

Henry Yu

Global migrants and the new Pacific Canada

THE NEW CANADA

In the last quarter of a century, a wholesale shift of immigration patterns from transatlantic to trans-Pacific flows has created a new Canada. The changes were quiet at first, beginning after the creation of a the new “points system” for immigration in 1967, but rising in volume during the 1980s so that increasingly the voices of the “new Canada” are spoken in various Asian languages, a powerful new blend of multilingual Canadians that has created a globally connected Pacific Canada in the last 25 years. We have become a new nation that remains in conversation with the dominant Anglo-French society of the mid-20th century, but our future no longer makes sense as a bilingual dialogue solely between English and French. Our national past, built on the outer edges of British imperial settlement that displaced societies already existing in North America, is at the present moment a complicated

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global conversation in multiple languages, and if we are to embrace a future that builds upon the strength and diversity of this new Canada rather than silencing the great potential we now possess, we must recognize what we have become and reconcile with a colonial past that continues to haunt us.

What is the demographic reality of the new Canada? The top 10 places of birth for immigrants who arrived in Canada between 2001 and 2006 included only two European countries: Romania, at number seven, was the origin of just over 28,000 immigrants; the United Kingdom, which was the dominant sending nation for the first century of Canadian history, was even lower on the list at number nine, sending just over 25,000 new immigrants. In contrast, six of the top 10 countries were in Asia, and the top four on the list alone—the People’s Republic of China, India, the Philippines, and Pakistan, accounted for two-thirds of all new migrants to Canada in that period. China sent over 155,000; India over 129,000; the Philippines over 77,000; and Pakistan over 57,000.¹

In 2006, 83.9 percent of all new immigrants to Canada came from regions outside of Europe, and the very moniker “visible minority” to designate nonwhite Canadians had become a questionable descriptor of Canada’s urban populations. Over 96 percent of Canada’s “visible minorities” live in metropolitan regions. Two main groups—south Asians and self-identified ethnic Chinese—accounted for half of all visible minorities in Canada, with each accounting for roughly a quarter of the total. Ethnic Chinese and south Asians account for eight percent of Canada’s total population, but because they have settled overwhelmingly in either the metropolitan regions of Toronto or Vancouver, they have transformed those cities. Between 1980 and 2001, for instance, the largest proportion of new migrants to Canada were ethnic Chinese who came from various locations in southeast Asia (including Hong Kong), along with migrants born in the People’s Republic of China. These various ethnic Chinese migrants went overwhelmingly (87 percent) to the five largest cities in Canada, with 41 percent going to Toronto and 31 percent to Vancouver alone.² Chinese

1 “World: Place of birth of new immigrants to Canada, 2006,” 2006 census, Statistics Canada, geography division, 2007; also, “Immigration to Canada from the Asia Pacific, 1961-1996,” population and immigration statistical reports, Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada (original source, 1996 census).

2 Shibao Guo and Don Devoretz, “The changing faces of Chinese immigrants,” research on immigration and integration in the metropolis, Vancouver centre, no. 05-08, February 2005.

Canada is not homogenous, with a range of linguistic and social variation reflecting diverse origins not only in Asia, but from around the globe. The same can be said of south Asians, who, like ethnic Chinese, often come to Canada as part of global diasporas that emanated from home villages decades and even centuries earlier, bringing with them a wide array of family journeys and complicated histories from around the world and over many generations. By 2006, south Asians had slightly surpassed ethnic Chinese as the largest group of “visible minorities” in Canada, but both are categories that envelop a complex spectrum of family and personal histories that cannot be reduced to simple ethnocultural or racial categorizations.

What is clear, however, is that trans-Pacific migration from Asia has transformed Canada in the last 25 years. Toronto and Vancouver have become the urban capitals of Pacific Canada, and Vancouver in particular has become a city in which the term “visible minority” to describe Asians makes no sense. In 2006, four out of 10 Vancouverites were immigrants, and five out of 10 were of Asian ancestry. Richmond and Burnaby, suburbs of metropolitan Vancouver, were 65 percent and 55 percent visible minority, and 50 percent of Richmond’s population is ethnic Chinese: in Vancouver, Canada’s third largest city, the visible minority is white.

