

IMMIGRATING TO CANADA FOR A “BETTER LIFE”:  
A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON FIRST GENERATION VIETNAMESE IMMIGRANT  
YOUTHS IN CANADA IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

by

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**ABSTRACT**

Through five in-depth interviews, this research paper examines factors influencing recent Vietnamese immigrant youths’ decisions to come to Canada, and their initial settlement experiences upon arrival in the first three years. This study mainly focuses on the context of departure, exploring the youths’ every-day interactions with their social surroundings in Vietnam, prior to their arrival in Canada. This study found that Vietnamese immigrant youths immigrate to Canada to obtain a ‘better life’. The three main factors influencing their decisions to come are: (a) their interactions with overseas Vietnamese (including relatives and non-relatives), (b) the Western media, and (c) foreign tourists and tourist sites in Vietnam. This study also found that there are two factors affecting their opinions on whether or not they have obtained a ‘better life’ after coming to Canada: (a) their socio-economic status in Vietnam compared to Canada, and (b) their level of paid and domestic work responsibilities in Vietnam compared to Canada. This research suggests that the ideas transmitted about Canada are not always accurate, leading to immigrants’ misperceptions of Canada. The study utilized the theories of symbolic interactionism and transnationalism, along with push/pull theory of migration, to help shed light on the complexities of this migration phenomenon.

*Keywords:* Vietnamese immigrant youths/young adults, pre-departure influences, symbolic interactionism, transnationalism, push/pull theory

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*Dành tặng Ba Má yêu mến:*

*Con xin cảm tạ Ba Má đã cho con có cơ hội để tiếp tục hành trình và đã không ngưng hỗ trợ con trên con đường học tập suốt mấy năm qua. Con thương Ba Má rất nhiều*

*- Út*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The first wave of Vietnamese immigrants to Canada arrived in the late 1970s to early 1980s after South Vietnam fell to the Communists of North Vietnam in 1975 following 16 years of civil war (Dorais, n.d.). Many citizens of South Vietnam left by boat or as refugees to escape the repressive political system, as well as to improve their impoverished conditions due to the economic downturn that Vietnam experienced after the war. In spring 1975 alone, at least 150,000 people left Vietnam. Most of them went to Cambodia, the United States, France, and Australia, and around 3,000 were admitted to Canada (Dorais n.d). Since then, there has been a continuous flow of Vietnamese immigrants to Canada as refugees, international students, skilled workers, and most commonly, through family and group sponsorships (Dorais n.d). By 1991, the number of newly arrived Vietnamese immigrants to Canada quickly grew to 141,113 people (Dorais n.d). This was also the year that Canada tightened the immigration gates (Dorais n.d). Even so, Vietnamese immigrants continued entering Canada, although at a slower rate than before as the population had only increased by roughly 10,000 people ten years later, and by 2001 there were around 150,000 Vietnamese people in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2007). Based on 2001 Canadian Census, although the Vietnamese population accounted for approximately only 1% of the total Canadian population, 70% of all Vietnamese Canadians were born outside of Canada (Statistics Canada, 2007).

It is no surprise that research on Vietnamese immigrants in Canada is sparse, as they are not a large group in Canada. However, most research on the Vietnamese in Canada focuses on the settlement and integration experiences, especially of the cohort that came in the late 1970s to early 1980s, while works on the context of departure are limited (Lam, 1985; Dorais, Chan & Indra, 1988; Nguyen, 2009). Contemporary studies on Vietnamese immigrants in North America are mostly American-based, and most of them deal with second-generation Vietnamese immigrants (Dinh, 2006; Phan, 2003; Pyke, 2000; Rootham, 2008; Yoosun, He & Harchi, 2008). In general, there is a lack of research on recent first-generation Vietnamese immigrants to Western countries. Also, as opposed to forced migration due to political conflicts in the past, there are currently more Vietnamese immigrants departing Vietnam based on voluntary reasons. Thus, it is important to examine what these reasons may be. In this study, I am

specifically interested in the factors that may influence the decisions of Vietnamese immigrant youth and young adults to choose Canada as a receiving country, especially when past literature has shown the many downsides of immigrating to Canada such as racism and integration struggles that new immigrants face (Lew, 2004; Olmedo, 2003; Pyke & Dang, 2003).

As noted by Dorais (n.d), there are three main groups that are under researched among Vietnamese immigrants in Canada: Vietnamese women, youth and young adults, and the elderly. Thus, I would like to contribute by studying one of these under researched groups: Vietnamese immigrant youth. I would like to analyze how Vietnamese immigrant youth construct notions and perspectives regarding the lifestyle, culture, and society of Canada (as well as the Western societies), and in turn how these notions influence their decision to leave Vietnam and to immigrate to Canada. The questions I would like to explore are: What factors influenced these youth to immigrate? Are the main factors consistent among youths or are there discrepancies among the factors between the youths? What are the push and pull factors? How does their social location play a role in affecting their decision to immigrate? My hypothesis is that family, media, and their interactions with tourists from Canada play an important role in affecting their decision to immigrate to Canada, in addition to their social location specifically their socio-economic status. The data that I will be collecting are the life histories of the participants, based on interviews. This data includes their past experiences, their thoughts, perspectives, interpretations and opinions relating to their decision to come to Canada.



## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite the major gaps in the literature on Vietnamese immigrants in Canada (described above), these studies provide essential background knowledge in understanding the general immigration experiences of Vietnamese immigrants. A further common finding among previous works on Vietnamese immigrants in general is that the immigration experience not only alters the immigrants' identities, but also their modes of thinking and actions, which in turn alter their relationships within the family. As agreed by all authors, these changes are all shaped and influenced by new social networks (Freeman, 2001; Olmedo, 2003; Pyke & Dang, 2003; Qin, 2006).

What have been the main motives for immigration to North America? Freeman (2001) found that most Vietnamese immigrants decided to go to America because they felt that they could improve their living conditions and "social mobility" in American culture by adopting American ideas (p. 12). As one of his participants explained, "the Vietnamese teach you to accept your destiny, be satisfied with what you have" in contrast with American values focused on "individual freedom" to improve oneself, to work harder to have a "good life" (Freeman, 2001, p. 13). This was evident for most immigrants from third world countries such as Vietnam, Mexico, and China who moved to first world countries, such as America and Canada (Freeman, 2001; Magat, 1999; Olmedo, 2003; Qin, 2006). These works were of much relevance to my study regarding the possible reasons and factors involved in how immigrants construct an idealized notion of the Canadian society.

In regards to one's ethnic identity there is an ongoing debate between scholars on the issue of whether ethnic identity remains unchanged or not. Magat (1999) argues that despite the differences of ethnicities, immigration experiences, and perspectives on what constitutes "home", immigrants are strongly attached to their country of birth and they never lose their "ethnic identities" (p. 137). However, ethnic identity is "dynamic, situational, multilayered and multidirectional" (Pyke & Dang 2003, p. 147). Pyke and Dang (2003) also showed that when submerged in a new environment, common racial beliefs and stereotypes of the dominant society affect the youth's identity formation (p. 168). Olmedo's (2003) literature on accommodation and resistance of Latinos in America further states that surviving in a

different culture requires changing one's ways of thinking and behaving (p. 373). Being able to adapt to new customs, language and values are also important (Olmedo, 2003, p. 373). However, for these Latino immigrants, there is a conflict of trying to maintain their country's values, while affirming American cultural values (Olmedo, 2003, p. 304). Thus, they adapt by resisting these norms by "carving out a space where Latino values and perspectives can be affirmed or coexist with different ones" (Olmedo, 2003, p. 374). This issue is relevant to my current research as it explains how ethnic identity is affected and constructed based on different social and cultural factors, which in turn aided my understanding of how these factors could shape and alter the perspectives of my group of youth.

Previous works also found that young immigrants face enormous changes in their familiar environment and supportive network of extended family and friends (Qin, 2006). They also face struggles as they experience racial discrimination and threats to their ethnic identity (Pyke & Dang, 2003; Hertzberg, 1998; Lew, 2004; Olmedo, 2003). This is significant to my research because these studies discuss the importance of social networks as a factor in affecting their immigration experience. These works also show how the immigration experience changes youths' identity construction. This is also significant for my research because it helps me understand young people's initial settlement experiences and their perspectives on how they might view and understand Canada after permanently settling for a few years.

The struggles of immigrant youth are most prominent in the education environment where they face discrimination from other students which causes them to feel left out. To accommodate or assimilate to these struggles, they aligned their position as a minority to other minorities who carried the same characteristics as them, such as low economic status and low levels of comprehension of English, while at the same time differentiating and distancing themselves from non-immigrants (Lew, 2004; Olmedo, 2003). Pyke and Dang's (2003) analysis of the terms 'FOB' (fresh off the boat) and 'whitewashed' through 184 in-depth interviews with second generation Vietnamese and Korean youths found that youths internalize mainstream ethnic and racial stereotypes and develop negative stereotypes within their own ethnic and racial community based on these dominant stereotypes. The term 'FOB' refers to someone

who is “too ethnic” and ‘whitewashed’ refers to someone who is “too assimilated” (Pyke & Dang, 2003, p. 149). In both cases, these terms are perceived as negative stereotypes and carry characteristics similar to dominant stereotypes of Asian people. For example, the term ‘FOB’ is used to label someone who has foreign English accent, who cannot speak English well, who is ignorant of American culture and society, and only partakes in their own ethnic and cultural activities and surrounds themselves with only individuals of their own ethnic background (Pyke & Dang, 2003, p. 158). This term is used to label others in a way of viewing them as subordinate to the labeler.

Thus, as stated by Pyke and Dang (2003):

Racial inequality shapes the way that the oppressed think of themselves and other members of the group. By accepting and internalizing mainstream racist values[...]subordinates, often without a conscious awareness of doing so, justify the oppression of their group with a belief in their own inferiority (p. 151).

Lew’s (2004) findings on the relationship between Korean high school students and high rates of drop-outs reveal that these students “associated ‘successful’ Asian and Korean with whiteness, while aligning their own experiences marked by poverty and racism with other working-class racial minorities” (p. 304). This is significant to my research because these studies discussed the effects of immigration on immigrants’ relationships with their friends at school.

