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# The role of internet-based social support network in immigrant settlement

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THE ROLE OF INTERNET-BASED SOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORK  
IN IMMIGRANT SETTLEMENT

by

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A Major Research Paper  
presented to Ryerson University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts  
in the Program of  
Immigration and Settlement Studies

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2009  
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# THE ROLE OF INTERNET-BASED SOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORK IN IMMIGRANT SETTLEMENT

Julie Xiaoping Lin  
Master of Arts, 2009  
Immigration and Settlement Studies  
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## ABSTRACT

This is an exploratory study on the roles that internet-based social networks play in supporting immigrants in their settlement process, using NewBridger as an example. This research finds that online social networks are able to provide informational, socio-emotional, and some material and instrumental support to immigrants that help meet their settlement needs. Information passed through NewBridger helps immigrants with employment, housing, education and training, leisure, and daily living related issues. Socio-emotional support helps reduce acculturative stress by fostering a sense of belonging and friendship, and by exchanging expressions of love, care and encouragement. Support for immigrants also takes the form of social capital building. This study concludes that online social support networks are valuable supplement to formal support networks consisting of the government and the non-profit sector. This study builds on the theoretical frameworks of social support, social capital and acculturative stress.

### **Key words:**

Immigrant settlement, social support, social capital, acculturative stress, online social networks

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**Dedication:**

**This paper is dedicated to my parents, my husband, my brother and my son.**

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

In the search for solutions to immigrant settlement service provision, the government and the non-profit service sector are often the focus of attention. Often times, immigrants are mentioned only as a part of the problem: they have needs to be met at the cost of taxpayers. The role of immigrants as part of the solution has not been adequately examined. In this paper, I will look at an internet-based immigrant social network, which involves immigrants as part of the solution to their own settlement needs. Through this network, the immigrants and other members of their community help each other to cope with the challenges of settlement and integration into a new society.

This paper is an exploratory study investigating the role that internet-based social network can play in helping immigrants meet their settlement needs, using Newbridger as an example. Drawing insight from the conceptual frameworks of social capital, social support, acculturation and acculturative stress theories, this study will analyze Newbridger to explore its functions and qualities as an informal social support network for immigrants. I will demonstrate how Newbridger help meet settlement needs by increasing members' social capital. I will also explore the ways in which Newbridger helps reduce acculturative stress.

NewBriger was created by a recent immigrant from China. It is used by members of the recent Chinese immigrant community mostly in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Some members stay with Newbridger after they moved to other parts of Canada, US or China. For the recent Chinese immigrant population, a major task of life is to settle in and integrate into the Canadian society. In its three year existence, Newbridger has grown to a membership of 2,200 people according to the moderator. This is an indication that the network is functional. However, it is not clear what specific functions the Newbridger network serve, or how these functions relate to immigrants' settlement needs.

Newbridger is a moderated email list. People who are on the email list are called Newbridger members. The founder and list owner is also the moderator, who receives requests and information from people on the list and gathers information from other sources. Then he selects and organizes the information, writes comments, and sends this packaged information to the list. Sometimes, he

contacts the information sources or people who make the request to verify and clarify information. When a question or a request is posted, the contact information of the person who asks the question or makes the request is also posted. Newbridger members respond to these questions or requests by either sending a message to the moderator or directly to the person who needs assistance.

Several offline groups are formed by Newbridger members, among which the English group meets regularly. Offline events, such as outings and picnics, are also organized from time to time. In September of 2008, the Newbridger website was launched by Newbridger members. Despite this new venue, the moderator intends to continue with the email list. Since the website is too recent, it is premature study its impacts. This study will focus on the email list only.

The moderator is an independent immigrant from China. In May 2005, two months after landing in Toronto, he participated in an English training program. Through this program, native English speakers volunteered to help new immigrants improve their English in social settings including people's homes. The moderator thought it was a good idea, so he forwarded the information about this program to his friends and acquaintances. That email was the start of Newbridger.

The moderator has strong convictions about sharing and mutual help. So he used his email list to pass on other information he thought was useful. He participated in many training programs and community activities. As he got to know more people through these events and activities, he added them to his email list. As a result, the moderator knew most people on the list. Other people joined Newbridger by sending a message to the moderator after they heard about Newbridger from friends and acquaintances. As a result, members usually use their real names in their communications. On February 9<sup>th</sup> 2007, the moderator announced the name he created for the email list, NewBridge. The name was changed to Newbridger in October 2008. The name reflects the network initiator's intention of using this venue to connect new immigrants from China with settled immigrants and native born Canadians. Newbridger operates without monetary support from either the three levels of governments or the non-profit sector.

I will examine Newbridger's social support functions in the context of immigrant settlement, and try to answer the following questions:

- What support functions does Newbridger serve in helping Chinese immigrants settle in Canada?
- What specific settlement needs are met through the use of Newbridger?
- Which types of social support are most attainable through Newbridger?
- What are the qualities that make Newbridger a choice for recent Chinese immigrants?
- Does Newbridger help immigrants increase their social capital? If the answer is “yes”, what settlement needs can be met with increased social capital?
- How does Newbridger assist immigrants in reducing acculturative stress?

## Chapter 2

### **Settlement Needs, Social Support, and Internet-Based Social Network: A Literature Review**

There is a critical absence of academic literature on internet-based immigrant social support networks. A search in the Academic Search Premier and in the Ontario Metropolis Centre (CERIS Resource Centre) using various key words for immigrant settlement and Internet-based groups yields no relevant literature. A similar search on Google Scholar has not yielded academic literature devoted to this topic, either. It is evident that online immigrant support networks such as Newbridger has not received adequate attention in the academic realm, and the functions and benefits of such a network remain largely unexplored. On the other hand, there is ample literature to suggest that Internet-based groups have the potential to help immigrants in their settlement process. Several studies have confirmed that Internet-based groups do provide social support, and that virtual social networks generate social capital just like traditional social networks do (Eastin & LaRose, 2005; Drentea & Moren-Cross, 2005; Colvin, 2004; Matei & Ball-Rokeach, 2001; Ye, 2006).

#### **2.1 Immigrant settlement needs and social exclusion**

As soon as immigrants land in the new country, they face the immediate reality of settlement. Needs of settlement differ in various degrees for individuals and groups depending on their past experiences and present priorities (George, 2002). The settlement needs of immigrants also change over time. An immigrant’s needs and priorities may vary in different stages of the settlement process. The employment goal at the immediate settlement stage may be to enter the job market. At the longer term integration stage, the goal may change to career advancement (R.J.Sparks Consulting Inc. & WGW Services Ltd., 2001). Immigrant settlement needs can also be analyzed in different dimensions, namely, economic, social, cultural and political (R.J.Sparks Consulting Inc. & WGW

Services Ltd., 2001). They can be straightforward needs for shelter, employment, transportation and education, or more complicated needs for language training, good health, community and social network building, and adaptation to socio-cultural aspects of life (George, 2002; Hirayama et al., 1993; Simich et al., 2005).

In relation to settlement service provision, researchers identified 14 areas of settlement related needs (Lim et al 2005, p.4). These areas reflect both the settlement goals and indicators (for instance, finding employment and housing), and the types of support that immigrants need in order to reach these goals (such as advocacy, information, translation and interpretation):

- Advocacy,
- Counseling and support,
- Education,
- Emergency food services,
- Employment,
- English as a second language (ESL),
- Form filling,
- Health/Medical,
- Housing,
- Information and referral,
- Legal,
- Orientation,
- Recreation, and
- Translation and interpretation

The challenge of immigration settlement is sometimes coupled with and intensified by social exclusion that many immigrants experience in their adopted country (Griffiths et al., 2006; Sadiq, 2004; Simich et al., 2005; Shields, 2003; Preston et al., 2003; Wastle-Walter et al., 2003). Employment, for instance, is an issue that is associated with relocation. For immigrants whose foreign credentials are often not recognized, finding employment that they are qualified for is much more difficult than for the native-born residents (Salaf, 2006; Waters et al., 2006; Watts, 2001). Other times, the generic challenges of migration and settlement and the manifests of social exclusion are intertwined and inseparable. Structural barriers prevent immigrants from achieving their goals and maximizing their potentials at both the economic and social levels.

## **2.2 Acculturative stress and social support**

Another challenge that is associated with the immigration settlement process is the stress factor. Stress can come from family pressure, work-related concerns, language deficiency, cultural

barriers, and systemic discrimination (George, 2002; Hirayama et al., 1993; Simich et al., 2005). Many researchers analyzed the immigration stress issue using the acculturative stress framework.

Acculturation is the process in which people adapt to a new social environment. This process happens to immigrants at both cultural and psychological levels (Berry, 2001; Berry, 2003). In this process, immigrants face many issues, pressures and choices, such as whether they are accepted by the dominant group, which acculturation strategy they choose, and how to deal with perceived incompetence of daily living and participating in the labour market. These issues and pressures result in the feelings of uncertainty, anxiety and depression, known as acculturative stress (Berry, 2001; Berry, 2003; Thomas & Choi, 2006). Acculturative stress has been identified as one of the major threats to immigrants' health (Noh and Kaspar, 2005).

Researchers found that acculturative stress and social support are closely related. People who have less social support experience more acculturative stress than those who have more (Thomas & Choi, 2006). Social support can reduce the level of acculturative stress (Keel & Drew, 2004; Oh & Sales, 2002; Smart & Smart, 1995; Tartakovsky, 2007; Thomas & Choi, 2006; Tran & Huynh-Hohnbaum, 2008; Ye, 2006). Social support, especially emotional support, reduces acculturative stress in two aspects. It helps relieve stress when it occurs. It also serves as a buffer preventing stress from happening (Cobb, 1976; Ye, 2006). Social support can come from a variety of channels, such as family, friends, and community. It can be generated through various social and cultural activities (Smart & Smart, 1995; Thomas & Choi, 2006; Ye, 2006). Social network and support from people of same ethnic background is very important in helping immigrants deal with acculturation stress and maintain good health and well-being (Noh & Kaspar, 2005; Ye, 2006).

### **2.3 Social support and informal social networks**

How to meet immigrants' settlement needs is an issue facing many immigrant receiving countries, such as Canada. Often times, decision makers focus on formal services provision by the government and non-profit agencies. Studies have found that informal support is important in helping people in needs (Levy, 2000; Aroian, 1992; Leslie, 1992). A couple of studies in the European context demonstrate that informal social support plays a significant role in assisting immigrants in their settlement process (Hernández-Plaza *et al.*, 2004; Iosifides et al., 2007). Studies have also found that services provided by the government and not-for-profit organizations are not always adequate, accessible or preferred (Hernández-Plaza *et al.*, 2006; Lo et al., 2007; Wang & Truelove, 2003; Heenan, 2000; Wilson, 1986; Ward, 1986). This gap calls for informal social supports from family members, relatives, friends and communities.

An informal social network refers to the social connections of an individual with his or her family, relatives, friends and members of the communities that he or she is part of (Froland et al., 1981). Informal social support networks were found to have many advantages over formal service providers (Hernández-Plaza *et al.*, 2004). They are more accessible, congruent with shared norms, stable, multiplicable, equal, adaptable to individual's needs and more flexible (Hernández-Plaza *et al.*, 2004; Froland et al., 1981; Gottlieb, 1981; Gottlieb, 1985; Litwak, 1985).

Researchers analyzed social support networks in functional and structural perspectives (Hernández-Plaza *et al.*, 2004; Hernández-Plaza *et al.*, 2006). By structure, a social network can be analyzed by examining its size, composition, density, homogeneity, dispersion, contact frequency, reciprocity and multiplicity. By function, social networks can be viewed in terms of informational, material and socio-emotional supports. Informational support refers to the attainment of useful information. Material support is also called instrumental support, which refers to the supply of material goods or an offer of personal assistance. Emotional support refers to the offering of both verbal and non-verbal caring and concern. These expressions convey a message that helps boost the self esteem of the receiver and fight negative feelings the person may be experiencing (Hernández-Plaza *et al.*, 2004; Hernández-Plaza *et al.*, 2006; Ye, 2006).

Socio-emotional supports can be given through activities or expressions (Skilbeck & Payne, 2003). It can be accomplished by listening, empathizing, legitimizing and exploring one's feelings (Burlison, 2003). There are different forms of emotional support, which can come as expressions of love, care, concern and interest, or as a way of encouragement, appreciation, reassurance and respect (Burlison, 2003; Sinha et al., 2002; Timmerman et al., 2000). Emotional support measures can be used to help people to gain a sense of control in stressful situations, to increase their sense of belong, to maintain one's dignity and to boost one's self-worth (Apker & Ray, 2003; Ye, 2006). Understanding people who need the assistance is very important in providing emotional support (Skilbeck & Payne, 2003).

## 2.4 Social capital

The importance of social network for immigrants is also demonstrated through the attainment of social capital (Iosifides et al., 2007). Membership in social networks is believed to generate tangible and intangible values, or social capital. Social capital is the actual or potential resources that people possess or acquire by belonging to social networks (Ports, 1998). Social capital serves three basic, but not mutually exclusive functions: sources of social control, family support, and social support. Social capital can be converted into human capital and economic capital (Ports, 1998). Three forms of social capital are generally recognized. **Bonding social capital** refers to the bonds among family members, close friends and the ethnic community. **Bridging social capital** is characterized by less strong relationships, such as workplace and professional associates, and friends

from different ethnic backgrounds. **Linking social capital** refers to the connection of people in different power positions, such as the relationship between immigrants and service providers and government agencies (Forbes, 2006; Iosifides et al., 2007; Putnam, 2000; Putnam, 2004).