If the new Canada can be understood by looking at the changed face of Canada’s cities in the present, so too can the future be seen in the young faces of the largely Asian, nonwhite Canada of visible minorities. Visible minorities in Canada are the face of tomorrow: their median age in 2006 was 33, versus an average age of 39 for the population as a whole. The demographic future of Canada will continue to shift towards a world derived from and oriented towards the Pacific world.

THE NEW PACIFIC CANADA AND THE OLD PACIFIC CANADA

What is meant by using the phrase “Pacific Canada”? Clearly, Pacific Canada is not just a new term for “western Canada,” since the changes that trans-Pacific migration has wrought in the last 40 years extend across the nation, from Victoria to Halifax, and every small town in Canada has seen a local manifestation of the new demographic shifts. Toronto, the largest city in Canada and the financial hub of the nation’s economy, has received the largest trans-Pacific migration in absolute numbers, so it is clearly not a phenomenon restricted to the west coast or western Canada. Rather than a geographical description, Pacific Canada refers to a perspective on Canada’s past, present, and future that highlights the ways in which the nation has

been and increasingly will be shaped by its engagement with the Pacific rather than the Atlantic world. More than just immigration flows and networks of migration between Canada and Asia, Pacific Canada also refers to economic linkages and trade flows, as well as social, cultural, and political connections. Whether in the form of goods manufactured in China dominating the store shelves in the smallest Canadian town, or in the shifts of manufacturing jobs from North America across the Pacific, the role of Asia in our national future cannot be measured strictly in population flows or even balance-of-trade figures. Whether we like it or not, China has become a dominant player in the global economy, and our future is tied to its future.

Ironically, the new Pacific Canada is also a return to an old Pacific Canada, a world in which migration networks and trade flows connected the new nation of Canada to Asia and the Pacific region. In the late 19th century, both before and after Confederation, British Columbia was engaged with a Pacific world through its dominant migration patterns and trade connections. It is often seen as a matter of ethnic trivia that “the Chinese built the railroad,” but the fact that trans-Pacific migrants from China built the Pacific portions of every major transcontinental railroad in the late 19th century is a significant indication of a growing Pacific world of migration and trade that had been developing throughout the century. It was much easier for migrants to the western coasts of North America to arrive by trans-Pacific shipping than it was for migrants to come from the Atlantic coast. In 1789, when the expedition of Captain John Meares arrived to trade with the Nu-chul-nath peoples, on board were 29 Chinese who helped build the fort and who likely intermarried with local First Nations peoples after the trading post failed. In 1858, when the colony of Victoria was established as the first British colony on the Pacific coast, Chinese merchants and labourers arrived at the same time as British migrants. The 15,000 or so Chinese workers who built the western portion of the Canadian Pacific Railway in the 1880s did so because it was possible to bring them in large numbers to British Columbia by water from China and from California. It should also be noted that the British capital that funded the building of the CPR would find a return on its investment from the creation of a more rapid means of transporting the luxury goods of Asia across the land barrier of North America, avoiding the difficult sea journey around either the Cape of Good Hope in Africa or Cape Horn at the tip of South America. Silk and other trade goods from Asia were rapidly unloaded in Vancouver and rushed across Canada on express trains before being loaded onto waiting ships in Halifax for the journey to European markets.

The irony is that the Chinese built the very means of transportation that allowed large numbers of migrants from the Atlantic coast to come to British Columbia and to begin displacing them and First Nations peoples. It is no coincidence that the 1885 Chinese head tax, designed to curb Chinese immigration to Canada, was passed at exactly the moment that the Chinese finished building the transcontinental railroad that brought workers in large numbers from the east coast. What these newly arriving Atlantic migrants in the late 19th and early 20th century saw when they stepped off the train in Vancouver was a province that already had Chinese migrants engaging in marriage alliances and trade relations all across British Columbia. Even with the passage of the discriminatory head tax (which charged only Chinese migrants a tax equivalent to over a year's salary upon arrival in Canada), over 96,000 Chinese arrived between 1885 and 1923 (when an almost complete ban on Chinese immigration was passed under the euphemistically named "Chinese immigration act"). These Chinese migrants travelled across the country eastwards on the same railroad that transatlantic migrants used to move westwards, passing them going the other way to deposit them in every small town and city across the Prairies and all the way to Nova Scotia and Newfoundland.