I found that most research mainly addresses factors that negatively affect immigration experiences and rarely mentions positive factors. Positive aspects are important to know because it helps us understand what may lead to a successful settlement experience. For example, Hertzberg (1998) explains that factors shaping immigrant students’ positive immigration experiences include having high self-esteem as this impacts their perception of success, and being optimistic as this helps boost one’s confidence (p. 398). These characteristics are helpful when encouraged by educators at school through creating a safe environment, and giving positive feedbacks to the students (Hertzberg, 1998, p. 400).

Aside from educators, Qin (2006) found that current immigration research suggests that family is the main agent of socialization that affects young immigrants positively in their immigration experience by acting as a “buffer” against external threats by “preserving culture, language, and ties to the ethnic

community [which] facilitate upward social mobility in immigrant children” (p. 163-64). This is because family ethnic characteristics and the involvement of families in ethnic communities could indirectly channel young people away from associations with negative social groups (Bankston III & Zhou, 1997, p. 523). From the research demonstrated above, it is evident that school and family environments play critical roles in affecting immigrant students’ immigration experiences.

Knowledge produced in regards to the Vietnamese immigrants in Canada is indeed sparse. Although many works discussed above deal with a different immigrant population such as the Chinese immigrants studied by Qin (2006), and Latinos studied by Olmedo (2003), I was able to apply their main findings to my own group of study, regarding issues such as the struggles of adaptation in a new community, and the effects this has on one’s identity construction.

### **3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Having a solid underlying theoretical foundation helps guide and frame the research in a clear direction and makes it easier for the readers to understand the author's interpretations of the results. For this research, I will be using the broader theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism as the foundation to analyze my findings as well as to help understand the participants' day-to-day interactions with their social surroundings and what influences them. I will also use the theory of transnationalism to understand the participants' global relationships and interactions, and the push-pull theory which would help draw out the general factors that affect the participants' decision to migrate to Canada.

#### **3.1 Symbolic Interactionism: Self, Social Objects, Social Problems, and Social Identities**

One of the major theoretical frameworks that guide my research is the symbolic interactionist approach. This framework attempts to explain the process of socialization by studying the personal life and daily interactions of individuals (Sandstorm, 2006). This framework is important in understanding the factors that shape Vietnamese immigrant youths' decision to come to Canada, and their before and after views on Canada because it provides a micro-level understanding of the day-to-day interactions with their surroundings as well as helps explain how one's perspectives may change overtime. The symbolic interactionist concepts that were useful in guiding my analysis were the concepts of the self, social objects and social problems, and social identities.

##### **3.1.1 The Self**

The concept of the self is important because it helps us understand that Vietnamese immigrant youth are continuously interacting and being influenced by their surroundings. George Herbert Mead made the strongest contribution to this analysis in his discussion of the development of the self and self-consciousness. According to Mead, self-consciousness arises within a conversation of gestures as "individuals begin to reflect on and interpret environmental stimuli as having some significance for conduct" (March, 2000, p. 362). Hence, Mead defines the self as a reflexive process that is always changing and is an object to itself (Mead, 1934). It also requires taking the roles of others onto oneself in order to develop one's self-construction (Mead, 1934, p. 254). Thus, he viewed the self as fluid and

always changing and heavily shaped and influenced by social objects and social problems. Thus, we can understand that young adults' perspectives are also in constant flux, depending on their social surroundings. Thus, it is also evident that social factors are important as they influence the Vietnamese immigrant youths' decisions to come to Canada as well as their perspectives on Canada.

### **3.1.2 Social Objects & Social Problems**

A social object is referred to as a physical entity, a mental construct, idea, or other people (Sandstorm, 2006). Social objects help individuals gain social meanings through the active interaction with these objects, which help them make sense of the world around them (Sandstorm, 2006). This suggests that Vietnamese immigrants develop ideas on Canada and Western societies based on their social interactions with other individuals and social objects. In this case, it could be individuals from a different country, class, or status, as this allows them to compare themselves with the 'other'. A social problem refers to a halt in our daily actions or an intervention into a daily habitual activity (Sandstorm, 2006). This could be an idea, an act, or a physical entity. Herbert Blumer (1971) argues that social problems are good because they lead to reflective thinking which leads to the emergence of social change (p. 298). Without these factors, symbolic interactionists would argue that a self cannot exist.

### **3.1.3 Social Identities**

Another significant symbolic interactionist is Irving Goffman. He believes that individuals have more than one social identity and more than one 'self' (Goffman, 1963). Social identities are what individuals describe themselves in different situations (Goffman, 1963). This includes one's gender, ethnicity, race, religion and age, as well as one's role in a situation such as a leader or a follower. However, symbolic interactionists argue that these identities simultaneously exist with one another, no matter what the situation is – this is called "intersectionality" (Villa, 2011, p. 177). People are influenced by "agents of socialization" (March, 2000, p. 360). This includes friends, family members, institutions and the media. Goffman argues that all social identities are acquired, maintained, and altered through different contexts (Goffman, 1963). This helps us to understand that Vietnamese immigrants' identities are influenced by other individuals, institutions and the media. While their identities are influenced by

these ‘agents of socialization’, their ideas of regarding the identities of individuals from Western societies are also affected. Thus, we can understand ideas and notions that Vietnamese immigrants formulate on Canadian society and culture are constructed in interaction with surrounding individuals, as well as the media and institutions.

### **3.2 Transnationalism**

Another important theory that is useful to guide my findings is transnationalism. This theory is used to understand the process of how individuals interact with each other across borders.

Transnationalism is the process of multiple linkages, networks, and interactions of global flows that connect people from cross borders between nation states (Schiller, Basch & Blanc-Szanton, 1992; Wong & Satzewich, 2006). A central feature of transnational social formations are structures or systems of relationships. This perspective is useful in understanding how Vietnamese immigrants develop their perspectives on Canada, while in Vietnam, through interaction with individuals from other countries, in this case is Canada, and other core (Western) countries of immigration. These individuals include family members, relatives and friends who immigrate to Canada but return to Vietnam to visit. These Vietnamese immigrants are known as overseas Vietnamese as they are ethnic Vietnamese who are living outside of their country (King & Nguyen, 2002). These individuals may also be transmigrants because they develop and maintain relations (familial, economic, religious or social) across nation-state borders (Schiller et al., 1992).

When transmigrants interact on a transnational space with individuals across different borders, the ideas and cultures of each side are being exchanged between them and affect one another (Schiller et al., 1992). However, in the context of Vietnamese people interacting with overseas Vietnamese in Canada and with tourists from other core countries, this exchange relationship is not equal. Rather, it is mostly unidirectional as the ideas and culture of overseas Vietnamese and tourists affect and influence Vietnamese locals more than vice versa (Schiller et al., 1992). Thus, transnational relationships in this context reinforce hierarchies and inequalities. This is because there is a greater flow of ideas and culture from the core country going to the periphery country than the other way around (Schiller et al., 1992).

Thus, we can understand that Vietnamese locals' construct of Canada is greatly influenced by the ideas and culture of Vietnamese immigrants from Canada, as well as other tourists from core countries.

Transnationalism cannot be understood apart from the global capitalist system. The intrusion of large scale businesses from core countries into periphery countries and the importation of goods and factories of global corporations into these countries have created a displaced, underemployed labour force (Schiller et al., 1992). This economic dislocation also created the displacement of people, who as migrants seek work both locally and globally outside of their birthplace. This relocation may cause them to be physically separated from their family members, and this may lead them to become transmigrants as they maintain transnational ties and linkages with their family members through transnational practices such as sending remittances, keeping frequent telephone contacts, or going back to their country to visit once in a while (Levitt, 2004). Thus, transnational theory helps us understand that the ideas and culture of core countries greatly influence how Vietnamese young adults develop a perspective of what constitutes as a 'better life' as they maintain transnational linkages with Vietnamese immigrants in Canada or other countries.

### **3.3 Push-Pull Theory**

The push-pull theory falls under the neoclassical approach which is based mainly on monetary calculations and economic factors. It also views the decision to migrate as "a deliberate and conscious effort to increase real income and improve welfare" (Sirojudin, 2009, p. 703). It is based on the assumption that "individuals and families will not emigrate against their will" (Sirojudin, 2009, p. 703). This is relevant to my group of participants in terms of exploring how voluntary their families' decision to migrate was.

Factors that individuals would take into consideration when migrating to another country are: "(a) the differences in cost of living between the original and the host (destination) countries, (b) the differences in labor wages, (c) political and economic changes, (d) differences in demographic structure, (e) technological processes, and (f) the development of international trade" (Sirojudin, 2009, p. 708). Thus, push factors would include low living standards, lack of economic opportunities, and political



repression, while pull factors include a comparatively higher standard of living, higher wages, more economic opportunities, and political freedom in the receiving country. On a micro level, people migrate to maximize their income, reduce insecurity and obtain higher education (Sirojudin, 2009). For individuals, maximizing their standard of living is the key goal. On a macro level, people generally move from countries with lower wages to countries with higher wages (Sirojudin, 2009).

From this theory, we can understand that for Vietnamese immigrant young adults who migrate to Canada based on voluntary reasons, economic factors may hold a great influence on their decision and that they generally come to Canada for better economic opportunities and to maximize their standard of living.

#### **4. RESEARCHING VIETNAMESE IMMIGRANT YOUNG ADULTS**

In my research I will explore Vietnamese immigrant young adults' current thoughts on their decisions to come to Canada after being settled for some period of time, so that they can reflect and compare their views on Canada then and now. This also includes exploring their construction of their perspectives on Canada prior to immigrating. My hypothesis is that family, media, and their interactions with tourists from Canada play an important role in affecting their decision to immigrate to Canada, in addition to their social location such as their low socio-economic status. The data that I will be collecting are the life histories of the participants, based on interviews. This data includes their past experiences, their thoughts, perspectives, interpretations, and opinions relating to their decision to come to Canada.

##### **4.1 Research Methods**

The data were collected through conducting qualitative in-depth interviews. This is a flexible form of eliciting information from individuals to understand issues, experiences, and behaviours of individuals (Bryman & Teevan, 2005). This is an interpretive approach that allows for flexibility and openness in the collection process since it is less concerned with a standardized structure, and is interested in understanding the individual meanings and experiences of each participant as social reality is subjective (Bryman & Teevan, 2005).