Even though social network is very important for immigrants, Kazemipur, a Canadian researcher found that immigrants' social capital is weaker than that of long-time residents. Kazemipur (2006) examined the value of social networks of immigrants in Canada, as compared to native-born Canadians. His findings suggest that immigrant's social network is less beneficial than that of the native born Canadians in social, economic and cultural dimensions. On average, an immigrant network has fewer members. The potential socio-economic membership benefit of immigrant's social network is smaller. Also, immigrants are less likely to ask their social contacts for assistance. Li (2004) suggests that social capital can be restrictive for immigrants and members of ethnic minority communities. Their bonding social capital sometimes serves as a trap which constrains their social mobility and limits their opportunities outside their own community.

## **2.5 Internet-based social networks**

Internet-based social network comes in many forms. Various terms are used to indicate Internet social network venues. Commonly used terms include:

- web-based discussion groups
- online discussion groups
- online discussion forums or usenet
- email lists, listserv
- chat rooms
- newsgroups
- discussion boards
- online support groups
- computer mediated network
- virtual community
- online board
- or bulletin board

(Colvin, 2004; Drentea & Moren-Cross, 2005; Eastin & LaRose, 2005; Matei & Ball-Rokeach, 2001; Ye, 2006)

Previous research confirmed the assumption that the internet is a social medium and is capable of providing social support (Eastin & LaRose, 2005; Drentea & Moren-Cross, 2005; Matei & Ball-Rokeach, 2001; Ye, 2006). Studies found that various groups of people had benefitted from the social support available through internet-based networks, which include people from within an

ethnic community (Matei & Ball-Rokeach, 2001; Ye, 2006). People can obtain four types of social support through the affiliation with internet communities. These are social companionship support, informational support, self-esteem support and instrumental support (Eastin & LaRose, 2005). Eastin & LaRose (2005) also found that social support increases as the size of the online social network grows.

Online social network can increase user's social capital (Drentea & Moren-Cross 2005). Studying the social interaction of 180 mothers with young children from an online bulletin board on a parenting website, Drentea and Moren-Cross (2005) found that this bulletin board created an online community which helped increase social capital of new mothers at a time when these women were confined to home and were more isolated than usual. These social capitals were gained through both informational and emotional supports, and with the feeling of protection in the virtual community. Mothers obtained valuable information for the care of their newborn babies. This information came from a heterogeneous group of women, which are often in contrast to the more homogeneous community of family and friends.

Bagozzi et al. (2007) found that the effects of online social interaction on offline activities are multifarious. Online social activities increase some forms of offline social interactions and decrease other forms. Specifically, face to face interactions with family and friends, and participation in hobby groups are increased. Telephone conversation and enjoyment of mass media decreased. Data that Eastin and LaRose (2005) gathered suggested that traditional offline interaction could be transferred to online interaction. Matei and Ball-Rokeach (2001) found that online and offline social ties were related. Stronger attachment to local community increased online community participation. Citing Hampton (2001), Matei and Ball-Rokeach (2001) also stated that online community participation could enhance and increase real life community participation.

In the event of social support seeking, online venues are justified as a more convenient and effective choice, when offline networks do not have the expertise or when the content of support is more personal or sensitive (Eastin & LaRose 2005). In a study of caregivers' view of online social support, Colvin et al. (2004) found three advantages that are associated with the attributes of computer-mediated communication: anonymity, asynchrony and personalization. The anonymity factor made caregivers, who provide regular care to family or friend due to their senior age or illness, feel easier to relate to each other and to seek help for emotional needs. Anonymity also fostered a nonjudgmental atmosphere online. Asynchrony is associated with convenience. For instance, a caregiver did not have to worry about their appearance or arrange sitters in order for them to leave home. Caregivers could log on and off whenever it was convenient for them, and were not pressured to join in any conversation when they were not prepared to do so. Internet was also found constructive in connecting people in similar situations and with shared values, and in sharing information and solutions (personalization). It helped expanding people's social network.

Online social network has its limitations. Researchers found that online sociability could reduce face-to-face interaction (Colvin et al. 2004, Eastin & LaRose 2005, Matei & Ball-Rokeach 2001, Nie 2001). Disadvantages include the absence of physical contact and socially contextual cues, and the inability to share tangible support. Some users doubt the quality and adequacy of information shared. Users also complained about the lack of confidentiality, technical problems and internet cliques that could make some users feel excluded (Colvin et al. 2004).

## **2.6 Implications for this study**

The literature reviewed above strongly suggests that internet-based social networks have the potential to provide social supports to immigrants and to help meet their settlement needs. This role that online social support networks could play is based on its social support functions, including informational, material or instrumental, and socio-emotional supports. The functions that are found in offline social networks are also attainable through online communities.

In what ways could internet-based social support help meet the needs of immigration settlement? How could internet-based social network help reduce acculturative stress many immigrants experience? What kind of information immigrants could obtain to help them reach their settlement goals? What common settlement indicators could be best achieved with the assistance of online social support? I will try to answer these questions in this research paper.

## Chapter 3

### **The New Wave Chinese Immigrants**

In order to understand the needs of Newbridger members, the assistance that Newbridger provides, and the implications of Newbridger, it is necessary to take a look at the larger communities to which most Newbridger members belong to. According to Landed Immigrant Data System (LIDS) compiled by Citizenship and Immigration Canada, in the ten-year period between 1996 and 2005, the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) has attracted more than one million immigrants from over 200 countries and regions. Over three quarters of these immigrants were born in 20 countries (Table 1). Eight of the top ten, or twelve of the top twenty countries or regions are in Asia. Another three countries from the top twenty are from Africa or South America. Most immigrants are from non-English speaking countries.

Table 1 also shows that China is the top source country for immigrants intended to settle in the GTA in six of the ten years between 1996 and 2005. In the other four years, China trails India with a difference of less than a thousand people. The number of immigrants born in China exceeds 10 thousands each year. They comprise more than 11% of the total immigrant population in this period. In 2001 alone, 22,484 immigrants came to GTA from China.

**Table 1. Top 20 Source Countries of Immigrants to the GTA**

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	'96-'05 Total	'96-'05 Total %
<b>% China</b>	<b>11.5%</b>	<b>11.4%</b>	<b>13.3%</b>	<b>17.4%</b>	<b>17.9%</b>	<b>18.0%</b>	<b>16.5%</b>	<b>18.0%</b>	<b>16.4%</b>	<b>16.4%</b>	<b>15.8%</b>	
<b>China</b>	11,097	11,242	10,142	14,682	19,673	22,484	18,457	17,583	16,360	18,486	<b>160,206</b>	<b>15.8%</b>
<b>India</b>	11,500	11,764	8,657	10,197	17,594	20,074	20,776	17,173	18,324	23,318	<b>159,377</b>	<b>15.7%</b>
<b>Pakistan</b>	6,121	9,319	6,146	6,773	11,207	12,138	10,808	8,865	8,593	9,611	<b>89,581</b>	<b>8.8%</b>
<b>Philippines</b>	6,285	4,862	3,262	3,464	4,280	6,434	5,538	4,963	5,496	7,279	<b>51,863</b>	<b>5.1%</b>
<b>Sri Lanka</b>	5,191	4,260	2,809	3,745	4,415	4,516	3,908	3,756	3,513	3,818	<b>39,931</b>	<b>3.9%</b>
<b>Iran</b>	3,092	4,257	3,811	3,306	3,161	3,162	4,900	3,353	3,530	3,066	<b>35,638</b>	<b>3.5%</b>
<b>Russia</b>	1,499	2,366	2,928	2,557	2,958	3,120	2,691	2,370	2,260	2,167	<b>24,916</b>	<b>2.5%</b>
<b>HK &amp; HK SAR)</b>	10,914	8,250	2,672	1,266	975	693	560	552	565	704	<b>27,151</b>	<b>2.7%</b>
<b>Korea, Republic of</b>	1,054	1,530	1,704	3,004	3,504	4,654	2,956	2,474	1,618	1,619	<b>24,117</b>	<b>2.4%</b>
<b>Jamaica</b>	2,694	2,399	1,894	2,007	2,079	2,343	2,074	1,644	1,745	1,530	<b>20,409</b>	<b>2.0%</b>
<b>Ukraine</b>	1,120	1,488	1,590	1,778	2,244	2,569	2,529	1,976	1,493	1,613	<b>18,400</b>	<b>1.8%</b>
<b>Bangladesh</b>	1,149	1,750	1,126	1,160	2,038	2,713	1,902	1,344	1,545	2,813	<b>17,540</b>	<b>1.7%</b>
<b>Romania</b>	1,499	1,690	1,287	1,442	1,999	2,513	1,739	1,449	1,401	1,247	<b>16,266</b>	<b>1.6%</b>
<b>U.S.A.</b>	1,429	1,352	1,284	1,609	1,691	1,671	1,335	1,442	1,936	2,485	<b>16,234</b>	<b>1.6%</b>
<b>Guyana</b>	2,052	1,605	1,093	1,177	1,146	1,564	1,325	1,234	1,176	1,106	<b>13,478</b>	<b>1.3%</b>
<b>Afghanistan</b>	1,192	1,307	1,066	1,050	1,525	1,700	1,251	1,188	1,010	1,188	<b>12,477</b>	<b>1.2%</b>
<b>Egypt</b>	1,368	1,159	712	718	836	1,275	905	991	1,026	1,046	<b>10,036</b>	<b>1.0%</b>
<b>Taiwan</b>	2,329	2,650	1,267	946	686	557	517	285	338	367	<b>9,942</b>	<b>1.0%</b>
<b>Iraq</b>	1,246	969	766	839	929	1,234	1,031	735	739	1,104	<b>9,592</b>	<b>0.9%</b>
<b>England</b>	1,034	905	827	877	944	1,079	812	956	1,001	890	<b>9,325</b>	<b>0.9%</b>
<b>Top 20 Total</b>	<b>73,865</b>	<b>75,124</b>	<b>55,043</b>	<b>62,597</b>	<b>83,884</b>	<b>96,493</b>	<b>86,014</b>	<b>74,333</b>	<b>73,669</b>	<b>85,457</b>	<b>766,479</b>	<b>75.6%</b>
<b>Top 20 Percentage</b>	<b>76.2%</b>	<b>76.0%</b>	<b>72.1%</b>	<b>74.1%</b>	<b>76.2%</b>	<b>77.2%</b>	<b>77.0%</b>	<b>76.2%</b>	<b>73.8%</b>	<b>75.8%</b>	<b>75.6%</b>	
<b>Other Countries</b>	<b>23,026</b>	<b>23,711</b>	<b>21,309</b>	<b>21,867</b>	<b>26,162</b>	<b>28,561</b>	<b>25,672</b>	<b>23,213</b>	<b>26,197</b>	<b>27,333</b>	<b>247,051</b>	<b>24.4%</b>
<b>Total Immigrants</b>	<b>96,891</b>	<b>98,835</b>	<b>76,352</b>	<b>84,464</b>	<b>110,046</b>	<b>125,054</b>	<b>111,686</b>	<b>97,546</b>	<b>99,866</b>	<b>112,790</b>	<b>1,013,530</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: LIDS, Citizenship and Immigration Canada

The Chinese diaspora is one of the fastest growing ethnic communities in Canada. According to the 2006 census, Chinese community is the 8<sup>th</sup> largest ethnic group in Canada, or the 4<sup>th</sup> largest ethnic group by single response, after Canadian, English and French, trailing the 3<sup>rd</sup> place French by a little over 95 thousand people<sup>1</sup>. Nearly 42% of all ethnic Chinese live in the GTA, making it the 4<sup>th</sup> largest ethnic group after English, Canadian and Scottish.<sup>2</sup>

As in any ethnic group, intra-group differences exist within the Chinese community. Differences between Chinese immigrants from mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and other parts of the world have been analyzed (Guo & DeVoretz 2007; Li 1998, 2005a, 2005b; Lo & Wang 1997; Wang & Lo 2005). After 1995, a new sub group of Chinese immigrants emerged (Li 2005b). They come from China but are different from previous immigrants from China. They are large in number and are one of the largest recent immigrant groups in GTA. To distinguish this group from previous groups, I call them the New Wave Chinese immigrants. The New Wave Chinese immigrants refer to immigrants who were born in China and came to Canada after 1995.

In 1995, Canadian embassy in Beijing began to process the economic category immigration applications<sup>3</sup>. Before that year, most Chinese immigrants had to apply in a third country or region, unless for family reunion. This is partly reflected in the changes in birth place and last permanent residence statistics. Prior to 1996, the percentage of indirect mainland Chinese immigrants is very high. Born in mainland China, these immigrants became permanent residents of a third country or region, especially Hong Kong, before coming to Canada. Figure 1 shows that for eight years in the two decades, more China-born immigrants came to GTA via Hong Kong than directly from mainland China. However, this trend started to change in 1995, when the proportion of indirect China-born immigrants dropped consistently and sharply. By 2000, 94% of China-born immigrants came to GTA directly from China.