Pacific Canada, therefore, also refers to this earlier world of trans-Pacific and transatlantic migrants engaging with First Nations peoples, a world that was eclipsed by white supremacy as a nation-building tool in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The growing numbers of European migrants to British Columbia, stepping off the railroad built by the Chinese, organized around the banner of a "White Canada Forever" (a popular bar-room song and political rallying cry). Depriving both aboriginal peoples and Asian migrants of the vote, the increasing numbers of transatlantic migrants pushed for aggressive legislation designed to clear aboriginal peoples from their lands and strict anti-Asian immigration laws that curtailed further trans-Pacific migration to Canada.

Between the 1920s and the 1960s, Canada was a forbidding and hostile place to Asian migrants. Those who were descended from the early trans-Pacific migrants of the late 19th and early 20th century faced racism and legislated discrimination in multiple forms, including disenfranchisement and legal segregation in housing and employment. White supremacy in Canada was universal and racial apartheid akin to the forms in other British settler colonies such as Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa—enshrined in laws in areas as disparate as voting rights through housing titles

and labour relations. Not until the Canada citizenship act of 1947 did Canadians of Asian ancestry begin to receive voting rights, and immigration laws did not formally remove racial preferences until 1967.

A post-1967 Canada echoes the incipient Pacific Canada that was developing in British Columbia before white supremacy took hold. For instance, the proportion of British Columbia's total population that was Chinese in 1901 was roughly 10 percent (14,885 of 149,709). It took a full century before that proportion was reached again in 2001 (373,830 of 3,698,850). In 1881, before the imposition of the head tax, Chinese made up almost 20 percent of British Columbia's non-aboriginal population and an even greater proportion of its workforce. Chinese, Japanese, south Asian, and aboriginal workers in lumber, mining, fishing, and agriculture dominated early industrial development, and well into the latter part of the 20th-century Chinese-Canadian farmers in Vancouver's lower mainland region were an integral part of the agricultural industry—growing, distributing, and selling produce in a vertically integrated network that connected farms on the Fraser River with grocery stores in every urban neighbourhood and small town throughout British Columbia. Chinese-Canadian family-owned import/export firms moved millions of dollars of goods back and forth across the Pacific, creating global connections that are often overlooked even though they created many of the trans-Pacific networks of business linkages that created the base for the flows of capital from Hong Kong and other parts of southeast Asia to Canada in the 1980s and 1990s.

If we consider the half century of “white Canada” between the 1920s and 1960s as an aberration, then the return to a Pacific Canada over the last four decades requires new engagements between First Nations peoples and migrants from both the Atlantic and Pacific worlds on terms other than those of white supremacy. For all of Canada, not just the western regions, the increasing importance of Asia and the Pacific world for the future involves more than just lip service to the existence of Asian migrants as marginal figures of our past and claims that we have left all vestiges of our white supremacist past behind. We must remember that the Pacific Canada in which we will live in the future is also a return to a world ended prematurely in our past.³

³ See “Refracting Pacific Canada,” a special issue of *BC Studies* 156-157, winter-spring 2007-08.

TRENDS FROM THE LAST 25 YEARS

Looking back on the transformations that new trans-Pacific migration patterns wrought in Canada, several trends stand out. The first was the increasing prevalence of global migration flows that are circular, with frequent travel back and forth between two or more locations on both sides of the Pacific, rather than the one-way immigration flows from sending country to receiving country that had been the hallmark assumption of most immigration policy during the 20th century. The second trend was the creation of a distinct set of highly mobile migrants who were the most visible in exhibiting these forms of circular migration. These migrants tended to be well educated and strategic in their migrations, encouraged to move to Canada by new immigration laws designed to attract highly educated and financially secure migrants, and seeing in Canada a safe and relatively accessible place for their children's education. Split families became a significant phenomenon, with children going to school in Canada, often with wives or grandparents accompanying them, while fathers or parents continued to work in Asia. A third trend has been the rapid growth in linguistic diversity among Canadian immigrants and their children, in particular in a range of Asian languages, and a subsequent increase in the ability of Canadians to engage across the Pacific in cultural and commercial exchange. All three trends are in fact not entirely new, with each having antecedents in the trans-Pacific migrations of a century before. What is distinctly new, however, is the volume and impact of these trends and their capacity to shape our collective future.