One of the advantages of in-depth interviews is that the researcher can understand sensitive issues, experiences, and behaviours, things that a questionnaire cannot extract (Bryman & Teevan, 2005). Although interviews are time-consuming, it would allow me to gain a detailed understanding of the participants' experiences that cannot be obtained through questionnaires or surveys where the questions are short and rigid and answers are limited. My study is focused on the unique individuality of the participants, so the most suitable method would be qualitative interviews because it would allow me to grasp the participants' point of view, rather than content analysis per se, where the researcher does not fully interact with the participants and relies on secondary sources.

Regarding the format of my interviews, I had semi-structured interviews as opposed to unstructured interviews because it would allow me to ask many questions that are specific to my topic, yet

still leaving much leeway and agency for how the respondents would like to reply (Bryman & Teevan, 2005). I had an interview guide (See Appendix II) that had three main questions to help start the interview session, as well as steer it in the direction needed. The questions were:

1. What influenced you to come to Canada?
2. After living in Canada, do you think that your life here meets the expectations you formed before immigration? Please tell me about how or how not.
3. Do you want to add anything more?

I also had three probing questions which were:

1. Do you think the media portrayal of Canada had influence on your decision to come?
2. Do you think your family or relatives (both in Vietnam and outside the country if any) influenced you to come?
3. Do you think the tourists in Vietnam influenced your decision to come?

This interview guide was pilot-tested to reduce the problems of misinterpretations or the difficulty understanding the questions. Due to the variation of interpretations, the interviewees may understand the same questions differently, or not the same way I intend them to understand. Thus, pilot testing would reduce these problems because it would allow for a second point of view on the questions, and allow for revision that would help my potential interviewees better understand my questions. I pilot-tested the interview guide with my cousin who had similar characteristics as the sample group in this study. By doing so, I was able to find out what kinds of questions to avoid such questions that are ambiguous, double-barrelled, have technical terms, or questions that include negatives.

#### **4.2 Participants**

For the purpose of my research, I narrowed down the selection criteria of the potential participants to Vietnamese immigrants who were born and lived in Vietnam before coming to Canada. They must also be between 18-30 years old, and have lived in Canada for at least three years. It is implied by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) that immigrants should become fully settled after three years (although this notion is problematic). That is when they are eligible to apply for citizenship and can

become a citizen of Canada. Once they obtain their citizenship, it is believed that they are fully integrated and thus, would no longer need to depend on settlement agencies.

The participants in my study were two (2) male and three (3) female Vietnamese immigrants ranging from 23 to 29 years old, who came to Canada after the year 2000 and have lived in Canada for at least three years. They currently live in the Greater Toronto Area in the cities of Brampton, Mississauga, and Toronto. I recruited them through their contacts with my friends by using a snow-ball sampling method. This refers to the researcher making “initial contact with a small group of people who are relevant to the research topic and then uses them to establish contacts with others” (Bryman & Teevan 2005, p. 386). In this case, I made my initial contact with my brother’s friends and my friends who had similar characteristics as my sample population and asked them to hand out my recruitment flyers to people they know but who I have no relation with, who would meet the criteria and are interested in participating in my study. This process was then repeated numerous times as my recruitment flyers continued to be circulated to other people. The interested potential participants notified me through email that they are interested in participating. I also posted my recruitment flyers in a local Vietnamese Newspaper in Toronto and at the offices of the Vietnamese settlement agency, Vietnamese Association of Toronto (VAT) located in Toronto and North York. Unfortunately, I was not able to obtain any interested participants through these last two recruitment methods.

#### **4.3 Data Collection**

Once I retrieved my sample group of two males and three females, I arranged a convenient time for an interview with the participants in the study rooms of the Brampton, Mississauga, and Toronto public libraries. A two-way public transportation cost was reimbursed for the participants at a maximum of \$10 dollars per participant. I chose to perform the interviews at public libraries because this would ensure that the location is safe, secure and confidential for the participants. Setting up compatible interview times with the participants was difficult as all of them had a full work-day schedule and other priorities, while I was busy with classes and assignments to complete.

I began the interviews by introducing myself and my research topic and went over the informed consent form (see Appendix III) with the participants. When going over the form, it was interesting that the female participants seemed to be uncomfortable when asked for their permission to voice record the interview, while the male participants did not mind at all. I also explained to them that they can choose to not have it voice-recorded and that the purpose of recording is for me to refer to it later because I will not remember everything from the interview. I also reassured them that it was confidential and that their personal information will be protected and will not be revealed in the research as I will use pseudonyms in my research. It was after the explanation that they agreed to have the interview voice-recorded.

I then went over the demographic questionnaire (See Appendix I) with the participants regarding their general social location such as their age, gender, and occupation. Using an interview guide (See Appendix II), I performed one-on-one qualitative in-depth semi-structured interviews to obtain my data, with a “reflexive approach” (Bryman & Teevan, 2005, p. 192). This includes “varying the order of questions, following up leads, and clearing up inconsistencies in answers” (Bryman & Teevan, 2005, p. 192). By being open-minded, I was able to absorb in everything the participants said without it being affected too much by my own opinions and allowed for data to speak for themselves as far as possible. For all participants, the interview was performed in both English and Vietnamese which allowed for the openness of the participants to express themselves in whichever language they felt more comfortable.

I used the ‘life history’ approach to interviewing which is a useful way of developing an overall picture of the life of the participants (Bryman & Teevan, 2005, p. 185). Since the emphasis of my study is on factors that affect the construction of the individuals’ perspectives on Canada and how that led them to wanting to immigrate to Canada, conducting life histories was useful in understanding how their perspectives change and develop over time based on the influences of different social and cultural factors.

The interviews were semi-structured as I had guiding questions but did not have a specific order of asking these questions, instead, I used them to help create a conversation and steer the interview in a way that is most aligned with the participants. This reflexive approach allows for flexibility and openness in the collection process which helped me better understand the participants’ own meanings, perspectives

and experiences. As stated by Bryman and Teevan (2005), the flexibility in qualitative in-depth interviews allows the researcher to go off tangents and ask new questions that “follow up interviewees’ replies” (p. 183). When I sensed some level of disengagement or would like the participants to elaborate on a topic, I would use probing questions to continue the discussion. My main purpose was to allow open discussions for the participants to freely share and express their opinions and experiences, while I mainly acted as a listener and steered questions when they went off topic.

Along with voice recording the interviews, I also took down side notes in order to grasp the conversation in its entirety, including both the spoken and unspoken knowledge such as the way they respond, and their emotions and reactions to the questions and in their answers. However, further into the interviews, I realized that constantly scribbling down every few seconds also disrupted the participants’ mode of thinking, and distanced our interaction from our casual ways, to a more academic form. Thus, I tried to keep my side notes to a minimum thereafter to help reduce the power dynamics of the researcher-participant relationship, which significantly encouraged a more fluid and open discussion with my participants.

I also paid great attention to the way the youths responded and to their behaviour in general. The interviews lasted from 30 minutes to one hour. I ended the interview by giving them my contact information and asking the participants’ opinions on what they thought about the interview – did they enjoy it, were the questions too vague, and what I can do to improve the interview questions etc. This was done to help me better prepare for the next interview sessions.

#### **4.4 Researcher Location**

I am a first generation Vietnamese immigrant, having arrived in Canada at age five in 1993 with my family through the sponsorship of my two older brothers and sister who left by boat in 1987, in their youth years. Currently a young adult, I have relatives and distant friends in the same age range who immigrated to Canada from Vietnam within the last ten years. From what I have witnessed and heard, my older siblings, my relatives, and my friends mentioned above, are still experiencing settlement issues such as language barriers after five or more years of living in Canada, and have not moved up in the social

ladder to where they had hoped to be. This provoked me to question why Vietnamese young adults choose to leave everything behind and immigrate to a completely different country. Thus, my interest in this study is driven by my positionality and personal experiences, conjointly with the gap in literature. Consequently, this research is undeniably highly subjective, and provides a limited and inconclusive understanding of Vietnamese immigrant young adults' decision to immigrate to Canada.

## **5. RESEARCH FINDINGS & DISCUSSION**

In this section I will first introduce the five participants in this study, using pseudonyms to protect the participants' identities. They are Thur (29), Cát (25), Ân (23), Đình (26), and Minh (27). The specific city of residence of each participant was also disclosed to protect their identities. However, all participants currently live in the Greater Toronto Area in the cities of Brampton, Mississauga, and Toronto. After that, I will discuss the three main factors that influenced their perspectives on Canada and their decision to come to Canada: (a) their interactions with overseas Vietnamese (including relatives and non relatives), (b) the Western media, and (c) foreign tourists and tourist sites in Vietnam.

### **5.1 Participants' Background**

Thur (29) is from Sài Gòn City, Vietnam and lived with her family who have a successful family business. She was a student in Vietnam. She voluntarily came to Canada in 2002 as an international student at age 20. Her parents were wealthy enough to pay for her tuition and living expenses. She studied at York University in Toronto and majored in Economics. She got married three years later and now lives with her husband. She is currently a stay-at-home wife.

Cát (25) is from Bến Tre City, Vietnam. She came to Canada at age 17 in 2005 with her parents and was sponsored by her older brother. She was a high school student in Vietnam. She continued schooling when coming to Canada and finished one year of Business Administration in college. However, she did not complete it because she lost interest in the study. Her passion is to become an interior designer. She currently lives with her family and works full-time at a nail salon.

Ân(23) is from Đà Nẵng City, Vietnam. She lived with her middle-class family. She was a student in Vietnam and was in her first year of university in a Marketing program before leaving. She was sponsored by her husband to come to Canada in 2007 when she was age 19. They are now divorced. She did not continue the same program when coming to Canada because she did not have the requirements to apply. However, she took one year of English classes at a Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) center. She currently lives with her aunt's family who were already in Canada. She is currently working full-time as a waitress at a phở (a Vietnamese noodle dish) restaurant.



Dinh (26) is from Saigon City. He lived with his mom and dad in Vietnam. His mom had worked for the American military as a secretary for a few years during the civil war. He has three older brothers who left Vietnam by boat. The oldest one died, and two came to Canada as refugees. He came to Canada with his mom in 2000 at age 15 and was sponsored by his second oldest brother. The sponsorship process took seven years. He now lives with his mom. He went to high school while working part-time at a car body shop. After, he went to college and obtained a diploma in Mechanical Engineering. He now works full-time as a mechanical engineer.

Minh(27) is from Huế City. He lived with his mom and older sister in Vietnam. His mom was a successful business woman. He was a student in Vietnam. His dad had already come to Canada and later sponsored him and his sister in 2000 when he was 16 years old. He finished one year in college in Business and Accounting and dropped out because he felt that he chose the wrong program. He currently lives with his sister and her husband and is working full-time at a nail salon owned by his sister.