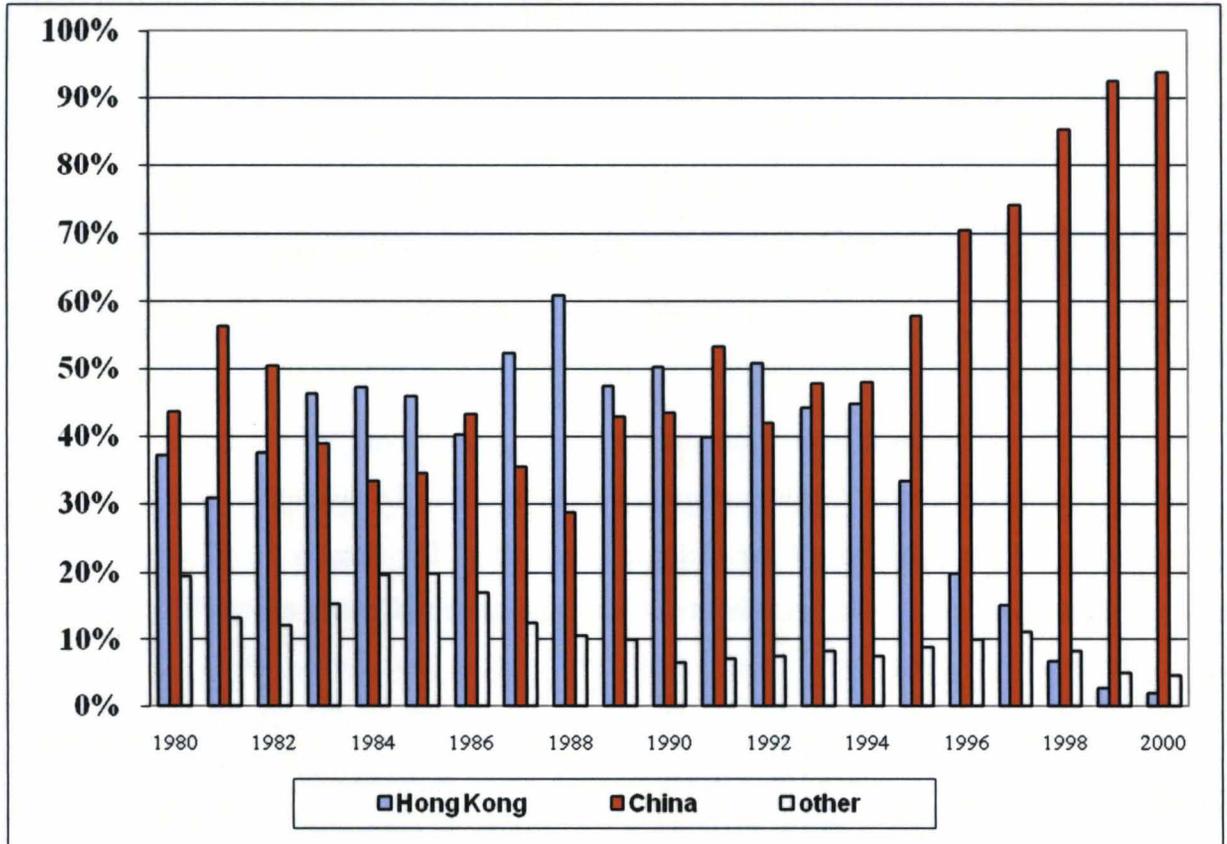
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<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada. 2007. *Ethnic origins, 2006 counts, for Canada*, accessed Nov. 30 2008  
<http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census06/data/highlights/ethnic/pages/Page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo=PR&Code=01&Data=Count&Table=2&StartRec=1&Sort=3&Display=All&CSDFilter=5000>

<sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada. 2007. *Ethnic origins, 2006 counts, for Toronto census metropolitan area*, accessed Nov. 30 2008  
[http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census06/data/highlights/ethnic/pages/Page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo=CMA&Code=535\\_&Data=Count&Table=2&StartRec=1&Sort=3&Display=All&CSDFilter=5000](http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census06/data/highlights/ethnic/pages/Page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo=CMA&Code=535_&Data=Count&Table=2&StartRec=1&Sort=3&Display=All&CSDFilter=5000)

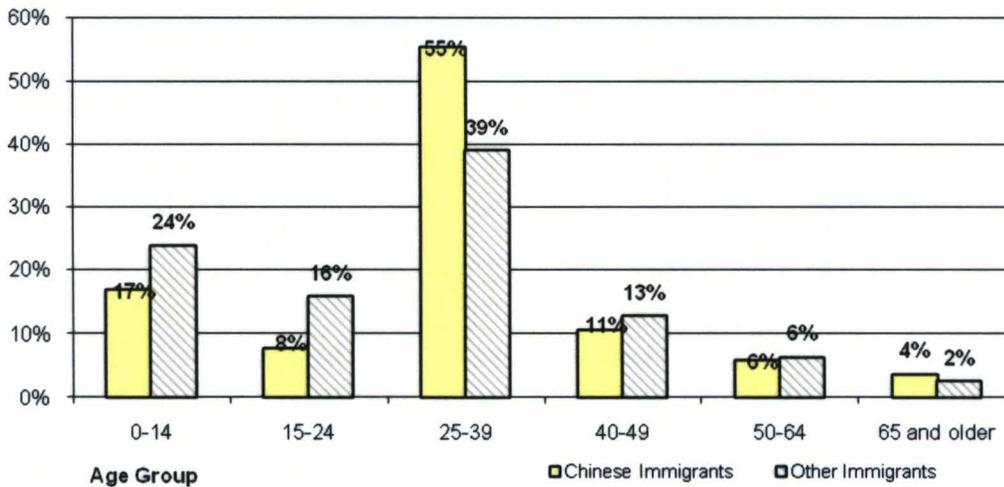
<sup>3</sup> Email correspondence from CIC media office in Toronto, December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2007.

**Figure 1. Percentage of China Born Immigrants from Different Regions, 1980-2000**



Source: LIDS, Citizenship and Immigration Canada

**Figure 2. Age Distribution of Chinese and Other Immigrants to the GTA, 1996-2005**



Source: LIDS, Citizenship and Immigration Canada

According to LIDS, the New Wave Chinese immigrants are a group of relatively young people. Most of them are in the prime working years of their life (Figure 2). About 55% of the Chinese immigrants<sup>4</sup> are between the age of 25 and 39. Another 11% are between the age of 40 and 49. Compared with immigrants from other parts of the world who came to GTA in the same time period, a larger percentage of Chinese immigrants are ready to work when they landed in Canada. Also, compared with other immigrants, adult Chinese immigrants are more likely to be married (Table 2).

**Table 2. Marital Status of Chinese and Other Immigrants (Age ≥20) to the GTA, 1996-2005**

	China	Other
Single	14.7%	22.5%
Married	81.6%	72.3%
Divorced, widowed, separated	3.7%	5.3%

Source: LIDS, Citizenship and Immigration Canada

In general, the proportion of Chinese immigrants who received bachelor' and higher degrees is higher than other immigrants. About 57% of Chinese immigrants between the age of 20 and 64 years have at least a bachelor's degree, compared with 48% for other immigrants. As well, adult Chinese immigrants are less likely to have a lower than high school education than other immigrants.

**Table 3. Education Levels of Chinese and other Immigrants (Age 20-64) to the GTA, 1996-2005**

	China		Other	
up to high school	25,452	20.8%	160,875	28.3%
Post secondary without degree	27,644	22.6%	131,291	23.1%
Bachelor's Degree	49,750	40.7%	206,892	36.4%
Master's Degree	16,365	13.4%	61,749	10.9%
Doctorate	2,959	2.4%	7,452	1.3%
Total	122,170	100.0%	568,259	100.00%

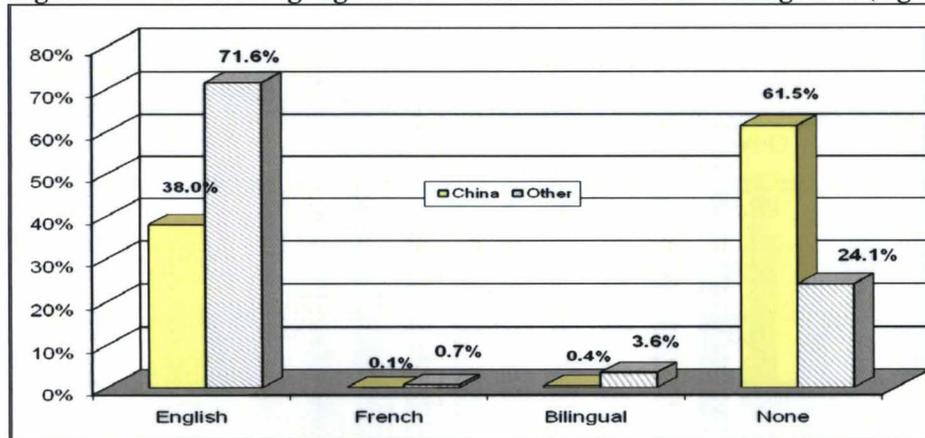
Source: LIDS, Citizenship and Immigration Canada

A great obstacle facing the New Wave Chinese immigrant community is insufficient official language skills. The proportion of Chinese immigrants who has no official language skills far exceeds that of other immigrants. For the ten-year period between 1996 and 2005, 61.5% of Chinese immigrants between 20 and 64 years of age have neither English nor French skills, compared with

<sup>4</sup> From this point on, Chinese immigrants refer to the New Wave Chinese immigrants, unless otherwise explained.

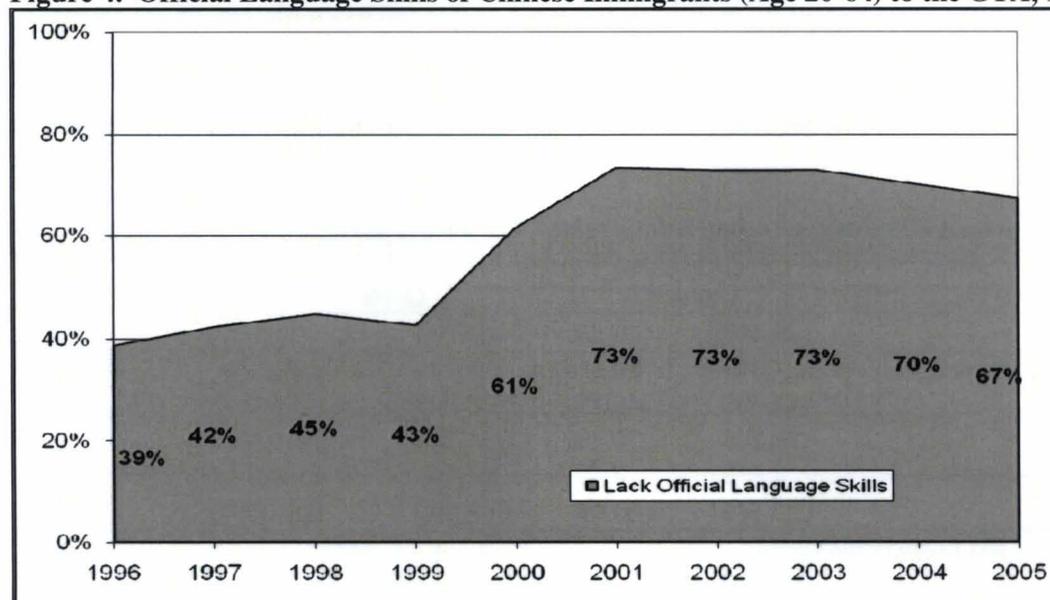
only 24.1% immigrants from other countries (Figure 3). The lack of efficient official language skills for New Wave Chinese immigrant is also reflected in the comparison with previous Chinese immigrants. Figure 4 indicates that there is a significant increase in the percentage of Chinese immigrants who lack official language skills between 1999 and 2001.

**Figure 3. Official Language Skills of Chinese and other Immigrants (Age 20-64) to the GTA, 1996-2005**



Source: LIDS, Citizenship and Immigration Canada

**Figure 4. Official Language Skills of Chinese Immigrants (Age 20-64) to the GTA, 1996-2005**

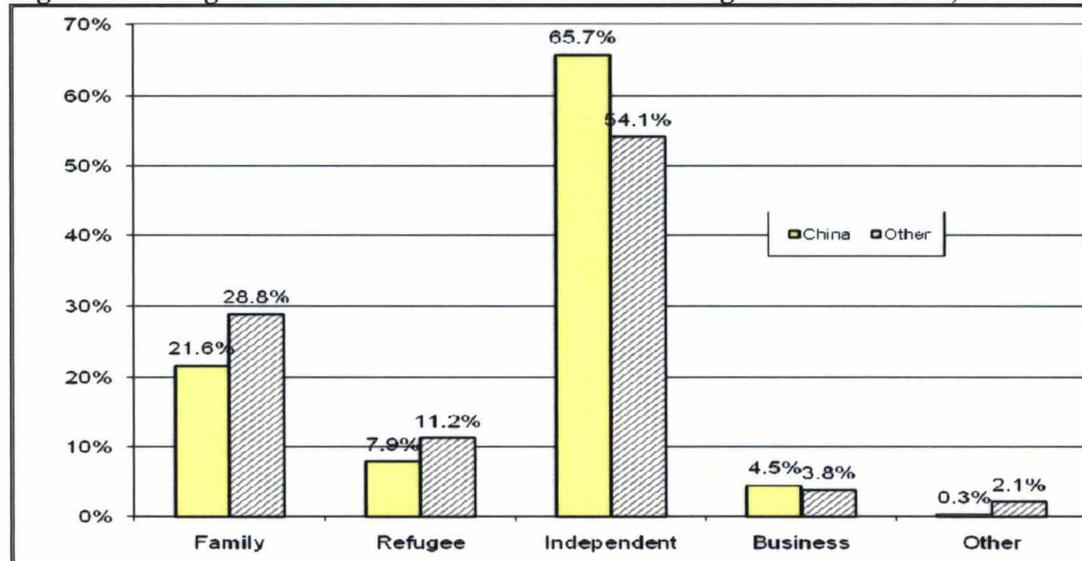


Source: LIDS, Citizenship and Immigration Canada

The increase of recent immigrants to Canada is fuelled by the surge of independent or skilled-workers class immigrants. The principal applicants of this class are assessed against the point system which is designed to select immigrants who are deemed most fit to live in Canada. In the ten year period between 1996 and 2001, independent class immigrants from both China and other countries

exceed 50% (Figure 5). However, compared with immigrants from other countries, the proportion of independent class immigrants from China is 10% higher. The proportion of family members, that include spouse, children, parents and grandparents, is higher for immigrants from other countries than for Chinese immigrants.

