

**FALLING LEAVES: AN EXPLORATION OF THE
PERCEPTIONS OF QUALITY OF LIFE AMONG OLDER
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY (ACT)
CHINESE IMMIGRANTS**

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ABSTRACT

This study documents both qualitative and quantitative investigations into factors associated with the quality of life of older Chinese immigrants aged 55 years and over in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). The study aims to answer the question: What factors influence the quality of life of older Chinese immigrants in the ACT? Based on the evidence of prior literature, this study focuses on the factors that affect the quality of life among older Chinese immigrants for three reasons. First, very little work has been undertaken on the concept of quality of life in older age among Chinese groups in the ACT or elsewhere in Australia. Second, there is a need to understand the impact of cultural variables on quality of life. Third, the research outcomes have the potential to contribute to enhancing the health and quality of life for all Australians and immigrant groups as they age.

A mixed-methods approach was employed in the study based on the rationale that neither quantitative nor qualitative methods are sufficient by themselves to capture the trends and the details of the situation. The quantitative results provided an overall picture of the research enquiry, while the qualitative results gave a deeper understanding. A survey was used to assess the levels of quality of life among older Chinese immigrants, and the relationships between demographic characteristics and quality of life. In-depth interviews gained insights into the issue relating to the quality of life of older Chinese immigrants.

The survey found that older Chinese immigrants generally had good quality of life in the ACT. The results of MANOVA revealed socio-demographic characteristics, including marital status, age, educational levels and religion were associated with quality of life, but gender, length in Australia and income were not. The interviews revealed that six domains, including health and functional status, autonomy, social participation, Chinese philosophical tradition beliefs, communication, and environmental conditions were associated with quality of life. Older Chinese immigrants defined their quality of life in terms of good health, autonomy and independence, a positive attitude towards life, good relationships with family and friends, the ability to communicate with other people, a well-established social welfare system and participation in social and community activities.

Traditional Chinese cultural beliefs were essential elements affecting the quality of life of individuals. There was evidence of a change in attitude regarding filial piety reflected in the living arrangements and filial expectations among older Chinese immigrants. However, older

* Chinese immigrants are always symbolised as falling leaves. The name of this thesis is taken from two Chinese sayings: One is *luo ye gui gen* (落葉歸根) “falling leaves return to their roots.”, and another is *luo di sheng gen* (落地生根) “falling leaves rooted in a new land”.

Chinese immigrants still held on to a number of traditional Chinese beliefs and values, including being contented, living in the present time and enjoying what is natural. Holding on to certain beliefs appears to have not only enabled these older Chinese immigrants to adapt to their new country but importantly also to enjoy better quality of life.

This study has contributed to the body of knowledge on factors associated with the quality of life of older Chinese immigrants in the ACT. The outcomes of the research will help health and social service providers to improve their cultural competence.

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