## **5.2 Reasons for immigration**

From the interviews on the life histories of the participants, I found that they all construct their ideas of Canada as a place where they can obtain a 'better life' ("được một cuộc sống tốt hơn"). This exact statement, although with some variations, was mentioned by all participants when asked 'why did you choose to come to Canada'. Although two came through their parents' decision, they agreed to go with their parents, and provided me with the same rationale as above.

I was particularly intrigued about how these individuals develop this understanding of Canada prior to ever visiting the country and how they define a 'better life'. Later on, I found that there were three major factors that affect their perspectives on Canada as a place where they can have a 'better life'. The three factors are: (a) their interactions with overseas Vietnamese (including relatives and non relatives), (b) the Western media, and (c) foreign tourists and tourist sites. I will also discuss how these factors influence and shape Vietnamese immigrant young adult participants' understanding that they can immigrate to Canada to achieve a 'better life', as well as discuss the ingredients that constitute a 'better

life'. I will also explore whether or not their perspectives of Canada as a place to obtain a 'better life' remained prominent after arriving in Canada.

Since the focus is on the perspectives of the Vietnamese immigrant young adult participants on Canada *prior* to departure, the participants and the contexts in this section are discussed with the assumption that they were still in Vietnam and had not yet immigrated to Canada, unless otherwise indicated.

It is also important to note that all participants understood Canada and United State of America as different countries, but the same in everything else. Most times, they would say 'America' or 'Mỹ' in Vietnamese, when asked a question about Canada. Other times, they would also use 'America' when referring to North America.

My conversation below with Đình (26) who left Vietnam at age 15 is one example:

Q: What were your thoughts of Canada before coming?

Đình: I really don't know. I was young so I never thought of it too much. I just knew that there is better education, better job opportunities, and a better future over there.

Q: How did you know that?

Đình: My mom told me that. And she worked in America as a secretary for the American government during the civil war so she knows.

Q: But that is America, not Canada.

Đình: I know, but it is exactly the same.

I usually had to verify with them to make sure if they were referring specifically to United States or not and they would always reaffirm me that America and Canada are the same. Thus, the participants view Canada more generally as North America and not any different from United States. Thus, it is important to keep in mind that when participants use the term 'America' in the discussion below, they are also referring to Canada. To make it less complicated, the term 'United States' was utilized when referring to the country itself.

### **5.3 Interactions with Overseas Vietnamese**

Transnational kinship ties between Vietnamese immigrants from other countries and their family members in Vietnam remain strong through the process of immigrants sending remittances back home,

frequent contacts through telephone, and traveling back to visit in person (Nguyen & King, 2002). These immigrants who were born in Vietnam but are settled in other countries such as Canada and United are called ‘Việt Kiều’ or “overseas Vietnamese” (Nguyen & King, 2002). I found that these forms of interactions between the Vietnamese immigrant young adult participants and overseas Vietnamese were the biggest factor in affecting how the participants construct ideas of Canada and of Western societies in general. This includes direct and indirect forms of interactions with overseas Vietnamese. As mentioned by the symbolic interactionist Theorist G.H. Mead, individuals gain social meanings through their day-to-day interactions with social objects and social objects could be a physical entity, a mental construct, idea, or other people (Standstorm, 2006). Thus, indirect forms of interactions with overseas Vietnamese include ideas and perspectives on Canada which could be told by other people. Next, I will discuss the importance of social networks and the two ways of learning about Canada through the social networks which are through hearing stories and observing overseas Vietnamese.

### **5.3.1 Social Networks**

Aside from Thur (29) who came to Canada as an international student, all participants had existing relatives or family members who were living in Canada and explained that they mostly learned about Canada through those individuals. The participants all had some kind of interaction with their overseas Vietnamese relatives or friends either through the remittances sent home by them to the participants’ families in Vietnam, by talking to them over the phone, talking to them in person when they come back to Vietnam to visit, or hearing stories about them from relatives or friends living in Vietnam. Cát (25) said:

I have an older brother who was already living in Canada. He would come back to Vietnam to visit us every few years [...] and sent us pictures of Canada. He calls home often too and talks to my parents [...]. They tell me that he sends money home to us every month.

Ấn (23) had an aunt and uncle who were living in Canada who had children and there would be at least one person that returns to Vietnam to visit every year:

I have cousins in Canada and there was always someone who comes back to Vietnam every year. I was also introduced to my ex-husband through one of my cousins too. I was close to a few of them who were around my age and they would always take me out when they visit.

Dinh (26) has two brothers who were living in Canada already. However, he learned about Canada mostly through his mom who was in Vietnam with him:

I was only 15 years old when I left so I did not know much about Canada. My mom [...] worked in America as a secretary for the American government during the civil war so she knows. She already told me when I was 5 years old that I was going to go to Canada.

Minh (27) had a good relationship with his dad who was living in Canada already and learned about Canada mainly through his dad:

My dad left when I was only seven years old. But he would call home very often so I talked to him a lot. He came home to visit a few times too and would always take us out to different places.

All participants referred to their family and relatives either overseas or those living in Vietnam as their first source to understanding Canada, whether the ties between them are weak or strong. Thus, for the participants, what they learn about Canada from their social networks greatly affected how they view and understand Canada as they trust these sources. I found that there are two main ways that the participants learn about Canada from their social networks. The first one is through hearing about things related to Canada that are either told directly to them from their relatives who are overseas Vietnamese, or through hearsay from local family and friends. The second way is through observing overseas Vietnamese who come back to Vietnam to visit.

### **5.3.2 Hearing Stories**

In chapter two of Castles and Miller's book, *The Age of Migration* (2009), they briefly discussed about transnational ties between the immigrants and their family members in their home countries. They showed that the ideas of the society that these individuals migrate to and settle in, greatly influence the individuals' own perspective on life and that these ideas also get transferred to individuals that they interact with from other countries. This is demonstrated below as all participants mentioned that they learned about life in Canada from hearing stories about Canada told by their overseas family members and friends, as well as stories told by their local relatives and friends about successful overseas Vietnamese.

Although Thu (29) did not have existing relatives in Canada or in other countries, she would hear things about Canada from her friends and relatives:

One of my cousins knew someone who went to school in America as an international student and that person told her that everything there is so much better. People live in huge houses, the malls are bigger and much prettier, and there are a lot of buildings. In general, everything is bigger and better. I also have a friend who has relatives living in America. She told me that her cousins who are born there are successful. One is a pharmacist, and the other is finishing up university.

Cát (25) said that she obtained information on the Canadian political system through her brother who immigrated to Canada before her:

I heard from my brother that the political system over there is more liberal. There is freedom of speech. People have more rights and the security system is better. The government actually cares about your safety [...] like the police would investigate in crimes and track down bad guys.

Minh (27) who came to Canada at age 16, learned about the school system in Canada by talking on the phone with his dad who immigrated to Canada already:

My dad told me that [...] going to school in Canada is free up to grade 12 and the government lends you money so you can afford to go to university after and get a good job.

Through hearing these stories about Canada from these social connections, the participants develop their understanding of Canada as a country that has a higher standard of living, with more educational and economic opportunities and more political freedoms, and thus, a place where they can obtain a 'better life'. These reasons align with the general migration pull factors according to the push-pull theory where a migrant's main goal is to "increase [one's] income and improve [one's] welfare" (Sirojudin, 2009, p. 703). Thus, for the participants, they develop their understanding of Canada through hearing stories told about Canada from their social networks. These stories are mostly view Canada in the positive way, and views Canada as a better country to live in than Vietnam, which in turn, affected their decision to come to Canada.

### 5.3.3 Observing Overseas Vietnamese

The second way that participants develop their understanding of Canada from interacting with overseas Vietnamese is by simply observing them, such as how they look, how they act, what they do, what they wear, and how they talk. This form of learning through observing is an indirect process of learning and is sometimes deemed more effective than direct processes such as having someone else teach you (March, 2003).

For example, Thur (29) learned about people in Canada by observing the physical attributes of overseas Vietnamese:

I always see overseas Vietnamese wear really nice, new and expensive clothing no matter if they are going out or staying in. They all wear brand name clothing, bags and shoes that are really expensive in Vietnam such as Gucci, Prada, Parasucco, Nike, and Bebe. I can tell they are overseas Vietnamese just by looking at them [...]. No matter how old they are, they all have that look to them that makes them look like they are not from here [...]. Generally, they are whiter in skin colour, more healthy-looking, and wear clothing that you do not see other local Vietnamese. Their clothes always look new, clean, and expensive.

Ăn (23) learned that Canada is more clean and sanitary from observing her overseas Vietnamese cousins when they go out:

My cousins from America always bring medicine for their stomach and hand sanitizers whenever we go out anywhere and are extra careful with cleanliness issues [...]. They tell me they have to be careful when they eat out because they are more prone to getting sick from eating out in Vietnam, especially when eating street food that are not as sanitary. It made me think that (North) America must be a nice and clean place to live.

Dinh (26) recalled:

I remember my brother always bringing home many presents from Canada when he comes home to visit. He would always take me to the city and different places in Vietnam that I wanted to go but never got the chance because it was too expensive, like the beach and amusement parks [...]. He took me out to eat at expensive places too, [...] places I would not be able to go otherwise [...]. I also saw overseas Vietnamese from England, Australia, America, Canada. They look different, like their skin and such, they were better-looking. They stood out more. Everybody was 'loaded with money', the way they acted was more polite, and more friendly.

As shown above, it is clear that the Vietnamese immigrant young adult participants' ideas on Canada and Western societies in general, are greatly affected by how overseas Vietnamese display

themselves and how they interact with Vietnamese locals. Nguyen and King (2002) explained that ideas and practices of one's residing country become integrated in one's daily activities. This is evident in the case of overseas Vietnamese as they would also bring with them to Vietnam the ideas and practices of Canada and America. These ideas and practices such as using hand sanitizers when dining in unsanitary places, would affect the participants' understanding of their own social conditions in Vietnam as they would be able to compare their own conditions to others in more modernized societies. Thus, from these data it is evident that by observing overseas Vietnamese such as how they act, what they wear, and how they talk, the participants gained an understanding of Canada as more sanitized and people there are richer as they have the financial abilities to buy expensive brand name clothing, dine in at expensive restaurants, and travel to different places in Vietnam. The participants expressed that they wanted to have the same kind of luxury and social mobility as the overseas Vietnamese because when living in Vietnam, they felt that they lacked these aspirations as one must already be wealthy in order to travel outside the country. As for Vietnamese immigrants from America, they do not have to be wealthy in order to possess the privilege and freedom to travel worldwide. Thus, Vietnamese immigrant young adults believe that they can achieve this same privilege and freedom of mobility by immigrating to Canada.