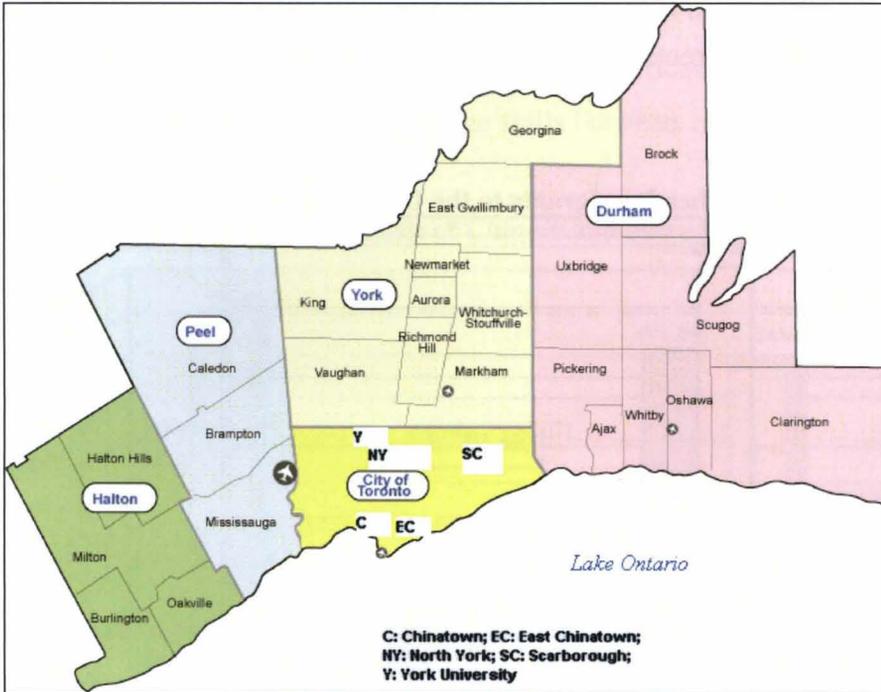
**Figure 5: Immigration Class of Chinese and other Immigrants to the GTA, 1996-2005**



Source: LIDS, Citizenship and Immigration Canada

Once in the GTA, Chinese immigrants are more likely to settle in areas that have a high concentrations of ethnic Chinese population. According to the 2006 census, most New Wave Chinese immigrants settled in the City of Toronto within their first five years in Canada. Following the footsteps of Hong Kong immigrants, the New Wave Chinese immigrants often chose Scarborough and North York. Some also settled in the south most stretch of Markham, an area bordering Scarborough and North York. Different from Hong Kong immigrants, some new wave Chinese immigrants favored the south stretch of the City of Toronto, especially the Central Chinatown area. The New Wave Chinese immigrants also concentrated in areas that were not popular for the Hong Kong immigrants but were settled by previous Chinese immigrants and ethnic Chinese immigrants from other parts of the world. These include the East Chinatown area, and the neighborhoods in and near York University.

**Figure 6. Map of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA)**

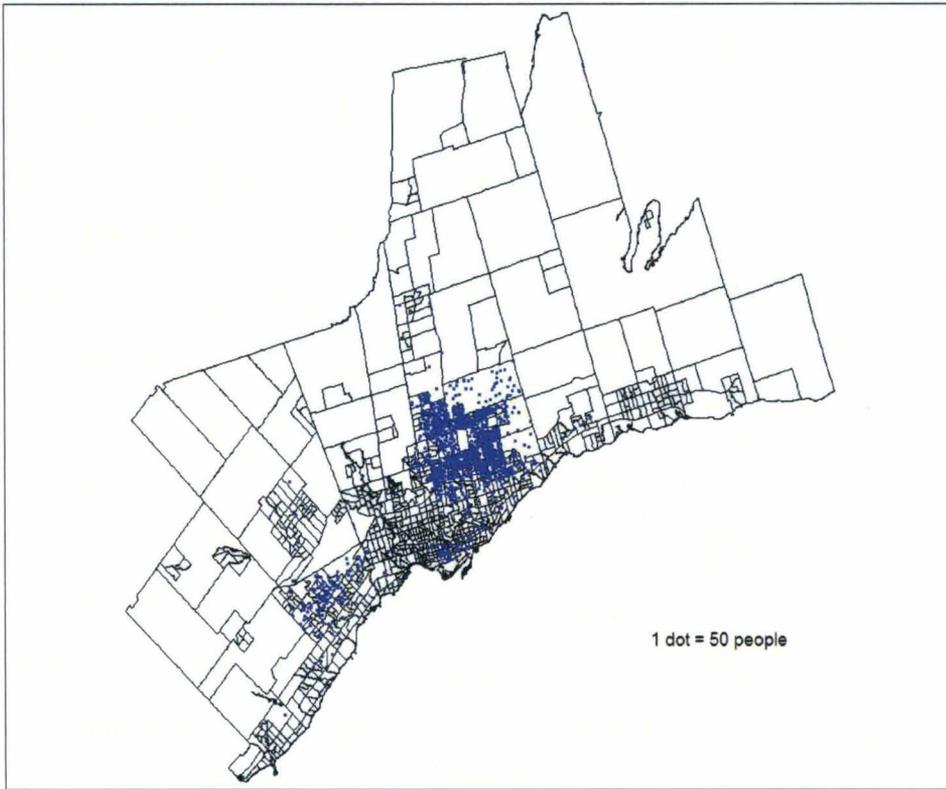


**Figure 7: Residential Pattern of the New Wave Chinese Immigrants in the GTA, 1996-2001**



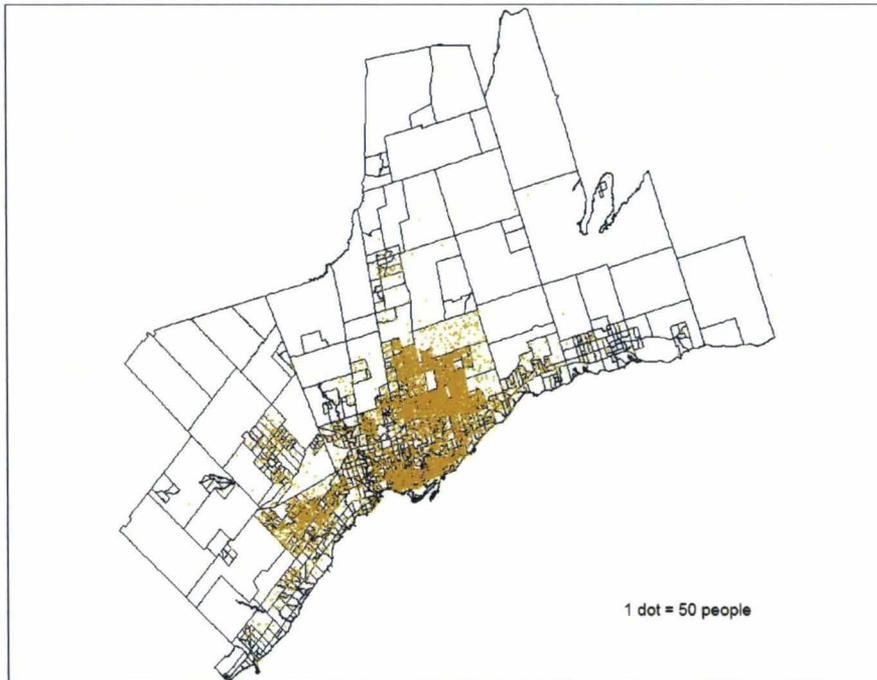
Source: Census 2001, Statistics Canada

**Figure 8. Residential Pattern of Hong Kong born Immigrants in the GTA**



Source: Census 2001, Statistics Canada

**Figure 9. Residential Pattern of Ethnic Chinese Population in the GTA**



Source: Census 2001, Statistics Canada

In summary, the New Wave Chinese immigrants started to come to Canada after 1995. Unlike previous Chinese immigrants who were born in mainland China, most New Wave Chinese immigrants came directly from the People's Republic of China. Previous China born immigrants to GTA are most likely to be indirect immigrants who had experienced the settlement process outside of mainland China, especially in Hong Kong. A number of previous China born immigrants were students in Canada or other Western countries (Li 2005 a & b). After coming to the GTA, many New Wave Chinese immigrants choose to live in areas that are populated with ethnic Chinese community. Given the fact that China's political system and socio-cultural environment is more different from Canada than Hong Kong, it is likely that Chinese immigrants who came to Canada directly from China may encounter more obstacles adjusting their lives in Canada.

Compared with immigrants from other parts of the world who came to GTA in the same period of time, the New Wave Chinese immigrants are more likely to be in their prime working age and to be married. They are also more likely to carry with them more human capital as demonstrated in the higher level of education. Most New Wave Chinese immigrants are independent class immigrants, a category that is deemed to be more desirable for Canada according to the immigration point system. However, the official language skills of the New Wave Chinese immigrants are more likely to be insufficient compared to immigrants from other countries and to previous Chinese immigrants in general. This is one of the biggest barriers restricting their ability to participate in the Canadian labour market and to reach their full potential.

Supplementing the findings of George et al. (2004), the brief profile in this Chapter indicates that the New Wave Chinese immigrants in the GTA are more likely to need supports in, but not restricted to, the following areas:

- English language training, including both the general purpose English as a Second Language classes and English training for professional development
- Employment or self employment opportunities
- Socio-cultural orientation and adaptation
- Acculturation stress reduction
- Volunteer opportunities

## **Methodology and Data Analysis**

This research is conducted using the Grounded Theory approach. Due to the lack of published literature in the area of internet-based immigrant social support systems, this research attempts to uncover the basic characteristics, themes and patterns of such networks, drawing data from the lived experiences and the point of views of immigrants who use such a network.

Data for this research has been collected through interviews and a questionnaire survey. A compilation of all email messages that were sent to Newbridger members between February 9<sup>th</sup> 2007 and December 24<sup>th</sup>, 2008 (the cut-off date for data collection), is available. However, due to the extensiveness of information and time constraints to conduct this research, the email messages are not systematically analyzed. They are used as a reference only.

Ten semi structured interviews were conducted between October 3<sup>rd</sup> and November 18<sup>th</sup>, 2008. The sample was selected through stratified sampling (Berg 2007; Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2006). Both convenience and purposive samples were utilized. Interview participants were solicited through a “Letter from the Researcher” posted on the Newbridger email list, together with the interview guide (Appendix A). The letter explained the research objectives and procedures. The first seven people who responded to the letter were selected. However, six of the seven respondents were immigrants who had been in Canada for over two years. Predicting that there was a possible difference in the use and views of Newbridger by new and settled immigrants, a second call for more recent immigrants who had been in Canada for less than two years, was sent out. The first three people who responded to the second message were interviewed.

The first person to be interviewed is the founder and list owner of Newbridger. This interview enabled the researcher to obtain an overview of Newbridger. At this stage, the researcher gathered information about the initiation and operation of Newbridger, its activities, network rules and future plans, as well as membership demographics.

Nine subsequent interviews were conducted. Four respondents were recent immigrants who had been in Canada for less than two years. Five were more established immigrants who had been in

Canada between two and eleven years (Appendix B). All interview respondents have at least a bachelor's degree. The ratio of male to female is 4 to 6, which reflects the demographics of Newbridger members as estimated by the group's founder. Four interviewees were between the age of 25 and 40 and six were between 41 and 54. They came to Canada between 1997 and 2008. Eight interviews were conducted in Chinese (Mandarin), and two were conducted in English, as preferred by the interviewees. The interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes.

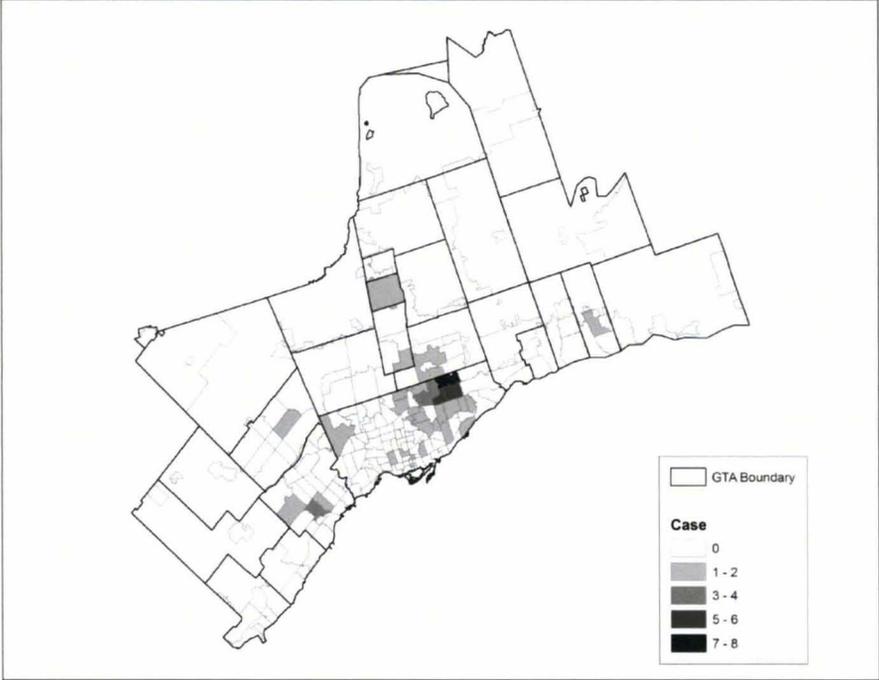
At this stage, the objective was to identify recurring themes about the functions and qualities of Newbridger through respondents' experiences with Newbridger and their evaluations of the network. The interviews followed a semi-structured interview guide which consisted of open-ended questions to help informants focus on issues relevant to the research. Respondents were encouraged to contribute information and comments that they deemed important to the understanding of Newbridger. The researcher also asked follow-up questions to follow information leads or to clarify information. The interview guide was used in a flexible way. Themes identified in earlier interviews were incorporated in later interviews.

