CIRCULAR MIGRATION AND IDENTITY: CANADIAN DIASPORA IN CHINA[1]

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ABSTRACT

Canada-China people flows will increasingly be characterized by circular movements and by transnational citizens with personal, business and emotional attachments on both sides of the Pacific. With the growing number of Canadians in PRC and HKSAR, many challenges arise in defining identities of this group of Canadian population in China, and in designing policies associated with these identities. Canada-China human connections through this circular mobility are a unique focal point for relations between Ottawa and Beijing. There is an urgent need for both countries to work together on policies that will deepen the connections across the Pacific and ultimately benefit Canada and China, as well as the individual migrants.

提要

中加人口流动日益显示出这样两大特征：循环移动以及在太平洋两岸由于个人、公务和情感事由来回穿梭的跨国公民。随着加拿大人在中国和香港特别行政区人员数量的增加，如何界定这部分加拿大人口的认同以及设计与此相关的政策便面临着诸多挑战。通过循环移动建立起来的中加人员联系对于两国关系而言是一个重要的关注点，两国有必要联手制定加强跨太平洋联系的政策，这将最终使两国以及两国的移民受益。

INTRODUCTION: A CHANGING CHINA!

International human migration always occurs in two directions, namely, immigration and emigration. However, the history of China has been associated with waves of Chinese emigration. This emigration history can be seen as early as 210 BCE when Qin Shi Huang (秦始皇) dispatched Xu Fu (徐福) to sail overseas in search of elixirs of immortality, accompanied by 3,000 virgin boys and girls. Later during the Ming dynasty (1368 to 1644), Zheng He (郑和) became an envoy of Ming who brought mainly Cantonese and Hokkien people to explore and trade in the South China Sea and in the Indian Ocean. The mass emigration that occurred from the 19th century to 1949 was mainly caused by wars, starvation and other problems resulting from political instability in mainland China. Most immigrants were illiterate, poorly educated peasants and manual labourers, historically called coolies, who emigrated for work to the Americas, Australia, Canada, South Africa, Southeast Asia, Malaya and other destinations.

In the early period of the People's Republic of China (PRC), there were strict controls that prevented large numbers of people from leaving the country. As a result of open-door policies, more liberalized emigration policies were enacted in the 1980s , facilitating the legal departure of increasing numbers of Chinese people with diverse backgrounds. Some joined their overseas Chinese relatives and friends, while others attended foreign academic institutions to help further China's modernization, especially in the sciences. These more liberalized policies

brought about increased contact with the outside world, particularly the industrialized nations. In recent years, Chinese tourists and temporary workers are often seen in different parts of the world.

In the other direction, the only significant immigration to China was by the overseas Chinese who were offered various enticements to return to their homeland since the founding of the People's Republic. Several million may have done so since 1949. The largest influx came in 1978-79, when about 160,000 to 250,000 ethnic Chinese refugees fled Vietnam for southern China, as relations between the two countries worsened.

However, in recent years, the Chinese economy has become one of the most robust in the world, and brighter job prospects are attracting many people to move to the mainland. National, provincial and municipal governments are actively encouraging Chinese citizens or foreign citizens of Chinese origin who have trained overseas to return to China.

In addition to attracting return migration of overseas Chinese, the rapid economic growth has turned the country into a magnet for foreign workers, including Canadians, at all skill levels to seek better job opportunities. China has also grown into a major destination for international students. In fact, China surpassed Canada as one of the top destinations for post-secondary international students in 2008 (Zhang, 2010).

Nowadays, China is no longer a country that just produces emigrants. It has become a magnet for professionals and students from around the world seeking better job opportunities and a good education, including overseas Chinese returning from countries such as Canada and USA. Does this emerging trend change the direction of people movement between Canada and China? How large is the Canadian community outside Canada, globally and in China specifically? How do these Canadians in China personally identify? What issues arise from their identities moving across the Pacific? Are there any policy implications for both countries?

This essay aims to address these questions by exploring the relationship between changing patterns of migration and the identity of people involved in migration between Canada and China. The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section I will focus on the concept of circular migration. Section II will review statistics on migration to and from both China and Canada. The discussions of identity and policy implications of Canadian community in China will be presented in Section III and IV respectively.

I. WHERE IS THE DESTINATION OF CHOICE? RETHINKING OF MIGRATION PATTERN

Traditionally, international human migration is defined as permanent or temporary mobility of people across a political boundary. Through permanent or temporary forms of migration, the movement of people is considered as a simple move from place A to place B, or a return-migration moving from A to B followed by returning to A.

In the early 21st century academics began to view the migration process as circular migration which is a continuing, long-term, and fluid pattern of international mobility that can exist naturally (where national borders are open or not heavily enforced) or with government involvement (typically a bilateral agreement). A person with citizenship in two or more countries can easily move among them without restriction (DeVoretz & Ma, 2002; Migration Policy Institute, 2008; Newland, Agunias, & Terrazas, 2008; DeVoretz, 2009). In other words, the mobility of people can take place from place A to B to A (C), and be repeated indefinitely. In other words, a person may choose different migration destinations over his/her lifetime span.