#### **5.3.4 Role-taking as Overseas Vietnamese**

Interestingly enough, the forms of identity displays by overseas Vietnamese (as discussed above) do not always hold true and do not represent how they live on a day-to-day basis in Canada. This was found through asking the participants on their experiences on going back to visit Vietnam after already coming to Canada.

I found that all the participants were of the middle-class in Canada and their yearly salary wages for 2010 ranged from \$18,000 to \$28,000 (excluding Thu's (29) income which was \$0 because she is a stay-at-home wife). However, when they go back to Vietnam to visit, they would use what Jayakody and Vu (2009) refer to as their "first-world identity", which is their identity as an overseas Vietnamese, as their "master status" which would enable them to go from low-status to high-status (p. 240).

Jayakody and Vu (2009) mentioned in their study that overseas Vietnamese from core countries such as United States, Canada and Australia relied on the notion that core countries have more economic power in the global economy than periphery countries like Vietnam that have weaker economic global relations ( p. 241). This idea was then internalized by the overseas Vietnamese individuals who come from core countries and view themselves (or viewed by others) as having more privilege and more social mobility freedom than those from periphery countries. This was evident in the findings in this study.

For example, Đình (26) and Cát (25) shared that they feel pressured to display their identity as an overseas Vietnamese as their master status and that ‘keeping face’ was very important:

Of course I have to dress nicely when I go back [...]. One thing is that I’m on vacation and the other thing is that if I don’t, they will think less of me [...]. After staying in Canada for so long, it’s expected that you should be doing better than how you were in Vietnam, [...] which is true. Since the currency in Canada is so much higher, my wage in Canada might be low but comparing how much I make to others in Vietnam, it would be comparable to the really rich people [...]. If I come back and not treat them out to places then they’ll think I’m selfish [...]. (Đình, 26)

When I tell my relatives and friends in Vietnam that I’m coming back to visit, I know that they expect me to something bring back something for them...even if they don’t say it, I can tell. It’s like an obligation almost...or else I would look really bad [...]. And then they would assume that I’m selfish or not doing well in Canada and become disappointed in me [...]. I’m sure not everyone thinks that way, but a lot do. (Cát, 25)

For Ân (23) she expressed that she enjoys displaying her identity as an overseas Vietnamese when going to Vietnam because she can finally live out the things she wanted to do when she was still in Vietnam but was not able to because she lacked the time and money:

I love going to Vietnam and being able to go to many different places [...]. I can finally enjoy the things in Vietnam that I normally wouldn’t be able to, either because I have no time or because I can’t afford it [...]. People pay more attention to me, because I am a foreigner [...] and ask where I’m from. It feels good to say I’m from Canada. (Ân, 23)

Thus, it can be understood that how overseas Vietnamese display themselves to Vietnamese locals in Vietnam do not simply represent how they live on a day-to-day basis in Canada. Some feel pressured to put on this display to keep their face and reputation as they believe that if they do not do so then their relatives and friends may develop negative assumptions of them as being selfish or



looked nice and clean, I didn't see trash littered anywhere. I thought, wow, what lovely nature sceneries that America has [...]. Also, most women who are main characters in the movies were successful women with university degrees and stable jobs. It made me think that women in America has more opportunities to succeed than in Vietnam [...] The actors were also very open about expressing their affection towards each other too.

Minh (27) shared that he can see from Western movies that Canada is a country with a lot of Caucasian people and that people in Canada are rich. He said:

I remember watching a few American movies and almost all of the actors were white-skinned (Caucasian) people. There were films like 'Rush Hour' that had a Chinese and a Black guy as the main actors but that was it. So I always thought that America had mostly White people living there [...]. I also remember that in the action movies, the streets are big with so many nice and expensive-looking cars, and[...]the buildings are sky-high. There were so many nice flat screen T.V.s which would've cost a fortune in Vietnam. And all the technology equipments like cell phones were so advanced compared to those in Vietnam at the time. I couldn't wait until all the sponsor paper work is done so I can finally go Canada[...]and have enough money to get one of those cell phones.

As shown above, Minh (27) associated being rich with the ability to own expensive advanced technology such as the newest cell phone, TV and cars. He believes that he can obtain the expensive things he desires such as an advanced cell phone, by immigrating to Canada, a country he believes is richer than Vietnam. By assuming that he will have enough money when he comes to Canada to buy the cell phone, Minh (27) suggests that he can make a lot more money in Canada than in Vietnam. This was also agreed among the other participants, that they could become richer in Canada, which to them would be having a 'better life' than the one they have in Vietnam.

Since the reforms in 1986, Vietnam transformed itself into a market economy as it was incorporated into the global capitalist system (Carruthers, 2001, p. 1 20). This enabled new media including pirated versions of video music variety shows and movies from Western societies, along with other consumer goods to flow into the country. Nowadays, the Vietnamese popular music culture is immensely influenced by these types of foreign media from Western societies such as United States and Canada. This was exemplified by Ān (23) and Cát (25) who are recent immigrants to Canada and came in 2005 and in 2007 respectively. They both mentioned that Vietnam's society is "progressing" (tiến bộ)

unsuccessful in Canada. Others like Ân (23) show that some people just like to take on that master status because it makes them feel good about themselves. Either way, these findings show that Vietnamese immigrant young adults' interpretations of Canada when they were still in Vietnam are easily distorted and biased by factors such as their interactions with overseas Vietnamese. In turn, these interpretations may result in false understanding of life in Canada, which may lead to disappointment when coming to Canada, as I will further discuss later on.

#### **5.4 The Western Media**

The media also played a significant role in shaping the Vietnamese immigrant young adult participants' perspectives on Canada and Western societies. The Western media is becoming increasingly accessible to people from other parts of the world (Newman, 2010). Stemmed from Foucault's approach to understanding power as a web-like and spatial structure instead of vertical structure, Newman (2010) argued that globalization caused the "decentering" of cinematic exchanges as audiences from periphery countries now have easier access to Western films and music from core countries (p. 3). She also emphasized that viewers of films and cinematic pictures are "active engagements", rather than being passive receptors (Newman, 2010, p. 4). This means that regardless of one's spatial, cultural, social or political orientation, one will be influenced by the ideas and social norms that are reflected in the films that one watches.

This was evident for the Vietnamese immigrant young adult participants. Aside from the interactions with their social networks, they also gained their understanding of Canada from watching American films and other forms of media such as American music videos. Based on the portrayal of Western societies from the media, the Vietnamese immigrant young adult participants developed an understanding of Canada as a beautiful country with four seasons, a country with mostly Caucasian people, a place where people are richer with more job opportunities than people in Vietnam, and where people are more open about love and affection. For example, Cát (25) said:

I liked to watch American romantic comedy movies. I don't remember the titles of the movies but I just remember the beautiful sceneries of snowfalls in winter and the green landscapes of summer. They were all very beautiful scenes and it

and is becoming more “civilized” (văn minh). Ân (23) gave an example of this by comparing Vietnam’s music industry to America’s music industry through their music videos:

When you watch the Vietnamese music videos in Vietnam, you can tell that it is higher quality than before, the style it’s filmed, the equipments and props such as cars that are used in the videos, and especially the more advanced video cameras with better lens that they use to film. The quality of the videos is almost as good as American music videos [...]. Even the style of music is more ‘developed’ (phát triển) than before [...] meaning the trend is not using Chinese songs and translating the lyrics to Vietnamese anymore. Instead, popular music nowadays are more American such as the styles of R&B and hip-hop, but the songs are composed by Vietnamese people themselves, and not Chinese songs with lyrics changed to Vietnamese [...]. These type of songs are more up-to-date with the current Western music industry and are good enough to be compared to American and Western music videos.

Here, it is clear that Ân (23) viewed the American or Western music industry as being better than Vietnam’s music industry as she continuously rationalized that Vietnam’s music industry is improving because it is becoming more like American or Western music industry. She views American music industry as the dominant one and that others should to look up to it or strive to become like it. Thus, this example shows how greatly American and Western media in general, influence the Vietnamese immigrant young adult participants’ view of Canada and other Western societies alike.

As mentioned by Carruthers (2001), individuals are inevitably influenced by the ideas and social norms that are reflected in the films that one watches, regardless of one’s social, cultural, spatial, or political location. This was evident through the discussion above on how the American and Western media’s representation of Western societies influence the Vietnamese young adult participants’ understanding and construction of life in Canada as well as of the type of people living in Canada and Canadian culture. The consumption and interactions with Western movies and music also affect young people’s identity construction and inevitably influence their modes of thinking and behaving. It is evident to see that Western movies and music videos acted as social objects that Vietnamese immigrant young adult participants interacted with in their everyday lives in Vietnam, and affected their understanding of Canada.

Western movies and music videos were also social problems in this context. As defined earlier, a social problem is a halt in one's daily actions or an intervention into a daily habitual activity (Sandstorm, 2006). This could be an idea, an act, or a physical entity. Blumer (1971) also mentioned that social problems are good because they lead to reflective thinking which leads to the emergence of social change (p. 298). In this case, as Vietnamese immigrant young adult participants interacted with these forms of Western media, it caused them to re-evaluate their own social conditions and lifestyles as they compared their own conditions to others from America or Western societies that were represented in the Western movies and music videos.

Through the interactions with the Western media, Vietnamese immigrant young adult participants understand Western societies like Canada as modernized and "ahead" compared to Vietnam which they view as still "progressing". Thus, the locals would interpret their own social conditions as worse than individuals in Canada. They would then view Canadians as having better lifestyles than they do. Hence, Vietnamese immigrant young adult participants would then construct their perspective on the lifestyle, culture, and society of Canada based on the Westernized ideas, practices, and consumer goods that are represented in the Western media. This includes understanding Canada as a beautiful country with four seasons, a country with mostly Caucasian people and that the people are richer than people in Vietnam, where there are more job opportunities, and where people are more open about love and affection. In general, through their interactions with Western media, Vietnamese immigrant young adult participants developed an understanding of Canada as a better place to live than in Vietnam because of the reasons listed above, and thus, this perspective affected their decision to come to Canada and their mental and social construction of a 'better life'.