Interview data was supplemented with a questionnaire survey (Appendix C). The questionnaire was finalized after the completion of the interviews so that the questions reflected the findings of the interviews. It was sent to the Newbridger mailing list and posted on their new website. Sixty-one completed surveys were collected in a period of two weeks ending on December 12<sup>th</sup> 2008.

The survey data was collected for two purposes. First, it was used to examine if the themes and patterns emerged from the interviews could be verified by more Newbridger members. Reflecting the findings of the interviews, the questions in the survey were more focused. The effectiveness of Newbridger as a social support network was investigated in terms of the functions and qualities of the network. Demographic characteristics of the respondents were also collected. As well, the functions and qualities of Newbridger were examined in comparison with other people and agencies. Second, the questionnaire was designed to uncover new themes that were not captured through the interviews.

The profile of survey respondents is very similar to that of the interviewees. Both groups are typical of the New Wave Chinese immigrants as described in Chapter 3. All survey respondents were between the age of 20 and 54. About 53% were over 40 years of age. Five people had college level education. The rest had earned at least a bachelor's degree, including two with PhD degrees. Coming to Canada between 1997 and 2008, these respondents had been in Canada for 5 years on average. About half of them had been in Canada for 4 years and 3 months. They were most likely to live in Scarborough or north eastern North York (Figure 10).

**Figure 10. Settlement Pattern of Survey Respondents**



Source: LIDS, Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

A descriptive analysis of the interview data was conducted. The interviews were first analyzed through open coding. All major points from each interview were listed. Then, the ten lists were combined into one by merging identical points and grouping similar points. The initial grouping was not guided by any theory or previous research. It followed the literal meanings of each interview respondents' own words. The initial analysis resulted in scores of small groups.

In the next step, the themes of each small group were compared. The small groups were sorted into different categories according to similar features of their themes. At this point, the characteristics of social support networks that were identified in previous researches emerged. Most

themes fit into the dichotomy of a social support network: they reflect either the functions or the qualities of a support network. For functions, all three areas, i.e. informational, material and emotional support, is reflected in the interviews.

## Chapter 5

### Findings and Discussions

The findings of the survey and the interviews are very similar in respect of the functions of Newbridger. Both data collection methods confirm that Newbridger provides informational, socio-emotional, and some degrees of material or instrumental support that help its members in their settlement process. In this chapter, findings from the interviews and the survey will be presented, starting with an overview of the evaluations of Newbridger by its members. Then, the functions of Newbridger will be discussed in details. Special emphasis will be on how Newbridger meets the needs of immigrant settlement. This format, I hope, will enable the readers to see not only what Newbridger has done but also what such a network is capable of doing.

Survey respondents were asked to describe Newbridger by choosing from eight characteristics of the network generalized by interviewees (Table 4). An overwhelming majority of the respondents agree or strongly agree that Newbridger is friendly, positive, convenient and reliable, and offers useful information. These features will be discussed in relation to immigrant settlement later in this chapter.

**Table 4. Answers to Question 3: What term(s) would you use to describe Newbridger?**

	Convenient	Reliable	Friendly	Positive	Unique Information	Useful Information	Enjoyable
Strongly Agree	66%	62%	77%	72%	30%	41%	22%
Agree	33%	33%	22%	25%	37%	50%	56%
Don't Know	2%	6%	2%	2%	28%	7%	19%
Disagree	0%	0%	0%	2%	6%	2%	4%
Strongly Disagree	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

For settlement related issues, the functions of Newbridger are most eminent in providing assistance in the areas of informational and socio-emotional support. Over half survey respondents answer Newbridger is “very helpful” in providing information, a sense of belonging and a venue for the enjoyment of friendship (Table 5). A large percentage of survey respondents also agree that Newbridger is “very helpful” or “helpful” in issues relating to their daily living in Canada (86%) and as a channel for leisure and recreation (80%). To a lesser degree but still significant, survey

respondents find Newbridger helpful in their quest for employment (65%), and in updating their credentials through education (73%). Newbridger is found least helpful in assisting members with housing related issues (35%).

**Table 5. Answers to Question 2: In which of the following aspects is Newbridger helpful to you ?**

Percentage	Housing	Employment	Education	Daily Living	Information	Belonging	Recreation	Friendship
Very helpful	3.8	17.3	21.4	31.6	55.9	51.8	22.8	58.9
Helpful	30.8	48.1	51.8	54.4	39	42.9	57.9	37.5
Not Sure	34.6	28.8	17.9	10.5	1.7	3.6	14	3.6
Not helpful	26.9	3.8	5.4	3.5	1.7	0	3.5	0
Not helpful at all	3.8	1.9	3.6	0	1.7	1.8	1.8	0
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

### 5.1 Newbridger as an Information Hub for Immigrants

Information is one of the most significant forms of support Newbridger provides for its members. Nine interview respondents articulated that the information they found on Newbridger was useful. This finding is confirmed by the survey. Close to 95% of all survey respondents agree that the information they receive through Newbridger is helpful at least. Close to 56% of respondents rated Newbridger information as “very helpful” (Table 5). In Table 5, ninety-one percent of the respondents agree or strongly agree that Newbridger provides useful information. Sixty-seven percent of the respondent found that information on Newbridger was unique.

However, the interview results suggest that recent and settled immigrants take different perspectives concerning the usefulness of Newbridger information. Respondent who had been in Canada for less than three years said the information on Newbridger was helpful to them right here and now. Those respondents, who had been in Canada for over three years, wished that they had access to such information when they were new to Canada. Thus, both groups agreed that Newbridger information is helpful to new immigrants in their immediate settlement process. Even though settled immigrant considered their immediate settlement needs were met, they still used Newbridger for integration or long-term settlement goals as well as other needs.

A wide range of information has been posted on Newbridger. In respect to helping immigrants in their settlement efforts, information support attainable through Newbridger covers, but is not limited to, these settlement indicators: employment, housing, education, healthcare, daily living, and community participation and recreational activities.

## ***Employment Support***

As indicated earlier in this chapter, over 65% of the survey respondents believe that Newbridger is constructive in helping members finding employment (Table 5). This is reflected in the interviews as well. Five interview respondents indicated that Newbridger was very helpful with employment related issues. This support largely comes from employment-related information that is posted on Newbridger, including insider job postings and tips about the position that gives the job seeker an edge over others. For instance, on February 9<sup>th</sup> 2007, a member posted a message about a pending part time vacancy in a downtown museum. This member was planning to quit his or her job, and offered to personally introduce interested members to the boss or supervisor.

There are various types of employment related information on Newbridger. First, there is information about workshops and training opportunities offered by non-profit organizations, or about college and university programs that have great prospect for good jobs. These programs could equip students with knowledge and skills that are in high demand in the job market. Second, there are links to written information on various employment related issues, such as where to find specific or appropriate help, how to locate job vacancies, how to write a resume and cover letter, or how to prepare for job interviews. Third, there are accounts of personal experiences, such as how the person succeeded in finding a good job, or warning of pitfalls that the person had fallen into. Forth, there are job postings, job fairs and job vacancy information through personal contact. Fifth, announcement of volunteer opportunities that help immigrants obtain much needed Canadian working experience. Sixth, there are questions and discussions on specific issues, such as fees charged by employment brokers.

Three interview respondents found jobs because of information they read on Newbridger. Interviewee #9 found a surviving job thanks to information on Newbridger. She also had the opportunity of a job interview due to a separate piece of information on Newbridger. Even though she was not hired in the latter case, she admitted that the interview was a very precious experience and helped in her future job search. Another interviewee found a surviving job because of the help of a Newbridger member. He was hired on an inventory job just a couple of days before his previous contract job ended. Even though the inventory work was not an ideal choice for him, it was better paid than his previous job. The new company treats employees with higher standard. He was also relieved that he would have a relatively stable income. Later, when he learned that his company had vacancies, he posted messages on Newbridger. He also accompanied other Newbridger members to meet his boss. As a result, two other Newbridger members were employed.

Interviewee #10 came to Canada only 6 months before we met for the interview. He found his current job because of the information on Newbridger. A member posted a notice about this job on the network and left his telephone number. This interviewee contacted this member and

expressed interest in the work. After some exchange of information, the member who posted the information personally introduced interviewee # 10 to his boss. Eventually, the interviewee was hired.

Working in a small company, interviewee #10 was very satisfied with his job. He said that his work was more than a surviving job, because he had the opportunity to see all aspects of the company's operation. He also had opportunities to interact with people outside the company. For him, this was a great chance to learn more about Canada and about working in Canada, and to gain precious Canadian working experience that had stood in the way for so many new immigrants.

Respondents believe that various employment related information that are posted on Newbridger familiarize them with the Canadian job market. Even though, they have previous working experience in China, they contend that knowledge and job searching skills in the Canadian context play an important part in finding good employment opportunities. The information they find on Newbridger is practical, and well-tuned to their specific needs.

Relating to employment and earning a living, information is also available for self-employment and entrepreneurship. From time to time, messages are posted on Newbridger about various information sessions or workshops on how to start a business in Canada, about import and export related regulations and issues, and about doing business with China. There are messages about business opportunities or calls for business partners. Newbridger members also organized a business group that meet offline.

### ***Education, Healthcare and Housing Supports***

As important settlement indicators, the needs for reasonable and affordable housing, for education and training, and for health and medical services are all significant in the lives of New Wave Chinese immigrants. This is reflected in Newbridger. About 73% survey respondents believe that Newbridger is either helpful or very helpful in education-related matters (Table 5). Newbridger carries information that can be helpful for members with their own education and training, as well as in the education of their children. Members share information and tips about good schools for their children, advice about their children's education issues, and information about after school academic enhancement classes and extra-curricular activities. One Newbridger member even posted a message asking for opinions about her child's choice for a university major.

As indicated in Chapter 3, New Wave Chinese immigrants face a bigger challenge with English proficiency than either previous Chinese immigrants (Figure 3) or immigrants from other parts of the world (Figure 4). Reflecting this need, Newbridger posts a lot of information about

language training courses and tips about how to acquire English skills faster. Newbridger's offline English group was formed as a result of discussions about better ways to improve English. One can also find professional training information on Newbridger offered by the non-profit service providers, academic institutions and the private education sector. Interviewee #9 learned about a personal training and coaching program through Newbridger. She found it very useful. After she saw what she called "the real benefit", she recommend it to other people she knew, including Newbridger members.

Newbridger is also a place for information about healthcare issues. There is information about how to find a good family doctor, and there are discussions about how to stay healthy. A notice for free or very affordable dental care service is treasured information for immigrants who do not have extended health insurance. Interviewee #5 gave birth to her child in Toronto and experienced the whole process of pregnancy, child birth and child care in Canada. When a member posted an inquiry for an obstetrician and gynaecologist, she had a lot to share. As far as she knew, at least six other people had provided information and/or advice about this topic. She was not sure whether the person chose the doctor she recommended. But she remembered that the person expressed gratitude to all for their information and tips, which helped her find a good doctor she was very satisfied with.

About 35% of the survey respondents thought that Newbridger was helpful or very helpful in the areas of housing (Table 5). Among the eight areas surveyed, respondents gave the lowest rating to Newbridger's function as an engine for housing support. There is no regular posting of housing vacancies on Newbridger. However, one may find information about preferred part of GTA to live, kinds of houses or apartments to buy, housing prices and mortgages, factors one needs to know when buying a house, and about how to find a good real estate agent. There is also information about temporary housing for immigrants who just land in Canada. Occasionally, members post messages to rent out their spare rooms or apartment, to find a roommate, or to find a room or an apartment to rent in a specific area of the city.

### ***Daily Living Support***

When asked about how helpful Newbridger was in assisting with their daily living issues, 32% survey respondents chose "very helpful" and 54% chose "helpful" (Table 5). Support for daily living is the area, among five settlement indicators, that received the highest rating from Newbridger members. A large part of this support comes from the information posted on Newbridger. Newbridger carries a lot of information relating to the bits and nibs of daily living in Canada, and in GTA in particular. This information can range from orientations to the city of Toronto and

surrounding areas, child care, internet services providers, second hand cars, to various bank services. It can be about where to shop for ethnic foods, where to find specific services provided in Chinese language, how to file an income tax return, or how to reduce auto insurance premiums. This pool of information serves as a road map to everyday life in GTA. It helps new immigrants get to know their new physical and social environment faster. It also helps ease the strains that many immigrants feel when they find themselves incompetent in the seemingly simple tasks of daily living.

### ***Community Involvement and Recreational Activity Support***

About 81% survey respondents agree that Newbridger is helpful or very helpful in the area of recreation (Table 5). This means that Newbridger messages are fun to read, and that Newbridger provides information about recreational activities members can enjoy. There is often information about community and recreational activities that help immigrants enjoy life in Canada. This may include various leisure activities in the Chinese community in GTA, such as concert by popular Chinese singers, traditional Chinese holidays celebrations, and outings organized by Chinese folk associations. Information about activities and events outside the Chinese community can also be found on Newbridger. For instance, messages were posted about volunteering for a movie event, in memory of Iris Chang, author of *The Rape of Nanking*. In another message, a member who worked for a bank, recommends a social event organized by the bank. Newbridger members also organize their own activities, such as outings. At the time of the interviews, Newbridger organized a trip to Algonquin Park. When a group of single women decided to take a walk in Edwards Gardens, they posted a message on Newbridger inviting single men to join them.