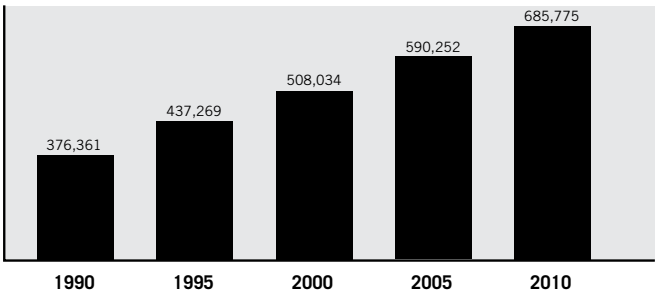
Current patterns of circular migration fall into several categories, including seasonal migration, non-seasonal low-wage labour, and the mobility of professionals, academics, and transnational entrepreneurs. Increasingly, both destination and origin countries see circular migration as a means to jointly gain from migration. Circular migration also becomes the base of policy tools for many countries, such as Canada, New Zealand and Germany, just to name a few, to target specific types of migrants to meet their labour market and other economic needs (Newland, Agunias, & Terrazas, 2008).

II. HOW MANY? CANADIANS IN CHINA

In the past two decades, China has become a magnet for professionals and students from around the world seeking better job opportunities and a good education. According to the United Nations' estimates, the total number of international migrants in China (Hong Kong Special Administration Region (HKSAR) estimated separately) increased from 376,000 to 686,000 in 20 years (See Figure 1). While the absolute number of immigrants remains smaller than in other major destination countries, China has kept its growth of migrant stock at a constant rate of 3% annually from 1990 to 2010. The annual increase

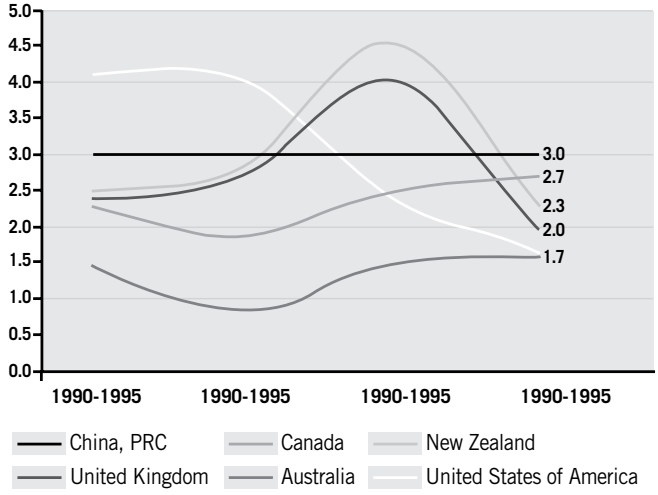
rate of foreign-born population in China has been higher than the traditional immigrant countries, like Canada and Australia, in this period (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Estimated Number of International Migrants in China, PRC



Source: (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2009)

Figure 2: Annual Rate of Change of the Migrant Stock: Selected Countries (%)



Source: (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2009)

Canadians in China are also on the rise. Historically, Canadians have traveled widely and today an estimated 2.8 million Canadians (or 8% of Canada's population) now live and work abroad. Those Canadian citizens actually make up "Canada's Secret Province" (DeVoretz, 2009; Hoffman, 2010).

There have always been large numbers of Canadians living outside the country for extended periods, especially in the USA. There are also many Canadian expatriates working for multinational companies and international organizations around the world. More recently, there is evidence that many immigrants to Canada are returning to their countries of origin to pursue business and professional activities, especially in mainland China (PRC) and HKSAR. Approximately 57% of Canadians abroad are concentrated in the United States, PRC, HKSAR and Taiwan, the United Kingdom and Australia (DeVoretz, 2009).

Although out-migration occurs in all groups of Canada's population, the level of international mobility varies considerably by place of birth. During the period of 1996-2006, the Canadian-born population has experienced an average exit rate of 1.3%, compared to 4.2% amongst foreign-born Canadians. Foreign-born Canadians who are originally from Taiwan have the highest exit rate of 30%, followed by Hong Kong Canadians at 24%. Canadians of PRC origin have a 3% exit rate compared to an 11% exit rate amongst Canadians of USA origins (see Table 2). Based on these exit rates and other available sources, it is likely that there are approximately 40,000 – 50,000 Canadian citizens living and working in PRC and another 250,000 in HKSAR, although exact statistical information is currently unavailable (Guo, 2009; Zhang, 2009).

