

community storytelling and evidence-based integration strategy



Social Economy and Sustainability Research Network

Partenariat sur l'économie sociale et la durabilité

Bridging, Bonding, and Building / Renforcement des Liens et des Capacités



ISLAND STUDIES

UPEI UNIVERSITY
of Prince Edward
ISLAND

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Dr. Hung-Min Chiang-“Spring Thaw”

Dedication

This work is dedicated to Dr. Hung-Min and Mei-chih Chiang, for their contribution, inspiration and support. Thank you.

Abstract:

Many new settlers go through similar processes in integrating. According to this research, their stories, if shared and honoured, can inform the host community, empower newcomers and improve integration.

The first Chinese person to arrive on Prince Edward Island came in 1851. Over one hundred and fifty years later, this community remained hidden in the shadows. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, through the process of storytelling, this community transitioned from liminality to their rightful place in the local community story. Listening to the voices and stories of the first-generation of island born Chinese provides an opportunity to increase awareness and understanding of those who are not of the majority anglo-saxon ancestry group. The research also provides information that may assist governments to formulate policy that works well both for those who choose to come to a new place, and for those who are well established locals.

Question: What was your first memory of growing up on PEI?
Quote a: I just remember Mom and Dad in the kitchen, always cooking I always thought, I guess, that Dad was quite a pie maker cause I can still picture the rack that he had. He'd slip all the pies in it, and then there was a screen door on it to close so the flies wouldn't get at it. I remember him and mom baking the flies (laughs) baking the pies!..and I remember them in the kitchen with the huge pot of potatoes we had a potato masher that was bigger than me!

The three goals of this research were to:

GIVE VOICE: To highlight the stories and voices of the first-generation Prince Edward Island-born Chinese who were faced with trying to “fit in” to a 90% anglo-saxon population.

EDUCATE: to increase awareness of the concept of Islandness and how it specifically affects the integration process culturally, socially, economically and politically.

CONNECT: to connect Chinese Islanders to the recently arrived Chinese newcomers for the purpose of friendship and support.

This research has demonstrated the significance of the process of storytelling, and how that process affected the participants, giving voice to their lived experience. The opportunity to share their stories was a stepping stone for the community's "coming out", coming forward with their history, acknowledging the trials and the tribulations of their lives, and being celebrated by and for themselves and with the community at large.

This work also reviewed the concept of liminality and observed how Chinese Islanders experienced liminality for decades, and some would argue as long as a century. It examines how the insularity of an Island, compounded by its relative homogeneity and geographical isolation intensifies the experience of a liminal community.

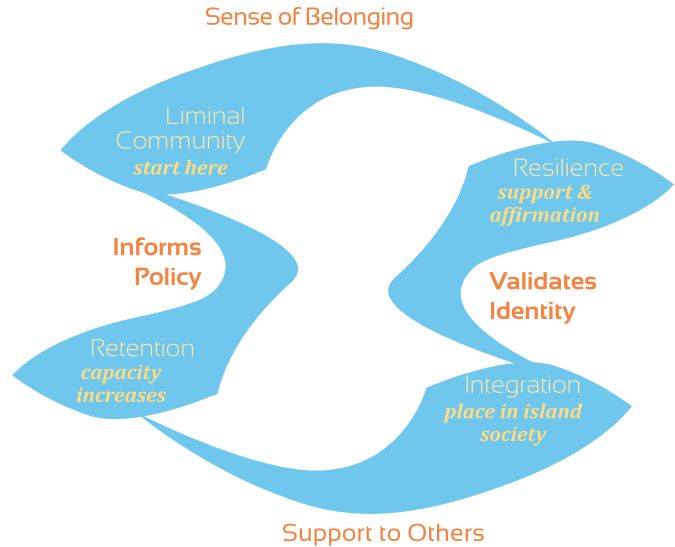
The Power of Storytelling

From this research came the Model: Circle of Community Storytelling and Integration. The Model

demonstrates that story telling is a powerful tool, a creative device that can increase social capital by building resilience, validating identity and creating bridging and bonding in integration. This can inform immigration policy and increase capacity for newcomer retention.

The final goal of connecting Chinese Islanders to the recently arrived Chinese newcomers for the purpose of friendship and support became redundant during the

Connection between Community Storytelling and locally informed Immigration Policy.



process of this research. The large numbers of Chinese newcomers quickly outgrew the population of the “old Island Chinese”, and they are effectively settling themselves and each other.

Bridging the Gap

There's a lot of them that come into the store. They seem to want to join the Co-op. The lady in Membership Relations, she says to me, 'Come here, understand these people.' They have very little English. I can make them out more than she can. Some of them think I'm Eskimo or Indian. 'No I'm Chinese and French'. Others know I'm Chinese or half. I say to my boss 'You just gotta learn to speak slowly to them'.

This research wished to also fill a gap in the story telling process and follows up on the seminal work of Dr. Hung-Min Chiang. This work also considered attributes of Islandness that impacted particularly on this community. We looked at how boundedness, particularism, and migration are an integral part of Island life and how these nuanced the Chinese Islander lived experience. The phenomenon of ‘routes and roots’, or migration and islands sense of place and its impact on the Chinese community on PEI was explored. Concepts of liminality, resilience, and integration were overlaid and woven into the story to create a model of Storytelling and Integration. The researcher suggests that this model may inform public

policy in regards to understanding the dynamic of liminal communities on Prince Edward Island and developing an approach with which to bring them “out” to increase social capacity and improve retention for new settlers.

