nature of visitation to wilderness-oriented parks by the Chinese in Greater Vancouver.
3. To understand the relationship between the level of acculturation to Canadian culture and wilderness-oriented recreation behaviour.
4. To illustrate and explain any subcultural influences that may be acting as "barriers" to Chinese visitation to wilderness-oriented parks and participation in wilderness-oriented recreation activities.
5. To recommend to park policy-makers how to address equity issues, marketing, and wilderness education.

1.3 SUMMARY OF METHODS

Three conditions prompted the use of a qualitative methodology in this research. Firstly, there is little known information about the topic and previous research is scarce. Secondly, the study examines a heterogeneous community where individuals would have varying perspectives. Finally, there was the possibility of unexpected circumstances that may require slight changes in the research design at any time. In such situations, a qualitative methodology is appropriate (Babbie, 2001; Creswell, 1994; Neuman, 2000; Taylor & Bogden, 1984).

Fifty-three qualitative interviews were conducted with Vancouver ethnic Chinese during the summer of 2002 to examine their attitudes towards visiting wilderness-oriented parks and their recreation preferences. Participants included members of Vancouver's Chinese community and two key informants from a local Chinese social service agency and an Asian environmental club. Results were sorted into coding categories and quantified, thus allowing themes and

patterns to be identified and analysed. Secondary data sources were reviewed to complement and enhance the information from the interviews.

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

This research will contribute to the planning profession by expanding the knowledge of park planning in Canada, particularly in the area of cultural diversity in wilderness recreation. Diversity issues within park and recreation management have received growing interest in recent years. Researchers and practitioners (e.g. Goldsmith, 1994; Hollister & Hodgson, 1996; Kraus, 1987) have addressed the need to make special efforts to attract and serve ethnic minority groups and have put forth recommendations to increase their representation in recreation and park programs. However, few *empirical* studies on this topic have been conducted in Canada, giving professional planners little on which to base their recommendations. The author will make recommendations for park policy makers, including strategies dealing with equity of access to park resources, marketing, and wilderness education. Research findings may also be of interest to park agencies in other Canadian cities with significant Chinese populations, such as Calgary and Toronto.

This thesis will contribute to the park planning literature by surveying books and articles from a variety of disciplines for subcultural explanations for under-participation in wilderness recreation activities and summarizing consistently emerging themes. This will help park planners and researchers not only understand the complexities of under-participation by ethnic minority groups, but also establish the necessary resources to facilitate ethnic use of designated wilderness areas. Furthermore, it is hoped that the research methodology can be applied to Chinese populations in other cities, to different ethnic groups, or to other types of leisure and recreation activities.

The research addresses a notable gap in the professional planning literature. Practising planners have made only sparse contributions to the professional literature on the topics of multicultural planning and park planning. A keyword search through Plan Canada's consolidated index yielded only nine 'hits' on "multicultural" or "diversity" since inception of the journal in 1959. Seven of these articles resulted from a one-day diversity conference held at York University, Ontario and were published in a special issue in 2000. There was only one hit for "immigrant". There were only five relevant articles on "parks" and no hits on "protected areas" or "wilderness". In contrast, there were 129 hits on "urban design", 100 for "land use", 96

for “housing”, and 64 for “transportation”. The Journal of the American Planning Association (JAPA) did not fare much better. In the cumulative index of volumes dated 1958-1983, there were a number of articles related to “discrimination”, “minority groups” and “racial segregation”, but no references to multiculturalism or diversity in planning[2]. The six articles related to parks and recreation were classified under the obscure subject heading “open space”. In the JAPA web index of volumes dated 1988 to present, there were only three references on “multicultural”, one article on “parks”, and one article on “wilderness”.

Finally, this research may lead to environmental benefits and contribute to the local community. If it assists park managers in reducing barriers to participation in wilderness-oriented parks and stimulating Chinese interest in environmental and backcountry issues, there may be increased political support for future conservation initiatives. There may also be an increase in both local and out-of-area tourism, thus stimulating the economy. Furthermore, increased use of these parks may lead to greater demand for outdoor recreation related products to the benefit of local retailers.

1.5 KEY DEFINITIONS

Two complex terms used throughout this thesis warrant brief definitions: *Chinese* and *wilderness*. No definition of *Chinese* is clear and concise. The decision as to whether an individual or a group is Chinese or not will undoubtedly vary according to whom one speaks, including the individuals themselves or the societies in which Chinese people reside (Poston, 2002). Pan (in Poston, 2002) offers an intriguing model of the Chinese people, whom she represents in a series of four concentric circles. The permanent population in the People’s Republic of China occupies the innermost circle. Chinese in Hong Kong and Taiwan, and Chinese nationals residing or studying abroad occupy the second circle. The third circle contains the “hyphenated Chinese” (e.g. Chinese-Canadians, Sino-Thais). These individuals are of Chinese descent, but have no ancestral loyalties because of their non-Chinese citizenship and political allegiances. The outermost circle consists of people with Chinese ancestry but who no longer identify as Chinese. As a result of intermarriage or other means of assimilation, they have “melted into another people”. In the context of this study, the term Chinese refers mostly to the third and fourth groups (individuals with Chinese ancestry and

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[2] This is representative of the difference between Canadian and US immigration policies. Whereas Canada passed the Multicultural Act in 1971 to allow “all members of Canadian society to preserve,

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Canadian citizenship) and to a lesser extent, the second group (individuals with Chinese ancestry and dual Chinese/Canadian citizenship, as with many recent immigrants).

The term *wilderness* is also highly subjective and difficult to define. In his survey of the use of the word wilderness from its earliest translation from the Latin Bible (e.g. the King James Bible, 1611[3]) to its appearance in more recent works, Nash (in McDonald, 2001) finds that in most cases, wilderness is defined as uncultivated lands populated with wild animals but void of human inhabitants. However, the *precise* conditions that must be present to constitute wilderness are unclear. According to Lutz, Simpson-Housley & De Man (1999), individuals from different backgrounds will vary in their interpretations. As Nash (2001) notes, "one man's wilderness may be another's roadside picnic ground" (p.1). This research treats wilderness as an idea or state of mind, rather than a material object or physical condition. Interview participants were only provided with a broad definition of "wilderness-oriented parks": parks that are further away from the city, in a more natural setting, and have fewer man-made features. The ways participants visualized these spaces are likely as varied as the participants themselves – that is, "wilderness-oriented parks" is respondent-defined.

1.6 THESIS ORGANIZATION

Chapter 2 outlines theories on cultural differences in outdoor recreation participation that have emerged over the past four decades. It also identifies the limitations and shortcomings of the existing frameworks and research. Drawing upon literature in recreation and leisure studies, environmental philosophy, Asian studies, religious studies, psychology, geography, and park planning, Chapter 3 proposes reasons why Chinese populations might be less inclined to participate in wilderness-oriented recreation activities. Chapter 4 articulates the research methods used in this study and discusses how face-to-face interviews were used as the primary means to realize the objectives of this qualitative study. The main results in the form of themes, issues, and patterns of behaviour arising from the interviews are identified in Chapter 5, followed by a critical discussion in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 offers some conclusions on wilderness recreation participation by the Greater Vancouver Chinese community, and on cultural diversity

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enhance and shape their cultural heritage" (Qadeer, 2000, p. 16), the US has maintained a "melting pot" policy, encouraging immigrants to assimilate to the American mainstream.

[3] Though the King James Bible was not the first attempt translate the Bible into easily understood English, it was the first to receive Church and State support, and has been by far the most successful.

in planning in general. It also proposes future research initiatives and recommendations for park planners and community organizations.