Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

of

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MSc (University of Victoria, 2014)
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“Longitudinal Effects of Congruence and Incongruence between Ideal and Actual Functioning on Chinese Immigrants’ Psychological Well-Being”

Department of Psychology

Thursday, August 2, 2018
1:00PM
Clearihue Building
Room B021

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Catherine Costigan, Department of Psychology, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Erica Woodin, Department of Psychology, UVic (Member)
Dr. Karen Kobayashi, Department of Sociology, UVic (Outside Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. Priscilla Lui, Department of Psychology, Southern Methodist University

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Patricia MacKenzie, Department of Social Work, UVic

Dr. Stephen V. Evans, Acting Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

The adjustment of immigrants has been an important area of research over the past few decades. The current literature on immigrants’ psychological well-being typically focuses on identifying specific contextual, interpersonal, and intrapersonal risks that contribute to negative adjustment. However, the mechanisms through which maladjustment occurs are less well-understood. In addition, less research has focused on understanding immigrants’ hopes, aspirations, and expectations for themselves and the extent to which they are meeting these ideals. According to existing literature on psychological incongruence, failure to fulfill one’s ideals can trigger dejection-related feelings, such as shame, and these feelings are closely connected with negative psychological well-being. In collectivistic cultures such as the Chinese culture, where much of an individual’s identity is dependent on close relationships, incongruence can be conceptualized both within an individual (e.g., I failed to achieve my ideals) and in relation to one’s significant other (e.g., My child failed to achieve my ideals for him/her). Informed by theories of psychological incongruence, this dissertation aimed to study Chinese immigrant parents’ psychological well-being, focusing on incongruence in two broad domains: 1) occupational and educational achievement; and 2) cultural adjustment, as well as incongruence within oneself and in relation to one’s child. The general hypothesis was that incongruence between ideal and actual functioning across the domains studied would predict a decrease in psychological well-being over time, as represented by lower self-esteem and higher depressive symptoms. Participants were 182 Chinese immigrant families (mothers, fathers, and adolescent-aged children) residing in British Columbia, assessed twice with 18 months apart. A combination of polynomial regression with response surface analysis and linear multiple regression methods were used to evaluate the extent to which the direction and magnitude of congruence and incongruence between ideal and actual functioning predicted change in parents’ psychological well-being over time. Results provided partial support for the hypothesized relations, particularly within the domains of Chinese parents’ own Canadian acculturation and their children’s academic functioning. Support was also found within the domain of parents’ own occupational functioning, but this was the case only for mothers. The hypothesized relations within the domain of children’s Chinese cultural orientation were generally not supported. Overall, the results highlight the importance of understanding immigrant adults’ adjustment process using a goodness-of-fit, family-oriented approach. Clinicians and settlement workers are encouraged to consider cultural and personal ideals when supporting immigrants in their adjustment process, as well as fostering successful coping with the incongruence that can arise in parent-child dyads. Finally, immigration policies should continue to address structural barriers that prevent immigrants from achieving their ideals, such as in the domain of employment.