One interesting offline activity that several interview respondents mentioned was volunteering for a Toronto MPP candidate during the 2007 provincial election. This was initiated as the result of a message posted on Newbridger. A Newbridger member was an assistant to the MPP candidate. During the election, this member sent an email to the Newbridger moderator, who believed that participating in campaign activities was a good opportunity for immigrants to learn about the Canadian political process, to know more people and to gain working experience. So he posted a message on Newbridger recommending this activity to members. As a result, nearly 100 people signed up to volunteer for the MPP candidate. They were involved in different aspects of the campaign, such as door to door canvassing, poster setting-up, flyer distribution, and calling potential voters to vote. One interview respondent continued to volunteer in the constituent office of that candidate, who was elected to the provincial legislature.

## ***Characteristics of Information***

Generally, communication through Newbridger is made in simplified Chinese, the native language of the New Wave Chinese immigrants. This feature of the network is especially precious to this immigrant community in which most members have difficulty understanding and expressing themselves effectively in English. The New Wave Chinese immigrants may also have difficulty communicating, in writing, with immigrants from Hong Kong and Taiwan, who read and write in traditional Chinese characters. The Chinese language has two written forms: the simplified version and the traditional version. Chinese who grow up in People's Republic of China use simplified Chinese. Also, the delicate expressive customs, such as choice of analogies, may be different for Chinese from different parts of the world. Therefore, for Newbridger members, who are mainly the New Wave Chinese immigrants, simplified Chinese is both convenient and more culturally relevant.

For many members, Newbridger is a backup resource bank. Information passed through this network may not be useful to member at all time. But they are confident that once they post a request on the network, someone will respond. They believe that there is a good chance (over 50%) that they can get the information they need. At least, Newbridger increases the chances for them to find specific information.

**Types of information**            There are different kinds of information on Newbridger. By initiation, two distinct types of information are available, which are voluntary information and solicited information. Members and the moderator post information they believe are helpful to other members. This voluntary information targets at immigrants' immediate settlement or long-term integration needs. Solicited information refers to replies that members posted in response to other member's questions.

By target, information can be directed to an individual member, or to the whole group. Information can be posted or solicited targeting the specific need of the member who makes the request, for instance, finding a place to have an accordion repaired, or finding a farm for sale. Other times, the information is of general interest and can be found useful to a large number of people, for instance, how to improve English or how to find a good family doctor. However, this distinction is often blurred. Information about finding a good auto repair shop may be posted as a response to a member's request, but it is useful for other members as well.

By source, information found on Newbridger comes from personal experience and thoughts of individual members, from government offices, non-profit agencies, and in some cases, from private business. It can be cyber links to other information sources, too. A number of Newbridger members work for non-profit service agencies or community organizations that provide services to recent immigrant population. These members often disseminate information about their services

through Newbridger. In this sense, Newbridger serves as a medium between immigrant service organizations and their potential clients.

**Personal experience and advice** The government and the non-profit community service sector place great emphasis on providing correct, accurate and impartial information. Even though this is the right approach, information delivered in this fashion may lose personal touch. In contrast, Newbridger members share personal experiences with others. This may include advice and opinions that are helpful supplements to factual information. Members do not shy away from recommendations, such as ESL programs and teachers, driving instructors, and auto repair shops and technicians, doctors and medical specialists.

On Newbridger, members also share their personal experiences and thoughts about living and surviving in Canada. This helps members learn from other's triumphs and errors, so they can avoid making the same mistakes. This also enables immigrant to learn about the new physical and social environment faster. Three interview respondents emphasized this effect . They maintained that learning from other people's experiences are an efficient way to help immigrant find the right path quickly and avoid pitfall in their settlement process.

In summary, Newbridger provides valuable information to help immigrants finding employment, training and educational opportunities. Information is also shared concerning housing issues and health and medical care. Information on Newbridger can provide a road map that help immigrants navigate the complexity and intricacy of daily living in a new physical and social environment. Personal experience and advice shared by some immigrants can also help others avoid the pitfalls. This support is even more valuable because it is provided in a language that Newbridger members are most comfortable with and from people of the same backgrounds.

Information on Newbridger reflects the priorities of the moderator and Newbridger members. What appears on the network depends on what the moderator and members deem as important in meeting their needs. The network is also flexible in the sense of responding to the requests of members. Newbriger is not a closed system. In respect of information, it often provides links to other online and offline resources. Access to the information is also made easier when the information provider can give specific answers to the question, or point to the specific location where the needed information can be found. Instead of sifting through pages of un-needed information, the user could go to the target directly.

## 5.2 Newbridger's Socio-emotional Support Functions for Immigrants

The most frequently expressed function of Newbridger by the interview respondents is socio-emotional support. Everyone who participated in the interviews mentioned some aspects of this function. This finding is in compliance with the survey result. Responding to the question: "in which of the following aspects is Newbridger helpful to you", survey participants gave two indicators of socio-emotional support, sense of belong and friendship, 95% and 96% approving rate respectively, the highest ratings among the eight areas (Table 5).

As the literature in Chapter 2 suggests, socio-emotional support can be provided in different forms, and can be summarized into different categories. These different categories or forms are often interrelated and are not mutually exclusive. Respondents in this research confirmed that most of these aspects of socio-emotional supports were manifested in Newbridger. Reflecting both the literature and the findings of this research, emotional support will be discussed in the following four aspects: sense of belong, friendship, love and care, and encouragement.

### *Sense of Belonging*

Even though, Newbridger members are connected mostly through email messages, they are aware of the very existence of the network. For them, Newbridger is not only a virtual reality, but a community with substance. They feel that there is a common bond between them through Newbridger. So they are not scattered individuals but a group of interconnected people. This sense of belonging and attachment exists partly because of their shared cultural background. They came from the same socio-cultural environment, and they can understand each other better.

Interviewee #7: *"Here (in Newbridger), I don't feel isolated. ... This is a group of people I can mingle in. This is where I belong."*

Interviewee #6: *"I feel a sense of belonging here (in Newbridger) ... it consists of people of same background (as mine)."*

Interviewee #4: *"Newbridger is a group of people of same background. ... if someone throws in a joke, I can truly understand it. I can laugh whole heartedly. ... I belong here. When I need to wash my car, I post a message asking which member does car washing. I want to give this business to a member."*

## ***Friendship***

In addition to feeling a sense of belonging, many Newbridger members also develop friendship with people they acquainted through Newbridger. For these immigrants, there is more to the relationship than the common characteristic of being immigrants from China. They are not only the same kind of people who can understand each other better, but also are bonded with mutual acceptance and interest. In this sense, Newbridger is a space for the fostering of friendship. Several respondents mentioned that being a Newbridger member gave them a sense of attachment. One member compares Newbridger members to circle of friends, or people she met at the church.

Interviewee #10: “ *we can make friends based on common interests, such as sports and classical music. ... From Newbridger, we not only get help, we also get friendship. For other organizations, we are only clients.*”

The feeling of having friends is one of the most effective ways to fight loneliness that new immigrants often experience in their initial settlement stage. Feeling lonely is also a source of stress that threatens the health and well being of immigrants. One respondent landed in Canada two years ago, but she had been in Canada only for a year. She stayed in China the other half of the time. She was depressed with the feeling of loneliness and boredom. Even though she did not have the pressure of earning a living, she was in obvious pain when she talked about leaving her circle of friends in China. She said she did not have friends to chat with or to go out with in Toronto. Everyone seemed to be so busy. She heard about Newbridger from someone she met when she volunteered for an event. She joined Newbridger about 10 days before our interview, and had high expectations of the network.

When interviewee #2 and his family arrived in Toronto, they did not know anyone here. Even though they had a place to live, opened a bank account, and had their basic needs met, they felt very lonely. Now they don't because they have made new friends through Newbridger, the church they went, and ESL class they attended. #10 was in Canada for six months when we met for the interview. He has experienced loneliness and depression. “*I don't feel lonely anymore ..... partly because of Newbridger. Through Newbridger, I met many people, and made friends. ... I also participate in other activities.*”

As a feature of friendship, Newbridger emphasizes on mutual assistance. Newbridger members are aware and proud that their network is a mutual help group. That is one attraction of the network for several interviewees, who benefit from it and enjoy it. They feel a sense of achievement from helping other people. During the interviews, seven respondents expressed a willingness to help when they are needed, without the solicitation of a question,

Interviewee #5: *“We help each other at Newbridger. Helping (other) people gives me satisfaction. (There is a) sense of achievement. ... I like to share what I know with other people. I really enjoy it.”*

Interviewee #4: *“At Newbridger, we help other people and also get help from other people. There is a spirit of mutual help. We cooperate. .... Some people have money. Some people have intelligence. (We have the) willingness to help each other. (We) gather our strengths and work together.”*

The friendship and mutual help aspect of Newbridger can also serve the function of a safety net. Interviewee #6: *“I am not a very active member of Newbridger. ... I stay with the group because maybe one day I can help. Maybe one day I will need help.”*

### **Love and Care**

Associated with friendship is love and care that several respondents feel present with Newbridger network. The feeling that someone cares about them gives them a sense of protection. Some respondents are confident that if they have a genuine need, someone from this group will offer to help. Sometimes, Newbridger members extend love and care to people outside their network. Interviewee #5 remembered that a new immigrant had an accident and died a couple of years ago. A message was posted on Newbridger calling members to support this man’s wife and child. Many responded.

Interviewee #4 feels that there is true love and caring for members at Newbridger. *“Newbridger brings out the best in people, good side of human nature. It is different from some other (Chinese language) websites. ... Other places feel like a store. You go shopping there and get what you want and leave. That’s it. (There is) no connection. But Newbridger has love and giving in it. It feels like a big family. It has love, similar to church group and friends. ... I can feel the warmth here. There are a lot of warm hearted people here. ... I have experienced hardship (when I first came to Canada). So I want to help others who are in the position as I was many years ago.”*

Interviewee #9: *“Other organizations only provide service, but Newbridger is friends help friends. Newbridger members care about one another.”*

## ***Encouragement***

Newbridger encourages its members to face the challenges and hardship of settling in a new country with a positive attitude. Interview respondents were fully aware of the fact that immigrating to a new country is a very stressful life event. Adjusting to the life here is not easy. People's attitudes are important in this process. Interviewee #3 said that some other Chinese media were depressing as they often carry sad stories. *"But Newbridger is different. Newbridger is more positive"* (Interviewee #3). This member feels that people get encouragement and strength through Newbridger. *"Our lives here (in Canada) are a long journey. (It is) full of challenges and frustration. We have to keep working hard. (We) need more encourage. ... (but) some media (are) very negative."*

Part of the positive attitude interview respondents felt comes from Newbridger network's moderator. He sometimes adds comments to stories and events posted on Newbridger, highlighting the positive aspects. He emphasizes solutions rather than simply presenting the problem. He even recommended songs to the list. One is titled "On the Road". The moderator wrote: *"... this song lets you forget your worries every time you hear it. It gives you strength. It makes you feel the beauty of live ..."* (Part 2, July 20<sup>th</sup> 2008).

Interviewee #9: *"The emails I receive through Newbridger are encouraging. (The moderator) selects success stories. It makes me feel that if someone can do it, I can, too. (The success stories) have that psychological suggestion impact."*

One significant implication of the emotional support function is that it helps relieving and preventing acculturative stress. Even though this research did not study the direct link between social support provided by Newbridger and the level of acculturative stress Newbridger members experience, there is strong indication that the kind of social support people can receive from Newbridger helps prevent and reduce acculturative stress.

Previous studies have established that immigrants' social network and informal social support system provide the mechanism to help reduce the psychological pressures and frustrations they experience due to migration (Thomas & Choi, 2006; Ye, 2006). Social support from people of the same ethnic background is very import in helping immigrants dealing with acculturation stress and maintaining psychiatric health and well-being (Noh & Kasper, 2003). Specifically, emotional support in the forms of friendship and social connection is very helpful. The feeling that someone is there for them and that they are not alone is very important in helping people in stressful situations.

For many New Wave Chinese immigrants, one of the biggest challenges is that their social support system was interrupted due to migration. This is a significant loss. As immigrants land in the new country, they lose support from family, friends, and the social organizations that they are familiar with and that they used to rely on. They find themselves in a place that is very different from where they come from. Many experience the disorientation, loss of confidence and frustrations. The very existence of Newbridger provides an option for the replacement the social support network the New Wave Chinese immigrants left in China.

### **5.3 Newbridger as a Facilitator of Social Capital**

Another way to analyze the role of Newbridger in immigrant settlement is to examine its capacity as a social capital facilitator, and how the increased social capital can help put immigrants in a better position to have their settlement and integration needs met. As an informal social network, Newbridger serves a function of helping its members increase their social capital. This can be achieved in three ways. First, Newbridger can help its member know more people and faster than they could otherwise. Second, Newbridger can provide opportunities for members to build strong relationships or friendships. Third, Newbridger can help its members know people who are more resourceful than themselves. Increased social capital helps Newbridger members with their settlement and integration needs.