### **5.5 Foreign Tourists, Tourist Sites and Social Mobility**

The third and last major factor that influenced the Vietnamese immigrant young adult participants' perspectives on the idea that they can obtain a 'better life' in Canada are their interactions with foreign tourists and tourist sites in Vietnam. I found that all participants emphasized on the importance of social mobility, the freedom to physically mobilize to different places. Below, I will

discuss my findings on how Vietnamese immigrant young adult participants' interactions with tourists and tourist sites affected their understanding of Canada as a place where they can obtain a 'better life'.

#### **5.5.1 Interactions with Tourists**

From the interactions with foreign tourists from Canada and other Western countries, the participants learned that people in Canada have more mobility freedom than those in Vietnam, and that people in Canada make more money than those in Vietnam as they have the ability to travel to different countries and have vacations, and that the culture in Canada is more liberalized.

Thư (29) explained how she viewed foreign tourists:

My parents were wealthy enough to cover my costs to study in Canada. I was also able to go to any tourist sites in Vietnam that I wanted. My family was able to afford that [...]. But I always wondered how people become rich so fast after immigrating to America. There is a friend of my cousin who is from the suburbs and is not rich like my family, but yet after immigrating to Canada, she's been able to come back to Vietnam just two years after she left and travel to many different places in Vietnam [...]. She also traveled to the United States too. That's why I was envious of foreign tourists from America. They have so much more freedom to travel than people who live in Vietnam, such as myself at the time.

From this, it can be understood that Thư (29) developed her understanding of people from North America as having more mobility freedom than those in Vietnam as they were able to travel to many different places that would require one to be financially capable of doing so. This in turn would affect her perspective on what consists as a 'better life', which in this case includes having the freedom and financial capability to travel to different places.

Here, Cát (25) demonstrates how she came to understand that foreign tourists are from wealthy countries like North America. She also viewed them as having the luxurious opportunity to relax and go on vacation in Vietnam:

I remember seeing White (Caucasian) tourists in Hồ Chí Minh City when I would go once in a while to shop or to drop/pick up a relative from the airport, which is rare in all three occasions [...] because I lived far in the suburbs. There seems to be more of them now since Vietnam is expanding its tourism economy [...]. They all looked relaxed and happy enjoying their time doing fun things like going to karaoke bars or shopping, while everyone else was working. I thought, lucky them [...]. I didn't really think much about them, except that they must be from wealthy countries like (North) America.

Ăn (23) shared her observations of foreign tourists on the beach in Đà Nẵng. She saw foreign women tourists with two-piece bathing suits as being too revealing which was opposite to the Vietnamese culture where women dress more conservatively. She associated the women tourists' way of dressing with a culture that is more liberal and open the way one dresses and related that to being the culture from Western countries. However, she did not view that type of culture as a negative thing, but rather, a good thing. Thus, this suggests that she viewed a 'better life' as one that has a more liberalized culture, where there is more individual freedom and allows one to dress the way one desires. She believes that this kind of culture exists in Western countries, such as Canada:

I mostly saw foreign tourists when I go by the beach in Đà Nẵng [...]. My house was close to the beach so I would pass by it quite often and sometimes hang out there with my friends too [...]. I didn't talk to any of the foreign tourists. I just saw them sun-bathing or lounging around on the beach [...], especially the women tourists. They would lay there tanning with the revealing two-piece bathing suits [...]. It was revealing compared to most people who live in Vietnam because we would normally wear t-shirts and shorts to the beach. It was okay for younger kids to go nude but everyone else would wear more cover ups than just a two piece bathing suit [...]. That is just how the Vietnamese culture is, women are more conservative [...]. I guess the culture in the Western countries is more liberal and open about those things [...]. I don't think that's a bad thing though. I think women should have the freedom to dress how they wish too.

As shown from these data, it is evident that the interaction with foreign tourists affected Vietnamese immigrant young adult participants' understanding of Canada as a country where people have more mobility freedom than those in Vietnam, are more financially secure, and that Canadian culture is more liberalized in that it is oriented towards individual freedom. All participants viewed these notions of Canada in a positive light and these reasons also constitute what the participants refer to as a 'better life' that they believe they can achieve when immigrating to Canada.

### **5.5.2 Tourist Sites**

Aside from their interactions through observing foreign tourists, Vietnamese immigrant young adult participants also gained insights on life in Canada, and that they can obtain a 'better life' in Canada, by visiting tourist attraction sites in Vietnam.

Wong and Satzewich (2006) stated that tourist sites in developing countries act as transnational spaces for locals to interact with individuals from other countries. This transnational social space is not geographically or physically bounded. This space can be understood as “pluri-local frames of reference which structure everyday practices, social positions...and simultaneously exist beyond the social contests of national societies” (Wong and Satzewich, 2006, p. 5). Thus, it allows for the interactions of individuals from all around the world, and the exchange of ideas, goods and symbols. This form of interaction enables Vietnamese locals, which in this case are the Vietnamese immigrant young adult participants, to develop a level of understanding of the lifestyles and benefits that foreigners have in their home countries. It also acts as a site where foreigners have the authority to represent their home countries and flaunt the great things that their countries have that the developing countries lack. In this context, tourist sites can include amusement parks, hotels, big malls in the capital city, and restaurants that cater to tourists.

The data showed that Vietnamese immigrant young adult participants further gained insights about Canada and life in Canada through their visits at tourist sites such as expensive restaurants catered for tourists and hotels, either with their overseas Vietnamese relatives or friends, or just simply from hearsay or observing the place when passing by. From those interactions and observations, they developed the understanding that people from Canada, or other countries that foreign tourists are from, have a higher standard of living.

Through her visit at a high-end restaurant in Hồ Chí Minh City with her overseas Vietnamese cousin, Cát (25) learned that restaurants in Canada and other Western countries are luxurious and expensive:

Whenever my cousins from Canada come back to Vietnam to visit, they would take me and other people to eat at fancy restaurants that I normally don't go to because they're too expensive. You can tell that those types of restaurants are specifically made to cater to tourists or really rich Vietnamese locals [...]. I remember going to one in Hồ Chí Minh City that was quite expensive. Although the foods were still Vietnamese foods that you can find in other cheaper restaurants, they had prettier presentations [...]. The decor was luxurious with long drapings by the windows, there was air conditioning, the tables had a clean towel napkin, a fork, knife, and chopsticks set up for each seat, and it was spacious with nicely decorated tables. Everything about the restaurant screamed expensive and luxurious [...]. I don't remember what the price total was but I do

remember my jaws dropping after seeing the bill, while my overseas cousin who covered for us did not seem a bit startled at all [...]. I remember that same cousin taking us to a couple more expensive restaurants like that one [...]. At that time, I thought that restaurants like those were common in Canada because there were a lot of tourists who went to those restaurants.

From knowing about the hotels in Đà Nẵng through hearsay, Ân (23) believed that the living standards in Canada was the same as the standard of living in the hotels:

The beaches in Đà Nẵng are becoming a popular tourist site. They are building more and more hotels in that area along the beaches [...]. I've never been in any of the hotels but I've seen some from the outside and also heard things about it from others [...] through hearsay [...]. I heard that in the hotels there have air conditioning, are clean and the hotel rooms are big with fully equipped bathrooms and big beds. They also have swimming pools inside the hotels [...]. I was sure at that time that the living standards in Canada were the same as how it was in those hotels [...] because hotels are supposed to make you feel at home when you are away from home.

As these data show, Vietnamese immigrant young adult participants also gained their understanding of life in Canada through their visits to and interactions with tourist sites in Vietnam, such as eating at expensive restaurants that cater towards tourists, and hearing stories about the hotels alongside the beaches in Đà Nẵng, as demonstrated above. From these interactions and observations, they developed the understanding that people from Canada, and other residing countries of foreign tourists, have higher standards of living.

## **5.6 Expectations vs. Reality**

Overall, whether or not Vietnamese immigrant young adults believe they have obtained a 'better life' in Canada greatly depended on their family's socio-economic status and their own level of responsibilities of when they were still in Vietnam compared to when they live in Canada. These responsibilities consisted of: being able to take care of oneself without the help of others including working to pay rent, and participating in cooking and cleaning. I found that those whose socio-economic status in Vietnam was the same or lower than their socio-economic status in Canada, and who had either the same or fewer responsibilities in Canada than in Vietnam, believe that their life in Canada is better than in Vietnam. On the other hand, those who came from a higher socio-economic background and had fewer responsibilities and obligations in Vietnam to a lower socio-economic background with more



responsibilities and obligations in Canada found life in Canada to be more difficult than they thought and were more satisfied with living in Vietnam than in Canada.

Cát (25) and Đình (26) both came from lower socio-economic backgrounds and had more responsibilities in Vietnam. They both agreed that despite some of the initial settlement struggles such as language barriers, and being unfamiliar with the surroundings in general, they felt that they have obtained a 'better life' coming to Canada:

In Vietnam, I would consider that my family is middle-classed family. We lived in the suburbs so we weren't poor like those living in the countryside or as rich as those living in the city [...]. I just went to school. I didn't have to work [...]. I would also help my mom with household chores [...] such as cooking, cleaning the dishes, doing the laundry, and cleaning up the house [...]. My first two years in Canada was difficult because I wasn't used to everything, the language, the people, the culture, how everything worked [...]. However, I did see that Canada was like how I thought of it [...]. The living conditions here are much better [...] and the school system is like what I heard of it [...]. It is definitely much better than the school system in Vietnam [...]. People are richer here than in Vietnam [...]. The houses are bigger and nicer [...]. I believe that life here is much better than in Vietnam [...]. There are so much more opportunities. (Cát, 25)

My mom wasn't rich in Vietnam but we were okay [...]. My dad in Canada wasn't rich either [...]. Like I said before, I knew that I was going to Canada since I was five years old [...]. I was young when I left (15 years old) and my mom made me focus just on school because I wasn't doing well [...]. The system there is so hard. It requires a lot of memorization and I am not good at that. My mom would try to drill me at home but I don't think it helped. It stressed me out [...]. I definitely think my life here is better than in Vietnam [...]. The education system here is so much better [...]. It's not focused on memorization skills but rather on your knowledge of the materials [...]. It's also good because they care about your opinions too. (Đình, 26)