MIGRATION RATHER THAN IMMIGRATION

One of the signature observations of the new scholarship that has grown in the last two decades to study and understand the new immigration to Canada has been to note that the term "migration"—denoting the movements of people in multiple directions and with multiple journeys throughout a person's life—is a much more useful framework than the term "immigration" for analyzing the way that people move. Immigration was a term that captured the one-way journeys of so many migrants from the British Isles and Europe who came to Canada in the 20th century as settlers and as refugees from war. But just as the period between 1920 and 1960 was aberrational because of the dominance of white supremacy in immigration policy, it was also atypical in terms of how migrants overwhelmingly moved in a single direction, usually within the British empire from Britain to

colonial settlements such as Canada and Australia, but also in the great refugee migrations spurred by the Second World War and the Cold War from Europe to North America. Within the great labour migrations of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, trans-Pacific migrants such as the Chinese and transatlantic migrants such as Italians tended to follow highly circular paths of migration, with young men leaving to make their fortunes around the world and often planning to return home to buy land and raise a family.

In the last decades of the 19th century, and again in the last decades of the 20th century, Canada was often one site among many for a significant portion of migrants. The term “astronaut” arose to describe fathers who jetted back and forth across the expanse of the Pacific Ocean to visit family in Canada while continuing to work in Asia. “Parachute children” came to be used as a description for those kids who came to, or were left in, Canada to go to high school or university while parents continued to work in other parts of the world. Although always a minority of the total migrants who came to Canada in the last 25 years, the significance of circular migrations increasingly became a focus of interest for research projects such as the “research on immigration and integration in the metropolis” project in Canada. Studies showed that not only were migrants often highly strategic in thinking about when they should live in Canada and when it was more advantageous to live or work somewhere else in the world, but native-born Canadians also saw Canada as only one site among many to live and work. Locations in Canada were understood within a life process of aspirations, often as a good place to go to school or to live out retirement in comfort and leisure, but a much less ideal place to work during the prime wage earning years at mid-life. Kenny Zhang of the Asia Pacific Foundation has estimated that there were over 2.7 million Canadians living outside Canada, and findings from surveys reveal that those in the age range of 30-44 were most likely to be somewhere else, with the most popular reason by far being job-career opportunities.⁴

The presence of Canadian citizens outside of Canada, living and working for decades, became an increasingly noted phenomenon in scholarly studies and the popular media. In the first decade of the 21st century, it became widely known that there were 250,000 Canadian citizens living and working

⁴ David Ley and Audrey Kobayashi, “Back to Hong Kong: Return migration or transnational sojourn,” and Kenny Zhang, “Global Canadians: Scale, profile, and impact,” Asia Pacific Foundation, 13-14 December 2008.

in Hong Kong. To put this in perspective, more Canadians lived in the city of Hong Kong than in either Saskatoon or Regina, and if the Canadians in Hong Kong were counted as a city in Canada, it would have been in the top 20 in size.

SWITZERLAND OF THE PACIFIC?

One of the most remarkable trends in the last quarter century has been the increased targeting of a particular set of immigrants who carry with them substantial financial resources. The business migration program was revamped in the 1980s to specifically target investors and entrepreneurs who could commit to a certain level of investment in Canada (beginning with \$250,000 at the start of the program and rising eventually to a minimum of \$400,000 as the program became successful) or to the creation of a set number of jobs. The targeting of wealthy migrants was not new for Canadian immigration policy—even anti-Chinese legislation such as the 1885 Chinese head tax and the exclusionary 1923 Chinese immigration act both contained exemptions for merchants. The novelty of this new program lay in the explicit description of the exact amount of financial commitment that migrants needed to make in order to be given fast-track immigration status, and how aggressive provincial and federal governments in Canada were in setting up recruitment stations in Asia, in particular in Hong Kong before the 1997 reversion of political control from Britain to China.

The strategic targeting of wealthy migrants was enormously successful, with ethnic Chinese from all around southeast Asia making up the majority of those who responded to the call. In some ways, acquiring Canadian citizenship and a Canadian passport became a form of security guaranteeing high mobility, an exit visa out of any location (such as Hong Kong post-1997) that might prove difficult to leave with another form of citizenship. The investments made in Canada could be considered a transaction cost for the acquisition of this form of secure mobility, but access to Canada itself became a commodity because other nations such as Australia and the United States also began to pass immigration legislation targeting the same set of financially successful migrants. As the most sought-after migrants began to consider an array of choices for migration, comparisons between cities such as Toronto, Vancouver, San Francisco, and Sydney were made strategically by would-be migrants.