The power of being a sub-national island jurisdiction was discussed (see Chapter 2 of thesis). It was noted that the Prince Edward Island provincial government's increasing interest in the immigration file, along with the federal government's encouragement for the province to take more of an interest and a lead. Through the federal-provincial nominee program we saw increased number of Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) candidates coming to Prince Edward

Breaking out of Liminality: How to Integrate

Try to mingle in with people and try to get involved. Perhaps the best place is your local church, or some volunteer work. And really get into it. That's the best way where you're going to be accepted, and people are gonna see you as not such a threat or something foreign that they should be afraid of, cause some people are like that!

Island, increasing exponentially the numbers of newly arrived Chinese. These numbers have quickly surpassed the number of old and established Chinese on the Island. One of the objectives of this research was to connect the old Chinese with the new. In the

Being in Between

It's funny when I go to the Chinese dinner you know, when I was picked by acclamation or whatever you call it - when they just picked you to be the president, because they don't vote you in back then because nobody wanted to do the job, right?! But today, it's a big to-do! With the new young Chinese there must have been ten of them up there on the stage. They want to be the president, and they actually vote for them now!!! It's just such a different day!!!! And so when I think of that, when I go to the dinner, the New Year's dinner, and I go to pick up my voting ticket, the young people say, 'well, you're not Chinese. You can't vote!' But the old Chinese who know who I am say 'No, no, no don't do that. She's the past president. Give her a ticket!' The young Chinese don't see me as Chinese, they see me as North American! It's wild. They don't see me as Chinese at all! It's really funny! Cause you see me as Chinese, well, a lot of people don't see me as Chinese looking.

course of the project, the number of newly arrived Chinese far outweighed the old community (PEIANC reported over 800 arrivals from China in 2007¹), making this objective obsolete.

We saw a public acknowledgement by the Charlottetown mayor that racism exists and is a problem on Prince Edward Island. We had the honour of listening to the stories of many of the first-born Chinese

Islanders who grew up on the Island and who became willing and able to share the full breadth and depth of their experiences. Through the process of telling their stories, the researcher argues that the first-generation Island-born Chinese emerged from a state of betwixt and between, or liminality. Once a level of trust was established, the participants were willing to come forth and tell their stories, and have their accomplishments lauded and their struggles acknowledged. They have taken their rightful place in the Island story.

In 2004 when assisting Dr. Chiang with the PEI Chinese history research, we estimated there to be about forty Chinese people on Prince Edward Island at that time. Beginning to delve into the history brought continual surprises as new research uncovered a larger history than initially imagined. With the arrival of the PNP clients, the Chinese New Year celebrations have grown to the extent where tickets sell out weeks before dinners (which have had limits of five and six hundred tickets since 2007).

Becoming aware of the elements of Islandness that affect the integration of newcomers, specifically particularism and boundedness is instructive. (For full discussion please refer to the thesis). Lessons can be learned for improving integration strategies for long-term settlement of new immigrants. The study of firstborn Chinese Islanders allows us to learn from past experiences, while becoming aware of the elements of Islandness, and working towards respectful forms of integration.

Findings and Recommendations:

Repeat the 1991 Race Relations In Prince Edward Island survey, as a way of gauging the change in attitudes on Prince Edward Island over time.

Within the ***Department of Education, encourage the understanding of the concept of Islandness*** and its various elements, increasing our knowledge of ourselves and our society.

Develop programs for recently arrived Newcomer Youth so they may have opportunity to express themselves in a language free environment through the arts (painting, drawing, cooking, photography, industrial arts, etc. i.e. The Juggling Cultures Art Program).

Department of Community and Cultural Affairs: Following the model of Place-based approaches, ***encourage the telling of stories*** as a creative method for improving the bridging and bonding mechanisms for developing social capital, leading to increased integration and social cohesion.

Retention is one of the three major objectives of Prince Edward Island's immigration policy. This research suggests that by telling their stories and researching their history, liminal communities not only enhance their own community but also integrate and build social cohesion as they educate society as a whole to the full spectrum of the Island story.

PEI Statistics Division: Collect local migration data that deciphers the in and out migration of people. Longitudinal statistical data could be beneficial to delineate patterns of success to build on, as well as areas that need more attention.

A similar research project be carried out, looking at the next generation of Chinese Islanders, the children of the cohort considered in this research. This would give a longitudinal perspective and understanding of long-term integration experience.

Conclusions:

In conclusion, the primary objective for this research was to hear the voices and stories of first-born Chinese Islanders. This process was cathartic and transitioned a liminal community who rightly claimed their place in the Prince Edward Island Story.

While looking at the islandness elements of boundedness, particularism, and migration, we can better appreciate the intense impact from negative exclusionary behavior. Dissecting island elements advances our understanding of island societies and potentially decreases the time liminal communities spend in the space of 'betwix and between'.

The growing new Chinese population is integrating with their own websites (wide and free distribution of their own stories and information amongst themselves and with others), a Chinese school, and an active, informed and integrated Canadian Chinese Association (PEI). This increase in social capacity will lead to increased retention and improved immigration policy.

For a more in depth discussion, please refer to the full length thesis.

(Endnotes)

¹ *The PEIANC keeps statistics of all clients that they serve. They now serve PNP clients, and it is this category that results from the high numbers of Chinese arrivals. More information can be found at <http://www.peianc.com/>.*

To check out the Canadian Chinese Association of PEI (CCAPEI), go to www.ccapei.org

Community partner:

Canadian Chinese Association of Prince Edward island (CCAPEI) is a non-religious, non-political, and non-profitable organization with the purposes as follows:

To improve networking and promote the spirit of helping each other.

To promote Chinese cultures and heritage.

To build friendship and improve cultural communications between the Chinese community and other communities in PEI .