The remaining participants, Thu (29), Ân(23), and Minh(27) all came from higher socio-economic backgrounds and had fewer responsibilities growing up in Vietnam than the top two participants discussed above. Coming to Canada, they all felt that life was more difficult than they had anticipated as their living standards were lower and they had more responsibilities:

In Vietnam, I had no responsibilities. I just went to school and spent time going out with my friends [...]. I didn't have to do any household chores or anything because we had a nanny to take care of that [...]. When I came to Canada to study at York University, it was nothing like how I thought of it [...]. Before leaving, [...] my place to stay in Canada was already set up for me by the agency [...]. It turned out to be an old-looking tiny basement in a neighbourhood with one-story small houses that looked very old. I was disappointed [...]. My room was small

and so was the bed that was too hard to sleep on [...]. I had to learn how to cook and clean for the first time because it turned out that the costs included for renting didn't include that [...]. It was miserable [...]. I felt lonely as everyone spoke English [...]. I had to learn how to take the transit bus to places and I didn't know anything about that place before coming, such as where everything was located [...]. I got a map but it was still very difficult [...]. I would've gone back to Vietnam after the end of my school session but then I found my partner and stayed back to live with him [...]. If it wasn't for him I would have went back to Vietnam and would not have stayed in Canada. (Thur, 29)

When I was living in Vietnam, I only had to go to school so I liked to go out to with my friends in the evenings and on the weekends [...] to places such as restaurants, karaoke bars, shopping, and nightclubs [...]. There are so many fun things to do in Đà Nẵng City. I would never be bored [...]. I met my ex-husband through my cousin when he came to Vietnam to visit [...]. He told me that there are bigger shopping centers in Canada, and that the restaurants, karaoke bars and nightclubs are way better in Canada too [...]. These things were true. However, he also said that work is easy which wasn't true and he didn't mention that I would take on full responsibility of household chores [...]. The work was a lot harder than I thought [...]. I had to work full-time at a factory as a machine operator [...]. It was tiring and repetitive. The managers were so strict and wouldn't even let us take five minutes breaks [...]. And having to come to cook and do more work at home was exhausting [...] especially when I never had to do any of that stuff – ever [...]. I thought maybe it was just something I needed to get used to. But after three years I would still get tired at the end of every day as always [...]. Now, I kind of regret coming over [...]. But I loved my husband at the time [...]. The things you do for love [...]. (An, 23)

For Minh (27), it was not the change of socio-economic status but the change of lifestyle that he was dissatisfied about:

My family was poor in Vietnam but I had an easy life. My daily schedule consisted of going to school, going home to eat, and then hanging out with friends [...]. The lifestyles in Vietnam and Canada are different [...]. In Canada, there are all kinds of people and cultures but everyone is always busy, either working or going to school [...]. In Vietnam, I got to have morning coffees with friends, and also had time to go out for lunch and dinner with friends [...]. Life in Canada is much busier than in Vietnam [...]. I thought it would be very easy, just go to work and enjoy the rest of the day off. But when I came, I was surprised. I had to work hard and study hard [...].

However, after staying in Canada for a longer period, all participants became more satisfied with their lives and think that the more they work, the more benefits they will reap:

I am happy with my life in Canada right now [...]. I love my husband and he takes very good care of me and I take good care of him [...]. Since he's gotten a better job, our financial burden has lessened and we can enjoy life more now. (Thur, 29)

I believe I made the right decision to come to Canada [...]. Of course, getting used to a new country takes time [...]. After staying here for six years [...], I think the downside is that the cold weather in Canada is difficult to getting used to [...] and so does the feeling of loneliness. The good thing is that jobs are easier to get here [...]. There are definitely more job opportunities [...] if you have a good education [...]. You can work and support yourself [...] and be independent. (Cát, 25)

What I like about living here is the easiness of transportation [...]. It's quicker, safer, and more convenient [...]. The political freedom is another thing I like about it [...]. You don't feel that the government is one-sided [...]. The laws are logical and your rights are respected [...]. Despite the initial struggles of settling, I would recommend all young people to come to Canada [...], with the exception of seniors and old people because it would be too hard for them to adjust to the different lifestyle and especially the cold winter [...]. (Ăn, 23)

Although I knew some things of Canada, I didn't expect much because I was young [...]. Such as the people, I did not expect much of but they are really friendly [...]. Compared to others, I feel like there are worse situations. Such as those who work in factories [...]. But I don't think I'm the best either. I think I'm average [...]. I am really satisfied with my life right now [...]. It took awhile and I needed a big boost since I was only fifteen-years old when I came [...]. But I invested a lot in order to get to where I am today [...]. So it paid off [...]. Whoever wants to come to Canada, I would recommend all of them to come [...]. If I could, I would take them all to Canada. (Đinh, 26)

It took me three years to get used to everything. After living here for awhile, I think it's different. Because the harder you work, the more you'll get and the future is in your hands to decide. (Minh, 27)

As shown above, data from this study found that in regards to whether or not the Vietnamese immigrant young adults believe if they have obtained a 'better life' in coming to Canada, depended on two factors: (a) their socio-economic status in Vietnam compared to Canada, and (b) their level of paid work and domestic responsibilities in Vietnam compared to Canada. Those whose socio-economic status stayed the same or changed from lower to higher and whose level of responsibilities and in Canada stayed the same or lessened after coming to Canada, believe that they have obtained a 'better life'. On the other hand, those whose socio-economic status changed from higher to lower and whose level of responsibilities increased after coming to Canada, expressed that life in Canada was more difficult than they thought and were more satisfied with living in Vietnam than in Canada. However, the duration of residency was also a big factor in affecting their level of satisfaction with coming to Canada. The longer

they lived in Canada, the more they come to believe that Canada does offer them an opportunity to obtain a 'better life'.

## 6. SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

### 6.1 Summary of Findings

Interviews with five Vietnamese immigrant young adults show that they chose to come to Canada because they wanted to attain a 'better life'. Their perspectives on Canada and perspective on what constitutes as a 'better life' were greatly affected, influenced, and shaped by three factors: (a) their interactions with overseas Vietnamese (including relatives and non relatives), (b) Western media, and (c) foreign tourists and tourist sites.

First, these findings showed that the interactions of Vietnamese immigrant young adults with overseas Vietnamese was the major factor affecting their perspectives on Canada and led them to want to go to Canada to obtain a 'better life'. There were two forms of interaction with overseas Vietnamese. The first one was through hearing stories told by overseas Vietnamese about life in Canada and other Western countries. The second way was simply by observing the overseas Vietnamese, such as paying attention to how they look, how they act, what they do, what they wear, and how they talk.

The participants all had some kind of connections with their overseas Vietnamese relatives or friends either through the remittances sent home by them to families in Vietnam, by talking to them over the phone, by talking to them in person when they come back to Vietnam to visit, or by hearing stories about them from relatives or friends living in Vietnam. Vietnamese immigrant young adults were influenced by overseas Vietnamese individuals whether the strength of their relationships with them was weak or strong.

Through hearing these stories about Canada from their social connections such as their overseas fathers or brothers, the participants developed their understanding of Canada as a country that has a higher standard of living, more educational and economic opportunities and more political freedoms, and thus, is a place where they can obtain this 'better life'. These stories mostly portray Canada in a positive way, and a better country to live in than Vietnam, which in turn, affected their decision to come to Canada.

The second way that participants developed their understanding of Canada from interacting with

overseas Vietnamese was by simply observing their appearance, actions, clothing, and manner of speaking. It was found that from observing overseas Vietnamese, participants learned that Vietnam is more unsanitary while Canada and other Western countries are safe and clean, and that people there are richer as they have the financial abilities to buy expensive brand name clothing and go out to expensive places in Vietnam.

Data also show that interaction with Western media and other forms of media that represented Western societies played an important role in affecting the Vietnamese immigrant young adults' understanding of Canada and how they developed a mentality to move to Canada to obtain a 'better life'. As media becomes "decentered" and disseminated across global borders from core countries to periphery countries like Vietnam, it has become easier for Vietnamese locals in Vietnam to access media from Western societies including movies and music from North America (Newman, 2010, p. 3). I found that Vietnamese immigrant young adult participants constructed their perspective on the lifestyle, culture, and society of Canada based on Westernized ideas, practices, and consumer goods that are represented in the Western media which include movies and music videos. This includes understanding Canada as a beautiful country with four seasons, a country with mostly Caucasian people, and one where people are richer with more job opportunities than in Vietnam, and a place where people are more open about love and affection.

The third important and final factor that influenced the Vietnamese immigrant young adults' perspectives on the idea that they can obtain a 'better life' in Canada were their interactions with foreign tourists and tourist sites in Vietnam. I found that all participants emphasized the importance of social mobility. From their interactions with foreign tourists from Canada and other Western countries, the participants learned that people in Canada have more mobility than those in Vietnam and are more financially secure. They also learned that the culture in Canada is oriented towards individual freedom, and that people in Canada make more money than those in Vietnam and they have the ability to travel to different countries and have vacations. From the interactions and observations of tourist sites such as expensive restaurants and hotels catering to tourists, they drew the conclusion that people from Canada,

or other countries that foreign tourists are from, have higher standards of living.

The above three factors were guided by my initial curiosity about my participants' initial responses to coming to Canada to obtain a 'better life'. I was particularly interested in how these individuals develop this understanding of Canada prior to ever visiting the country and how they define a 'better life'. Thus, it was important for me to find out if the participants' perspectives on Canada remained after actually coming over to Canada and experiencing the reality for themselves.

Based on the interviews, I found that there are two factors that affected Vietnamese immigrant young adult's opinions on whether or not they have obtained a 'better life' after coming to Canada. The two factors are: (a) their socio-economic status in Vietnam compared to Canada, and (b) their level of paid and domestic work responsibilities in Vietnam compared to Canada. I found that those whose socio-economic status stayed the same or improved, and whose level of responsibilities stayed the same or reduced after coming to Canada, believe that they have obtained a 'better life'. On the other hand, those whose socio-economic status decreased and whose level of responsibilities increased after coming to Canada, expressed that life in Canada was more difficult than they thought, and are more satisfied with living in Vietnam than in Canada. However, the duration of residency was also a big factor in affecting their level of satisfaction with coming to Canada. The longer they have lived in Canada, the more they have come to believe that Canada does offer them an opportunity to obtain a 'better life'.