Most interviewees are fully aware that Newbridger is a social network. They agree that Newbridger is a place for people to meet either virtually or physically. Through Newbridger, they can meet more people than they could have through their natural circle of friends and acquaintances. Knowing more people or networking, a term frequently used by several interview respondents, is an integral appeal of Newbridger for its members. It is very important for new immigrants to know more people in their newly adopted country.

*Interviewee #2: "One day, I read a message a person posted on Newbridger looking for a place to play Ping Pong. I knew a good place, so I responded. So, we met and went to play ping pong together. ... Now we still go sometimes. We also chat on the phone sometimes. ... You can meet more people and meet people faster through Newbridger."*

At least six other interview respondents agree with interviewee #2 that Newbridger helped increase the size of their social network. For them, Newbridger is another channel to meet and connect with people. To be a part of Newbridger is an effective way to expand their social network. This is achieved through online discussions, enquiries and responses, and participations in offline activities that they learn through Newbridger. As discussed in the previous section, friendship building is also possible through Newbridger.

Newbridger has organized regular and special offline events and activities that enable members to have face-to-face contact. These include an English group, outings, topical discussion meeting, and booths in other community functions. Started in early 2008, the English Group is formed as a result of several members chatting about improving English and using English learning opportunities to learn about Canadian culture.

When asked how many people they had known personally because of their involvement in Newbridger, the answers are between 10 and 70 people. These include people with whom they had engaged in some types of conversations other than saying “hi” and “bye”, people they had worked with in Newbridger projects or other volunteer events, people they exchanged contact information, or people who had become personal friends.

Newbridger members benefit from their improved social capital. These benefits manifest through assisting Newbridger members in finding employment, education and training opportunities, and building a community. Bonding social capital, generated among Newbridger members, helps create a chain effect for employment. For example, one person, who found employment because of the assistance of another Newbridger member, turned to help more Newbridger members get employment opportunities with the same company. Bridging and linking social capitals, generated from contacts with people from other ethnic communities or with people who are associated with other social networks, are able to give Newbridger members information about events and activities outside Newbridger network.

Social capital generated through Newbridger can also be turned into cultural and economic capitals, which not only help immigrants with their immediate settlement needs, but also help with their long-term integration objectives. One interview respondent is very interested in understanding the cultural aspects of the Canadian society. He is able to find like-minded people through Newbridger. That is why he got involved in the English group and became very active. The English group members believe that learning English is a way to learn about the culture. Instead of focusing on the grammatical aspects of the English language, the English group chooses a topic around broad social and cultural themes for each meeting. It helps them gain a better understanding of Canada. From time to time, they also invite native English speakers from other ethnic communities.

Newbridger also helps turn social capital into economic benefits. While many immigrants try every means to find employment opportunities, other immigrants put their efforts into starting their own business. A number of immigrants met on Newbridger worked on a business venture together. It started with a member preaching his business model on Newbridger: “design in Canada, manufacture in China and market around the world”. Through contacts from Newbridger, this

person was able find investors. He was operating a factory in China at the time of this study's data collection.

Members' opinions differ in regards to the quality of social capital that people can generate through participation in Newbridger. Some respondents think that Newbridger provides valuable social capital. Interviewee #5 believes that there are "crouching tigers and hidden dragons" in Newbridger. For her, some Newbridger members are well connected with other networks, for instance, members who work in the non-profit sector. She believes that these people have lots of potentials.

Other respondents feel that the usefulness of Newbridger is restricted in regards to the social capital quality. The second opinion echoes the findings of Kazemipur (2006) that the quality of social capital for immigrants is not as good as other Canadians. One respondent commented that Newbridger is a very loose group of people. The bonds among its members are not very strong. This person feels that Newbridger has not attracted people who are very successful and resourceful. Another Newbridger member shares similar thoughts. She said that members of another online community, which she was associated with, are more resourceful than members of Newbridger.

As a social network, Newbridger helps connect people. People being interviewed in this research agree that through Newbridger, they are able to know more people and faster than they could without Newbridger. In this respect, Newbridger helps members generate social capital. Making friends serves different functions. There are immediate benefits of social support people can enjoy right away. It also has the potential that people can benefit from in the future.

In respect to social capital, it matters how many people that a person knows, how close the relationships are, and how much monetary, social and political resources these people have. At this stage when most Newbridger members are new immigrants who have been in Canada for less than 10 years, their resources for other forms of capital, such as economic benefits, are limited. However, since members of Newbridger have a high level of education, their human capital is rich. There are great potentials that the social capital they acquired through Newbridger will be beneficial in the future. For many members, Newbridger is an important supplement of offline social networks.

#### **5.4 Other Functions of Newbridger**

Although not as significant as informational and emotional support, Newbridger does have the mechanism that enables its members to receive some material and instrumental supports. For instance, Newbridger serves as a bulletin board where members post messages about items they do not use any more and would like to give away. These items can be household appliances, furniture,

bicycle, cooking utensils, books, electronics, stuff for babies, or free concert tickets. One person even gave away an air-conditioner (June 1<sup>st</sup> 2007). Interviewee # 2 got two computer books and a router for his computer from another member. The monetary value of these items may be small. But for new immigrants who have limited income, this assistance was precious. This function is comparable to similar services some welcome or orientation centres offer.

Newbridger also facilitates the exchange of instrumental support. As mentioned in the earlier section, some Newbridger members are willing to recommend other members to potential employers and personally accompany them to meet the employer, which increase their chances of finding employment. Members also use Newbridger as a notice board to solicit personal assistance. A very common request is asking travellers to carry stuff to or from China, such as letters, documents or packages. Depending on the size and weight of the package, a fee may be offered. For many New Wave Chinese immigrants who maintain ties with family, relatives or friends in China, this assistance helps save time and money. It helps relieve some burden during their settlement process. Finding a traveller to accompany immigrants' elderly parents on the flight is another kind of requests found on Newbridger. Interviewee #6 once posted a message looking for travelers who might take the same flight to assist her elderly parents. Several people responded. Unfortunately, she did not find anyone to go with her parents due to conflict of flight schedules and destination difference. But she said she still had a better chance with Newbridger than only through her circle of personal friends.

For some Newbridger members, reading the emails have become a part of their lives. The function of the emails has moved beyond being a practical utility to a way of enjoyment. Reading the emails becomes a pass time activity, like reading a newspaper, watching TV or going shopping. It helps making an immigrant's life more interesting.

Interviewee #5: *"Newbridger helps enrich my daily life."*

Interviewee #6: *"Newbridger has many different things. It is fun to read."*

There is also evidence that Newbridger has the potential of being an instrument for social mobilization. At least three people being interviewed voiced the old country concern that Chinese people often just keep to themselves. But these interviewees see hope that Newbridger can help break that old country curse. Using Newbridger, it is possible to generate support for a common goal from a large number of people. This effect is manifested in the fundraising efforts, which Newbridger members joined, to benefit the immigrant family that suffered the loss of the husband. Another example is the number of volunteers gathered for the campaign of a MPP candidate. Due to funding restructuring, many non-profit agencies drop or reduce their efforts to advocate for immigrants (Omidvar & Richmond 2003; Richmond & Shields 2007). Thus, it depends more on the immigrant communities to defend and promote their rights.

## 5.5 A Comparison of Newbridger and Other Service Agencies

Various people and organizations are involved in the immigrant settlement process. Few people settle in a new country without any social support from the formal support system which involves government and the non-profit sector, or the informal support system consisting of family, friends and other members of the community. This section will discuss how effective or preferred Newbridger is in comparison to other players.

None of the respondents in this study suggest that they are reluctant to receive support from any specific source. This is contrary to the findings of a few studies in which some immigrants stayed away from government agencies (Iosifides et al. 2007; Hernandez-Plaza et al. 2006). It seems that Newbridger members would go to different people or organizations for assistance depending on which party could give them the support they need. Accessibility and convenience are also in consideration. For instance, Interviewee #2 found out about a career training program that he was very interested in. But he could not participate because of time conflict with his work schedule.

Several interviewees see an advantage of Newbridger over government and the non-profit sector. For the latter, immigrants are mostly just clients. But in Newbridger, they are treated more as people first. For employment support, for instance, the agencies may provide job vacancies. But from Newbridger, they may also obtain recommendations from someone on the job. This is similar to getting help from a personal friend. Another advantage Newbridger has over the formal support providers is easy access. If an immigrant has a question, all they need to do is to send an email to the moderator. There is no form to fill out and no trip to take.

Survey respondents were asked to rate on seven groups of people or organizations regarding their helpfulness in the settlement process. The result is shown in Table 6. Overall, friends not associated with Newbridger are found to be most helpful with a mean score of 7.5. This is closely followed by Newbridger (6.9) and family members or relatives (6). The other four types of organizations all receive about average scores indicating that they do play a role in helping immigrant settle in Canada. The government and the non-profit sector all receive just above average ratings.

The effect of family and relative is worth noting. Even though this category receives above average rating, many scores lie in the extremes. About a quarter of the respondents find family most helpful. However, another quarter of the respondents find it not helpful at all. Only 46 survey participants responded to this choice, which means that 25% did not respond to this choice. A possible explanation is that many New Wave Chinese immigrants do not have family or relatives in Canada. This possibility, if confirmed, makes friendship networks more important to the New Wave Chinese immigrants.

**Table 6. Answers to question 4: How helpful are following people/agencies in helping you to settle in Canada?**

	Family / Relative	Newbridger	Friends	Government	Non-profit	Media	Religion
1	24%	2%	3%	6%	11%	11%	17%
2	2%	2%	0%	6%	6%	9%	11%
3	4%	4%	0%	9%	2%	11%	6%
4	4%	8%	5%	11%	7%	8%	6%
5	9%	15%	5%	22%	16%	19%	19%
6	4%	8%	15%	17%	18%	11%	13%
7	2%	21%	17%	11%	15%	17%	6%
8	2%	13%	19%	13%	18%	8%	13%
9	4%	9%	15%	4%	6%	4%	4%
10	26%	19%	20%	2%	2%	2%	4%
Total #	46	53	59	54	55	53	47
Mean	6	6.925	7.492	5.333	5.618	4.887	4.83
Std. Deviation	3.553	2.328	2.12	2.163	2.415	2.415	2.721

*(In a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 indicates most helpful.)*

Survey respondents were also asked to choose which people or organization they are most likely to contact for help in the eight areas of needs (Table 7). This finding complements the findings of Question 4 (Table 6). Among the five common settlement indicators, Newbridger is found to be most helpful in the areas of daily living and recreation. In terms of social support, Newbridger is most helpful in providing informational support as well as emotional support as measured by the indicators of Sense of Belong and Friendship. Newbridger members surveyed in this research are most likely to contact government and the non-profit sector for help only in the area of education and training. Concerning employment-related issues, only 9% respondents feel that government is helpful, and 19% feel the non-profit sector is helpful. Even though the government has vowed and many non-profit agencies tempt to assist immigrants finding employment, their efforts are either not enough, or have not attracted the attention of Newbridger members.

As the name indicates, Newbridger seeks to bridge the gap between New Wave Chinese immigrants and settled immigrants and native born Canadians. Throughout the research, it is evident that Newbridger network is not attempting to replace any other social networks its members belong to. Rather, it makes great efforts to connect with other networks through its members. For the respondents, Newbridger is an important supplement, not a replacement, to services provided by the government and the non-profit sector. Newbridger is also an extension to family, relatives and other friends.

**Table 7. Answers to question 5: From whom or which organization are you most likely to seek help for the following needs?**

<b>Employment</b>		<b>Housing</b>		<b>Education</b>		<b>Daily Living</b>		<b>Recreation</b>		<b>Belonging</b>		<b>Friendship</b>		<b>Information</b>	
Media	23%	Media	32%	Government	26%	Newbridgeter	36%	Newbridgeter	34%	Newbridgeter	43%	Newbridgeter	48%	Newbridgeter	39%
Newbridgeter	20%	Friends	25%	Non-profit	20%	Friends	27%	Friends	23%	Friends	20%	Friends	30%	Media	27%
Friends	20%	Newbridgeter	19%	Newbridgeter	18%	Family/relative	12%	Media	21%	Family/relative	14%	Religion	8%	Friends	14%
Non-profit	19%	Non-profit	10%	Media	16%	Non-profit	8%	Familyrelative	5%	Religion	9%	Family/relative	7%	Government	9%
Government	9%	Family/relative	7%	Friends	10%	Media	8%	Non-profit	5%	Non-profit	5%	Non-profit	3%	Non-profit	7%
Family/relative	7%	Other	4%	Other	9%	Government	4%	Religious	5%	Other	4%	Other	3%	Religion	2%
Other	3%	Government	3%	Family/relative	1%	Religion	4%	Government	4%	Government	3%	Government	1%	Family/relative	1%
Religion	1%	Religion	1%	Religion	0%	Other	1%	Other	4%	Media	3%	Media	1%	Other	1%
100%		100%		100%		100%		100%		100%		100%		100%	

There is also ample evidence that Newbridger is acting as a medium between formal services providers and their potential clients. Several people on Newbridger email list work for non-profit organizations that have programs to serve the new immigrant communities. These people often use Newbridger as a channel to disseminate information about their services. Other organizations in the non-profit sector also expressed great interest in Newbridger.

Interviewee #9: *“Once I went for an interview at a community service organization and told them about my association with Newbridger. They were very interested and asked many question about Newbridger.”*

## **5.6 Qualities of Newbridger**

The most outstanding feature of Newbridger associated with usage is convenience. According to Table 4, 99% of the survey respondents agree or strongly agree that Newbridger is convenient to use. This also reflects the interview findings. Accessing Newbridger is easy for many New Wave Chinese immigrants as long as they have a computer and internet connection. There is no complicated procedure to join the group. Membership is virtually open to all. Application involves sending an email to the moderator expressing the attention of joining Newbridger. This quality of Newbridger as a social network is very similar to other internet-based communities. Members can access Newbridger without time and space constraint.