The desirability of Canadian citizenship from the point of view of these highly mobile migrants increasingly centred upon factors such as quality of

life (air and water quality, availability of good food, health care, accessibility by air to Asia for commuting), and most commonly the accessibility and cost of higher education for children. Vancouver-based architect Bing Thom made an off-hand observation in 2003 that Vancouver had become the “Switzerland of the Pacific”—offering a safe haven for wealth for the elite of the Pacific world, just as Swiss banks did in Europe, and providing a handy location for the same families to send their children for schooling, just as Swiss boarding schools provided in Europe.

Educational mobility—the strategic migration of young students around the Pacific region—became a noticeable trend that had particular impact on the major universities in the Vancouver and Toronto metropolitan region, as well as in the rapid growth of small private schools and colleges in those cities designed to prepare students from Asia (in particular South Korea, China, and Taiwan) for entrance into Canadian universities. By 2008, for instance, roughly 15 percent of the undergraduate population of the University of British Columbia were foreign students paying non-resident tuition rates that were four times the tuition for Canadian residents; however, it is likely that one third of the students were born outside of Canada and had become Canadian citizens sometime before their entrance into UBC. Forty-four percent of UBC’s incoming class in 2005, for instance, listed English as a second language, an approximation of the migrant origins of either themselves or their parents. As one of Canada’s most Asian-Pacific universities in both composition and orientation, the University of British Columbia (and Vancouver’s other major institution, Simon Fraser University) are perhaps the clearest examples of how the composition of Canada’s future educated elite is global in origin, with a particular weighting towards Asia. In terms of ethno-racial makeup alone, with no differentiation in terms of native-born versus immigrant origins, UBC also reflects perhaps the most significant example of how the demographic trends in Canada towards an Asian-Pacific future are more marked among the educated and the young than for Canada’s population as a whole. In 2005, 53 percent of the incoming class at UBC self-identified as Asian, compared with the 33.5 percent self-identifying as white. Students identifying themselves as Chinese were roughly 37 percent of the incoming class.⁵

⁵ Figures for UBC’s incoming class in 2005 are care of Walter Sudmant, derived from a survey conducted of undergraduate students.

Clearly, Canada has become a desirable destination in terms of educational mobility for migrants in the Asia Pacific region, just as it has for wealthy migrants planning to safely secure their holdings in the ever-rising real estate market that Canadian cities such as Vancouver and Toronto have enjoyed in the last 25 years. A safe and secure location to deposit both capital and school-age children, Canada did begin to acquire a role in the Pacific world akin to Switzerland in the Atlantic region. Because the sale of primary residences in Canada was not subject to capital gains taxes, the high rate of return for investments in the housing market was in practice a tax-free investment instrument. Located in the secure and stable financial environment of Canada, such investments seemed as safe as a Swiss bank account.

THE INFUSION OF LINGUISTIC CAPITAL

Perhaps the most significant trend in the last quarter of a century has been the rapid expansion of linguistic diversity in Canada in terms of Asian language usage. In British Columbia, the second most used language other than English was Chinese in one form or another. In Vancouver, for instance, the 2006 census counted nearly 117,000 residents who spoke Punjabi as their first language. At the same time, almost 129,000 residents who counted Cantonese as their mother tongue, along with roughly 115,000 who spoke Mandarin, nearly 69,000 who spoke Taiwanese, and another 120,000 who just listed Chinese rather than a specific dialect as their mother tongue. This meant that 20 percent of metropolitan Vancouver's residents reported some form of Chinese as their first language. In comparison, out of the 537,000 self-reported ethnic Chinese in Toronto, 403,700 reported some form of Chinese as their mother tongue, roughly eight percent of Toronto's residents. Although Toronto in absolute numbers contains more Canadians who speak some form of Chinese than Vancouver does, the proportion of Chinese-speaking residents among the total number of residents of Toronto is smaller. This does not mean, however, that the impact of Chinese and other Asian Canadians has been any less. For instance, suburban regions of Toronto such as Markham, Scarborough, and Richmond Hill have been transformed by Asian migration, and the presence of young south Asian Canadians and Chinese Canadians in Toronto reflects a city that counts 50 percent of its total population as having been born outside Canada.