The three theories of symbolic interactionism, transnationalism, and push-pull theory, utilized to guide my research, played important roles in examining how the three factors of overseas family and friends, tourists and tourist sites, and western media all influence Vietnamese immigrant young adults' perspectives on Canada, and affect their decision to come to Canada.

The theory of symbolic interactionism helped us to understand that one's immediate social surroundings greatly influence one's interpretations and perspectives on social realities, as Vietnamese immigrant young adults' perspectives on Canada are greatly affected by their interactions with their family, tourists and tourist sites, and the media. It is also evident that their perspectives altered after they have lived in Canada for a period of time and had a chance to interact with different social objects and

social problems such as the change from not working in Vietnam to working full-time in Canada; interacting with new people; and being exposed to a new environment with different values and beliefs. Thus, the data show that the self and one's perspectives are not static, but rather, are in constant change as one is continuously socialized in the context of different social objects and social problems.

Further, the concept of social identities helped us to understand that Vietnamese immigrant young adults have different social identities depending on the social context. As Vietnamese local citizens in Vietnam, they act as active receptors of knowledge and information about Canada by interacting with overseas Vietnamese family members or friends, with tourists and tourist sites in Vietnam, and with the media. When they have immigrated to Canada, they return to Vietnam, taking on the social identity of overseas Vietnamese, and act as the influencer as they now have the power to display ideas and knowledge of Canada.

The second theory, transnationalism helped us to understand that the interactions between Vietnamese immigrant young adults and the three factors, overseas family and friends, tourists and tourist sites, and the media, are not equal as the process of exchange of ideas and knowledge is unidirectional. This could be understood through the global interactions between the core and periphery countries. As Schiller, Basch, and Szanton-Blanc (1992) explained, the flow of ideas and cultures of core countries and western societies influences the periphery countries and eastern societies more so than the other way around. Thus, findings from this research also show this hierarchical pattern as the ideas of Canadian culture and society are depicted as being better than Vietnam through social objects of the core countries such as overseas Vietnamese from Canada, tourists from core countries, and Western media.

Lastly, the findings show that the Vietnamese immigrant young adults' decisions to migrate to Canada are closely aligned with the push factors explained in the push-pull theory, which states that people migrate to "increase income and improve welfare" (Sirojudin, 2009, p. 703). Their reasons to migrate to Canada included: better economic opportunities and standard of living, and more individual and political freedom.



## **6.2 Limitations and Future Research Directions**

Like all research, this study carries some limitations. One limitation is that the focus is on the context of departure of the immigrants but the interviews were conducted when the immigrants were already long settled in Canada. The participants occasionally mentioned that they do not remember the exact details because it was too long ago, or because they did not pay attention to those things at the time, such as considering what affected their understanding of Canada before immigrating. Thus, a possible suggestion for future research on this topic would be ideally to conduct a longitudinal study which consists of interviewing the participants while they are still in Vietnam, before coming to Canada. And after three years of settling in Canada, further research could be done to compare if their views, perspectives, and expectations on life in Canada still holds true, based on their actual experiences.

Another limitation is that this study is a small-scale research where data was collected through only five interviews with Vietnamese young adult immigrants in the Greater Toronto Area. The findings in this study are limited to the realities and experiences of only these five participants and may only cautiously be used to generalize about the Vietnamese young adult population. However, qualitative research like this can form a foundation for larger studies on the topic.

In contrast to the previous research on Vietnamese immigrants in North America, this research is useful in understanding the more recent immigration situations of Vietnamese immigrant youth, in regards to the context of departure and factors that affect their decision to come to Canada. With regards to the larger bodies of literature, this major research paper provides essential insights about a group and topic of study that is under researched in academia: Vietnamese immigrant young adults in Canada and the topic of Vietnamese immigrants and the context of their departure.

Understanding the three main factors that affect Vietnamese immigrant young adults' perspectives on wanting to immigrate to Canada provides important insight into the everyday decision-making processes of potential migrants. Media and specific individuals may not always transmit or display accurate ideas of life in Canada, and this explains how immigrants may develop misperceptions of Canada. Potential immigrants need to be more cautious regarding the sources that they are receiving the

information from, as well as become more aware that not all things said or shown about Canada are true because the sources may selectively choose which aspects to display.

Thus, another important area for future research would be to examine the actual media content and to research how and why family, friends, and tourists transmit specific information. Knowing more about both the views of both the Vietnamese migrants and their sources of information would give a more complete and balanced picture about this migration phenomenon. This will also go toward helping us understanding in more detail, the dynamics between migrants' pre-arrival expectations and their views of their post-migration experiences after living in Canada.

Overall, this research provides rich content from the interview data. This means that only a number of issues were addressed due to the limited time and space. Other issues and themes that emerged include: (a) satisfaction and dissatisfaction of the immigrants' with their new lifestyles in Canada, (b) racialization in relation to the colonial discourse, and (c) the issue of social class. Specifically, the imagery of social class is evident in this study, and further research could examine how this imagery is tied to globalization, transnationalism, and commodification influenced by North America. The findings reveal that participants are pre-occupied with the lifestyles of a "middle-class". Further theoretical explorations recommended for further research include the race theory and the post-colonial framework. These theories would provide a framework for understanding the powerful historical influence of European and North American ideas, culture, and society on today's societies across the globe, and would allow us to further understand the global migration patterns exemplified by the Vietnamese youth in this study.

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## APPENDIX I

### Demographic Questionnaire

1. Date \_\_\_\_\_
2. Age \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Gender \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Birthplace (city/province) \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_
6. Martial Status \_\_\_\_\_
7. Year of arrival in Canada \_\_\_\_\_
8. Highest Level of education attained \_\_\_\_\_
9. Occupation in Canada \_\_\_\_\_
10. Occupation in your home country \_\_\_\_\_
11. Which immigration class did you enter Canada (ex. Family class, skilled worker, student, etc).  
\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX II

### Interview Guide

1. What do you think influenced you to immigrate to Canada?
2. After living in Canada for a while now, do you think that your life here meets the expectations you formed before immigration? Please tell me about how or how not.
3. Do you want to add anything more?

#### *Possible Probing questions:*

4. Do you think media portrayal of Canada have influence on your decision to come?
5. Do you think your family or relatives (both in Vietnam and outside the country if any) influenced you to come?
6. Do you think the tourists in Vietnam influenced your decision to come?

### APPENDIX III

*The same informed consent would be obtained from all participants. Verbal translation of the form into Vietnamese will be provided. A sample of the form is as follows:*

#### **Ryerson University Consent Agreement**

##### Immigrating To Canada For A “Better Life”:

##### A Qualitative Study On First Generation Vietnamese Immigrant Youths In Canada In The Twenty-First Century

**Overview:** You are being invited to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent to be a volunteer it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure that you understand what you will be asked to do.

**Investigator and Research Assistant:** The Principal Investigator on this study is Thảo Đặng. She is a graduate student at Ryerson University in the Master’s program of Immigration and Settlement Studies.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to explore the factors that influence Vietnamese immigrant youth’s decision to immigrate to Canada. I would like to obtain data through interviews with immigrant youth because secondary published works on this topic is scarce. I hope this research project will provide as a resourceful foundation to understanding first generation Vietnamese immigrant youths’ immigration experience to Canada.

**Description:** I am asking you to participate in an interview that will last between 30 and 60 minutes. The interview will be recorded with a digital voice recorder to facilitate transcription, although if you prefer to have the tape turned off at any point I will do so. Tapes will be retained until the end of September 2011 or until transcription is complete and verified, whichever comes first. Transcriptions will be securely retained by the principal investigator for a period of 18 months and then destroyed. Beyond indicating your age, gender and birthplace, no other personally identifying information about you will be included in the transcription.

**Experimental Procedures:** None of the question or procedures used in this study is experimental in nature. The only “experimental” aspect of this study is the gathering of information for the purpose of analysis.

**Risk:** There is minimal risk or discomfort associated with this study. If you are not accustomed to being interviewed the process might make you a bit nervous, but our purpose is to learn from what you have to say about this issue so we will make every attempt to reduce any sources of anxiety. Another risk would be that participants may feel uncomfortable to addressing some questions or topics that may be sensitive to them. However, I will prevent this by reassuring them that this study is confidential, and that they are not obliged to answer all questions, and may choose to terminate the interview either temporarily or permanently.

**Benefits:** There are no monetary benefits from the study, but it will add to our state of knowledge about Vietnamese youth.

**Confidentiality:** As noted above, you will not be personally identified. Any identifying information on the tape will be removed when transcription occurs. The tapes themselves will be destroyed no later than the end of September 2011 after transcriptions have been completed and verified. Transcripts will be securely retained by the Principal Investigator for up to 18 months to allow analysis and review. Transcription of the tapes will be done by and verified by the Principle Investigator. No one else will have access to the audiotapes.

**Compensation:** You will not be paid for your participation in this study. You will be reimbursed for transportation costs of up to \$10.

**Voluntary Participation:** Your participation in this study is voluntary. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with the Vietnamese Association Toronto (VAT), or with Ryerson University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and stop your participation at any

time without penalty or loss of any benefits. At any point in the study you may refuse to answer any particular question or stop participation altogether.

**Consent for audio taping of the interview:** As noted above, the interview will be audio taped to facilitate transcription. Consent for audio taping may be considered as separate from consent to take part in the interview. If our consent includes audio taping, please indicate by signing your initials here \_\_\_\_\_.

As noted previously, you may also request that audio taping be stopped at any point during the interview, either for the balance of the interview or occasionally during the interview.

**Use of results:** The findings of this study may be used for publication, conference presentations and/or instructional and educational purposes.

**Your access to results:** A copy of the report of the results will be made available to you at the end of the study. You may either contact the Principal Investigator or add your email address to the end of this consent form.

**Questions:** If you have any questions about the research now, please ask. If you have questions later about the research you may contact the Principal Investigator, Thảo Đặng, by email at [thao.dang@ryerson.ca](mailto:thao.dang@ryerson.ca).

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study you may contact the Ryerson Research Ethics Board c/o the Office of Research Services at Ryerson University, 350 Victoria Street, Toronto, ON M5B 2K3.

**Agreement:** Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this agreement and that you have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. Your signature also indicates that you agree to be in the study and have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You have been given a copy of this agreement.

You have been told that by signing this consent agreement you are not giving up any of your legal rights.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant (Please Print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Email (optional) for copy of report

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator or Interviewer

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

20-07-110