Interviewee #2: *“It’s so easy. All I need to do is to send an email to (the moderator).”*

Interviewee #4: *“Using Newbridger is very convenient. If you call someone on the phone, both side have to be free at the same time. With internet, you write whenever you have time. The other side reply whenever he or she has time.”*

Interview #5: *“You can have your problem solved without leaving home.”*

Many respondents said that they trust the information that is posted on Newbridger. They trust the founder and moderator of the network. They also trust the people they meet through Newbridger. The moderator makes a conscious effort to ensure the quality of information posted on Newbridger. He often contacts the person who sends the information to clarify details and to verify information. He also filters out information that he finds bragging or inappropriate. Part of the reason that Newbridger members trust Newbridger is because they trust the moderator.

Interviewee #9: *“I trust (the moderator). He’s not selling anything. No burden”*

Interviewee #4: *“if a Newbridger member recommends a service, I will believe what he or she said.”*

Interview #10: *“I have trust in people met through Newbridger.”*

Interviewee #6: *“I trust the information on Newbridger. Newbridger is not for profit. It is just people sharing.”*

Interview respondents suggest that information passed through Newbridger is more helpful to new immigrants than to settled immigrants. At least three interview respondents feel that the information is more targeted to new immigrants' immediate settlement needs. Job postings on Newbridger, for instance, are more likely to be surviving job or jobs at the entry level. For immigrants who have higher levels of education and professional skills and experiences, this type of work is good only when they do not have other means to earn a living. In this sense, surviving and entry level jobs are more functional for new immigrants. Settled immigrants look for jobs that are better paid, use their professional skills that they had obtained in China, and offer more satisfactions and career advancement opportunities.

*Interviewee #6: I was in the medical profession in China. (In Toronto,) I have gone through more training and hoped to get back into the health care profession in Canada. But I could not find much information that I need on Newbridger. Most job postings (on Newbridger) were entry level jobs.*

Other respondents mentioned other aspects. One interviewee said that lots of the information that were needed by new immigrants is a common sense to settled immigrants who personally had gone through the process. They already have a driver's license and a family doctor, their children have been in the school systems for many years, and they have bought a house. Therefore, such information is not very relevant to them anymore. Another respondent mentioned consumption, noting that settled immigrants can afford better quality and better services than new immigrants. Therefore services and material goods that attract new immigrants with lower price are not as appealing to settled immigrants.

However, this is not to say that settled immigrants do not find Newbridger useful at all. Some information on Newbridger is useful to people despite their length of stay in Canada. Sometimes, members stay with Newbridger for socio-emotional supports, which will be explained later in this chapter. They can also find information useful in a different way. Interviewee #7 owns a business that has a customer service aspect. A lot of her clients are new immigrants from China. She said that by looking through the information from Newbridger, she had a better understanding of her clients.

*From Newbridger, I gain a better sense of what is going on in their minds, and what kind of a life they are living. Newbridger keeps me connected with my client base. It makes me feel that I am still in the same community (Interviewee #7).*

Settled immigrants may also find Newbridger handy when they have a question that recent immigrants are likely have the answer because of their more updated knowledge of China. This reflects the mutual help aspect of Newbridger which will be discussed in greater details later in this chapter. Interviewee # 3 found an answer to a piece of very specific information after he posted a message to the network:

*My wife and son were going to take a trip to our hometown last year. ... There was no direct flight from Toronto to our hometown. They had to spend a night in Shanghai. We didn't know anyone (who could help us). So I posted a message on Newbridger, asking if anyone knew a good and reasonable priced hotel near the airport (in Shanghai). I received five or six responses. We chose a hotel from the suggestions. We were very satisfied.*

## Chapter 6 **Conclusion**

The literature review in Chapter 2 has established that informal social support networks are important in the lives of a variety of social groups, including new immigrants. This assistance is materialized through social capital building, or as social support, which takes the forms of informational, material or instrumental, and socio-emotional assistance. Another strand of literature has established that online communities are capable of providing social support that people traditionally received through face-to-face contacts. Bridging these branches of studies, this research confirms that Newbridger, an internet-based social network, is providing support to New Wave Chinese immigrants. The support helps these immigrants to deal with issues that have emerged from cross border and cross-cultural migration.

Newbridger provides informational and socio-emotional supports, as well as some material and instrumental supports, that New Wave Chinese immigrants need for them to establish themselves in Canada. Among the 14 common settlement need areas that other researchers have outlined (Lim et al. 2005), evidence has shown that Newbridger is capable of providing direct assistance, to different extent, in 6 areas, which are advocacy, counselling and support, health and well-being, information and referral, orientation and recreation. For the relieving of acculturative stress, immigrants can use Newbridger for a sense of belonging and attachment, for love and care, for encouragement and affirmation, and for information that helps solve specific problems.

Newbridger is also capable of offering indirect assistance in the remaining areas mainly through its informational support function. Indirect supports offered through Newbridger can be very significant as well. Employment support through Newbridger, for instance, has enabled several Newbridger members to find employment. In terms of employment assistance, Newbridger can be helpful in three aspects: it provides various employment related information including job postings, instrumental support such as personal recommendation, and encouragement to boost immigrant's confidence. Even though levels of support vary in different settlement needs areas, they are definitely present.

Information is the main form of support members receive through Newbridger. There is no topical restriction as to what messages can be accepted except for the common sense that they do not contain illegal matters and are not offensive to other people. Usually, information on Newbridger is targeted to the specific needs of its members as the moderator and other members see it. In many cases, messages posted are direct response to individual questions that members have posted. Information also helps link Newbridger members to resources outside their own network. Newbridger members are also confident that the information that pass through Newbridger is reliable.

Newbridger is both flexible and accessible. As an internet-based informal social support network, Newbridger is convenient to use. Members can access the network at the comfort of home, during work breaks, and anywhere that has a computer and internet access. With this quality, Newbridger can help break the constraint of physical boundaries. A potential immigrant can be connected with Newbridger, and receive support before they land in Canada. For its members, Newbridger is a friendly space to interact with other people and to support each other. Newbridger is not a static entity. It is evolving and growing. A thorough evaluation of Newbridger should not be restricted to what it has achieved so far, but should also be directed to its potentials.

It is regrettable that only 61 Newbridger members responded to the questionnaire survey, and that this study could not hear from more people who receive Newbridger email messages. Also, eight of the ten interview respondents had participated in offline activities organized by Newbridger members and through Newbridger. The opinions of Newbridger members, who had not had much face-to-face interaction with other members, may be different and are not adequately represented in this study. Creating bridging and linking social capitals is one objective of Newbridger. This study is not able to fully assess the achievement of Newbridger in this respect. Furthermore, due to time constraints, this research is not able to analyze the bulk of email messages sent through Newbridger, which could have provide this researcher with more insight into Newbridger. Newbridger website was launched shortly before data collection for this research. Members' initial opinions towards the website differed. Some respondents embraced the new addition. Others still preferred the email list.

This research could not evaluate the effect the website has on Newbridger network. This research cannot answer all questions about Newbridger, such as the longevity issue that face many internet communities. However, as an exploratory study, I hope this research draws attention to informal immigrant support systems and have these questions answered in the future.

The New Wave Chinese immigrant need to break significant language and cultural barriers that separate them from both the Canadian society in general and the established Chinese communities which consist of native born ethnic Chinese and of immigrants who are mostly from or through Hong Kong and Taiwan. On the other hand, the New Wave Chinese immigrants generally come to Canada with high human capital. They are comfortable with modern communication technologies such as the internet, and are capable of communicating effectively in one written form of Chinese language. Without any direct financial support from the government and the non-profit sector, members of Newbridger support themselves by tapping into their own human capital and the existing resources that are already available in the society. Many other immigrant groups have the same needs and are as capable as New Wave Chinese immigrants. It is worthwhile to investigate if this form of settlement support is transferable to other immigrant groups.

Adding to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, this study suggests that internet-based social networks are capable of generating social capital. The example in this study demonstrates that bonding, bridging and linking social capitals are all attainable through online communities. Online social support is also capable of reducing acculturative stress, and providing significant social support that facilitate immigrant settlement. Future studies should focus on measurable effects that internet-based social networks have in the settlement process.

Newbridger is an innovative way to immigrant settlement service. It survives and grows thanks to the dedication of the moderator and many active members. It is a conscious effort by the New Wave Chinese immigrants to make their acculturation process easier, by gathering limited resources to form greater capacity, and by supporting each other in ways they are capable of. Newbridger is a valuable supplement to the generic informal social support system comprising of family, friends and acquaintances, and formal services providers such as the government agencies and the non-profit sector.

Evidence shown through this study calls for the government to recognize the contribution made by informal social support networks to immigrant settlement, and to support these efforts. One measure the government can take is to help connect immigrant social networks with networks of more established Canadians who have more cultural and economic resources. Policy makers should also consider developing a three-party immigrant settlement service model that incorporates input from the government, the non-profit sector, and informal support networks, including online social networks.

## Appendix A: Interview Guide

### The Role of Internet-Based Social Support Network in Immigrant Settlement

1. How long have you been using NewBridger?
2. How did you know about NewBridger?
3. What do you use NewBridger for? (e.g. Sending or receiving messages, or both; frequency)
4. How helpful is NewBridger to you? (e.g. The overall impression)
5. What are the advantages of NewBridger?
  - a. In terms of settlement needs (such as finding job or housing)
  - b. In terms of usage (ease of use)
6. What are the limitations of NewBridger?
7. Compared with other people or organization(s) that provide settlement support, how do you rate the usefulness of NewBridger? What are your preferences?
8. About the respondent.
  - a. Age range 17 or younger, 18-24, 25-40, 41-54, 55 and over
  - b. Gender
  - c. Highest level of education
  - d. Length in Canada
9. Is there anything you want to add?

Interview with the moderator: To gather information for an overview of NewBridger.

1. Why did you create NewBridger? (Objectives, member recruitment)
2. How is NewBridger operated?
3. How much time do you spend on NewBridger each week?
4. How is NewBridger financed?
5. What regular NewBridger activities and special events have been carried out?
6. What are the rules for using NewBridger?
7. Do you think the objectives of NewBridger are met?
8. What is the future plan for NewBridger?
9. Do you have information about membership demographics?

**Appendix B: Interview Respondents**

<b><i>Age</i></b>	<b><i>Education</i></b>	<b><i>Landed in Canada</i></b>	<b><i>Joined NewBridger</i></b>
41-54	Bachelor	1997	2008
41-54	Master's	1997	2007
41-54	Bachelor	2001	2006
25-40	Bachelor	2001	2006
41-54	Bachelor	2003	2007
25-40	Bachelor	2005	2005
41-54	Bachelor	2006	2008
25-40	Master's	2006	2007
41-54	Master's	2008	2008
25-40	Master's	2008	2008

## Appendix C: Survey Questionnaire

### The Role of Internet-Based Social Support Network in Immigrant Settlement

Please contact Julie Lin at [julie.lin@ryerson.ca](mailto:julie.lin@ryerson.ca) if you have any question.

Please send completed questionnaire by email or mail to Julie Lin before December 15<sup>th</sup> 2008.

Mailing Address: Julie Lin, cc Dr. S. Wang, Dept. of Geography, 350 Victoria Street, Toronto, ON, M5B 2K3

**1. When did you start to use NewBridger?** \_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_ (month/year)

**2. In which of the following aspect is NewBridger helpful to you?** *Write the letter in front of the choice.*

( **A**=Very helpful; **B**=Helpful; **C**= Don't know; **D**=Not helpful; **E**=Not helpful at all )

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Housing                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Information                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Employment                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Sense of belonging               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Education                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Recreation                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Daily living                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Friendship                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other ( <i>please specify</i> ): | <input type="checkbox"/> Other ( <i>please specify</i> ): |

**3. What term(s) would you use to describe NewBridger?**

(**A**=Strongly Agree; **B**=Agree; **C**=Don't know; **D**= Disagree; **E**= Strongly Disagree )

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Convenient        | <input type="checkbox"/> Providing unique information     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reliable          | <input type="checkbox"/> Providing useful information     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Friendly          | <input type="checkbox"/> Enjoyable                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Positive attitude | <input type="checkbox"/> Other ( <i>please specify</i> ): |

**4. How helpful are following people/agencies in helping you settle in Canada?**

(*In a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 indicates most helpful.*)

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family/Relative                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Non profit agency                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> NewBridger                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Media                                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Friends (not related to NewBridger) | <input type="checkbox"/> Religious group (e.g. Church, faith group) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Government office                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Other ( <i>please specify</i> ):           |

**5. From whom or which organization(s) are you most likely to seek help for following needs?**

**A**=Family/relatives; **B**=NewBridger; **C**=Friends (not related to NewBridger); **D**=Government office;  
**E**=Non profit agencies; **F**=Media; **G**=Church; **H**=Other (*please specify*):

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Housing                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Information                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Employment                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Sense of belonging               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Education                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Recreation                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Daily living                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Friendship                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other ( <i>please specify</i> ): | <input type="checkbox"/> Other ( <i>please specify</i> ): |

**6. What would you suggest to improve NewBridger?** *Please use extra space.*

**7. About you.** *Please circle the appropriate answer or fill in the information.*

Postal Code: \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ (first 3 digits) Landed in Canada: \_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_ (month/year) Education: \_\_\_\_\_.

Gender: Male; Female Age: 17 or younger; 18–24; 25–40; 41–54; 55 & over.

**Thank you very much! Please write any comment you wish here or use extra space at the back:**

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