Within a business environment in Canada and across the Pacific where transactions often take place as easily in Cantonese, Mandarin, Gujarati, or

Punjabi as they do in English, such linguistic diversity has become a form of human capital with global ramifications for Canada. Multilingual migrants who can move with ease across the Pacific to conduct business and to engage in social and cultural exchange in Asian languages have created the potential for a globally engaged Canada that can leverage such human capital.

Unfortunately, Canada at present continues to waste such capital because of language policies that place little or no emphasis upon retaining such language ability in children. Other than a highly successful kindergarten-through-grade-12 bilingual Mandarin-English program in Edmonton, Alberta, that has been in place for 25 years and has expanded to 13 public schools, there are virtually no examples of public school education that helps either teach or maintain Asian language use. Children of immigrants are more likely to retain the use as adults of their parents' language if they arrive later in their lives rather than earlier, since public schooling in Canada is designed around either English or French. In terms of the retention and maintenance of linguistic capital among Canada's youth, a Canadian is better off coming to Canada as a 10-year old than being born in Canada, since the likelihood of them growing up to have multiple language use is much better if they are not native-born.

THE IMPACT ON CIVIL SOCIETY

For most of Canadian history, nonwhites were disenfranchised and excluded from political life because of the formal implementation of white supremacy. Most Asian Canadians were granted citizenship and the vote in 1947 (Japanese Canadians, who were still interned despite the end of the Second World War, did not receive the vote until several years later). However, Asian Canadians remained in practice second-class citizens well into the 1960s because of the long-term legacies of legislated and formal racial discrimination. It is perhaps no surprise, then, that the delayed entry of Asian Canadians into formal electoral politics in Canada might have profound consequences for their political engagement. With the recent demographic transformations towards a Pacific Canada, what has been the impact on the political life of the nation?

If the effects of mass migration to Canada from the Asia Pacific region are measured only in terms of formal electoral politics, their impact on political life in Canada seems at first glance limited. The number of elected officials at the federal and provincial levels is at a lower proportion than that of Asian Canadians to the general population. Because of the concentration

of Asian Pacific migrants in urban areas, their impact on municipal politics has been much greater than at the provincial and federal levels, and yet even at the municipal level the number of elected officials who are Asian Canadian has remained limited. Both Toronto and Vancouver now have significant enough voting populations of south Asians, southeast Asians, Chinese, and Filipinos that the promise of “ethnic voting” trends might prove decisive in elections. However, Asian Canadians have tended to vote in just as diverse and sophisticated a manner as other Canadians, belying assumptions of simplistic ethnic block voting for ethnic candidates. In Vancouver, three of the 10 elected councillors in 2009 were Chinese Canadian, roughly mirroring the overall percentage of ethnic Chinese in the city. However, any simplistic analyses that assume a correlation between ethnic voting and elected officials at the municipal level would be wrong. Each of the three city councillors in Vancouver who are Chinese Canadian—George Chow, Kerry Jang, and Raymond Louie—came into civic politics from very different backgrounds and varying constituencies that were not limited to ethnic Chinese voters.

In Toronto, the proportion of city councillors who are of Asian-Canadian background is well below their overall percentage of the city’s population (in 2009, only two of the city’s 44 councillors were Asian Canadian, or 4.5 percent, despite the fact that the city of Toronto is over 30 percent Asian Canadian). Toronto, which switched to a ward system in 2000, shows a very different spatial distribution of Asian-Canadian communities than Vancouver, with many new Asian migrants clustering in particular neighbourhoods, whereas in Vancouver, ethnic Chinese in particular are much more evenly distributed throughout the city. For instance, Toronto city Councillor Raymond Cho, first elected in 1991, represents at the present moment ward 42 of Scarborough-Rouge River, an incredibly diverse area that contains 88.7 percent visible minorities, with 39.8 percent south Asian, 17.6 percent black, 10.7 percent Chinese, and 10 percent Filipino. In terms of migration status, nearly 80 percent of those over 15 years of age in ward 42 were first-generation Canadians who had arrived from elsewhere, and only 6.2 percent were third-generation Canadians. It is interesting to note, however, that this district contains almost four times as many residents of south Asian origin than Chinese, again belying simplistic correlations between ethnic block voting within Asian-Canadian communities for co-ethnic candidates.

If civil society and political life are conceived in broad terms, with politics including networks of economic and social participation as well as influence in informal political processes (beyond voter turnout numbers and the fielding of “ethnic” candidates), then the demographic shift towards a Pacific Canada is more significant and argues for broader ways of understanding political life.

Since the overwhelming majority of migrants from the Asia Pacific region to Canada have arrived within the last three decades, it is perhaps no surprise that the impact of these newer migrants upon electoral politics may still be delayed. But how can the underrepresentation of Asian Canadians in electoral politics be explained, beyond a time lag because of recent arrival? Theories about whether migrants from Asia come from places with underdeveloped democratic practices have been propounded, often based upon abstract analyses that misapprehend the depth of political practices that exist in places of origin. Migrants from Hong Kong from the 1970s through the early 1990s, for instance, were coming from a colonial city where the British did not allow open democratic elections until just before they lost political control. Political culture under British rule evolved not around electoral politics but elite networks that reflected economic and social status to influence policy, as well as the use of nongovernmental organizations and grass-roots mobilization to enact political change.

Many Hong Kong migrants to Canada brought sophisticated knowledge of how to create organizations that could engage with political institutions. SUCCESS, an immigrant service agency founded in 1973, was the creation of the early Hong Kong migrants who came to Canada after immigration policy reform in 1967 removed racial barriers. Growing from a small network of social welfare professionals trained in Hong Kong who recognized the need for helping newly arrived ethnic Chinese into a large organization providing a wide spectrum of social services to immigrants of all ethnicities, SUCCESS is an example of how civil society can be profoundly changed through processes beyond formal electoral politics. Several of the organization’s founders went on to serve in municipal political office in Vancouver and yet the political impact of the organization should be measured in how it transformed civil society.

In contrast, south Asian migrants from India over the last few decades came from a nation with a well-developed representative democracy and sophisticated voting practices that dated from the end of British colonial rule in 1947. South Asian-Canadian politicians have been able to win election by

representing districts with heavy concentrations of south Asian voters, in particular in suburban and semirural areas such as Surrey in the lower mainland of BC. The first nonwhite premier of a Canadian province, Ujjal Dosanjh, was an Indo-Canadian whose provincial riding had a significant Punjabi Sikh community. And yet the impact of south Asian migration upon civil society in Canada goes beyond these elected officials. For instance, in terms not of legislative governance but in the ways by which law governs the practices of daily life, Punjabi Sikh migration has transformed the face of policing in Canada. The metropolitan police forces of all the major cities, as well as the RCMP, the national police force of Canada, have seen significant growth in Punjabi Sikh officers. Indeed, the most potent symbol of the shift from a nation founded upon white supremacy towards the new Pacific Canada might have been symbolized by the successful fight of Baltej Singh Dhillon in 1990 to wear his turban as an RCMP officer. The symbolism of seeing the iconic symbol of the Canadian Mounties now wearing a Sikh turban was a watershed moment in understanding how a legal regime in Canada that for most of its history had undergirded the politics of white supremacy now had a new face.

If the political life of Canada is defined in broad terms, then the transformation of civil society has seen deep changes that are rooted in local neighbourhood transitions. There continues to be a lag in how formal electoral politics reflects such shifts in civil society and local politics, in particular at the higher levels of provincial and federal politics, but the future will undoubtedly be shaped by these profound changes.

THE FUTURE OF PACIFIC CANADA?

What the next 25 years brings is uncertain, but if the current immigration policy remains the same, and the dominant trends in trans-Pacific migration continue to transform our future into one heavily infused with the voices of Asian migrants, then Canadian cities such as Toronto and Vancouver will enter the realm of global cities such as Singapore, Sydney, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, where significant populations with Asian ancestry have created connections and networks that span the Pacific. However, state educational policies in almost all of those cities have yet to recognize the potential of these new demographic admixtures. Singapore has adopted language education policies that are designed to promote the use of English and one Asian language in all of its youth. Canada has yet to make a similar investment in the linguistic potential of its younger generations, and as of

now the retention of valuable Asian language skills varies greatly, depending upon the individual circumstances of each family.

What will be the future of Pacific Canada? It is highly unlikely that its development will be prematurely clipped as it was 100 years ago. But if we have returned to an engagement in Canada with the Asian-Pacific world, and our migration networks and the linguistic background of our immigrant population create an enormous potential for linkages and connections across the Pacific, the question remains whether our state policies at the local, regional, and national levels recognize and leverage such potential. The answer to this question will greatly determine whether Canada will look back in 25 years and judge our success or failure in capitalizing on this transformative moment in our nation's history.