TABLE 1: Out-migration Rate of Canada's Population by Place of Birth: 1996-2006

CANADA'S POPULATION	EXIT RATE (96-06)
Canadian Born	1.3%
Foreign Born	4.2%
Of which: China PRC	3%
HKSAR	24%
Taiwan	30%
USA	11%

Source: DeVoretz, 2009

III. WHO ARE THE MOVERS? RETHINKING OF IDENTITY(IES)

The circular migration has not only changed the concept of migration destination, but also raises a question of how these migrants identify. The question becomes more important when the volume of people involved in the circular migration grows to be significant as we have seen in the case of mobility between Canada and China.

In social sciences, an identity is a general term to describe a person's conception and expression of their individuality or group affiliations (such as national identity and cultural identity). A psychological identity relates to self-image (a person's mental model of him or herself), self-esteem, and individuality. Sociology places some explanatory weight on the concept of role-behaviour.

Components of identity include a sense of personal continuity and of uniqueness from other people. In addition to carving out a personal identity based on the need for uniqueness, people also acquire a social identity

based on their membership in various groups—familial, ethnic, occupational, and others. These group identities, in addition to satisfying the need for affiliation, help people define themselves in the eyes of both others and themselves.

This paper discusses the identity of a unique group – Canadians in China – from three different angles, namely, people in China, people in Canada, and migrant individuals.

In the eyes of many Chinese over several generations, Canadians are seen as friends and this feeling is largely attributed to one of the prominent Canadian pioneers in China – Dr. Norman Bethune (1890-1939), who received international recognition when Chairman Mao Zedong of the People's Republic of China published his essay entitled In Memory of Norman Bethune (紀念白求恩), which documented the final months of the doctor's life in China. Almost the entire Chinese population knew about the essay which had become required reading in China's elementary schools during China's Cultural Revolution (1966–76). Mao concluded in that essay: "We must all learn the spirit of absolute selflessness from him. With this spirit everyone can be very helpful to each other. A person's ability may be great or small, but if he/she has this spirit, he/she is already noble-minded and pure, a person of moral integrity and above vulgar interests, a person who is of value to the people." (Mao, 1939) It is underscored that his spirit of service, courage and innovation continues to inspire Canada-China innovative partnerships today (Government of Canada, 2009).

Nowadays, Canada's Mark Rowswell, known in China as Dashan, has been described as "the most famous foreigner in China," where he has worked as a performer, television host and cultural ambassador for over 20 years and is currently serving as Canada's Commissioner General to Expo 2010 in Shanghai. Although relatively unknown in the West, it is hard to find anyone in China who does not know of Dashan (Dashan Incorporated, n.d.).

As China increasingly becomes a global economic powerhouse and the biggest recipient of foreign direct investment, there are increasing numbers of Chinese-origin and non-Chinese-origin Canadian executives, engineers and other professionals and specialists and their families working and living in China.

Chinese people use different terms to name separate groups. For Chinese-origin-Canadians, for instance, those highly skilled academics and professionals who were born in China trained overseas and returned to China are called "Sea Turtles" (海归).[2] Transnational entrepreneurs who fly back and forth across the Pacific are given the more science fiction-like title "Astronauts" (太空人). Others, including Chinese descents of second generation or more who moved to China, are seen as returned overseas Chinese[3] if they keep Chinese citizenship, or simply as Canadians with Chinese origin.

Non-Chinese-origin-Canadians are obviously considered foreigners in China. However, under some circumstances, some friendly Canadians who do not look Chinese at all, such as Mr. Mark Rowswell, are seen as "foreigners but not outsiders." (Dashan Incorporated, n.d.)

People in Canada also hold diverse views on Canadian citizens living in other countries. To some, people who immigrated to Canada, met the residency requirement to obtain Canadian citizenship, moved back to their original home country, but continue to hold onto their Canadian citizenship are seen as "Canadians of convenience" (Turner, 2006).

Furthermore, some argue that some residents abroad may be simply "foreigners holding Canadian passports" in that these individuals are citizens of convenience, have no loyalty to Canada, and have chosen to live in their native lands on a long-term basis, calling on consular services only in times of difficulty (APF Canada, 2007).

According to these individuals, people who hold a Canadian passport as well as additional citizenships, and do not live in Canada are bad citizens. Macklin and Crépeau have shown in their recent paper that judgments about whether someone is a "good" or "bad" citizen — as measured by civic engagement, presumed embrace of so-called Canadian values, economic self-sufficiency, respect for law or the like — is sometimes tethered to the notion that people who are multiple citizens are more likely to be "bad" citizens, especially if they or their parents acquired citizenship by naturalization (Macklin & Crépeau, 2010).

Despite the views of some discussed above, a recent poll by APF Canada found that a solid majority of Canadians believe their overseas compatriots are still 'real' Canadians, and say their counterparts living outside Canada should have the same rights as those living in Canada (APF Canada, 2010).

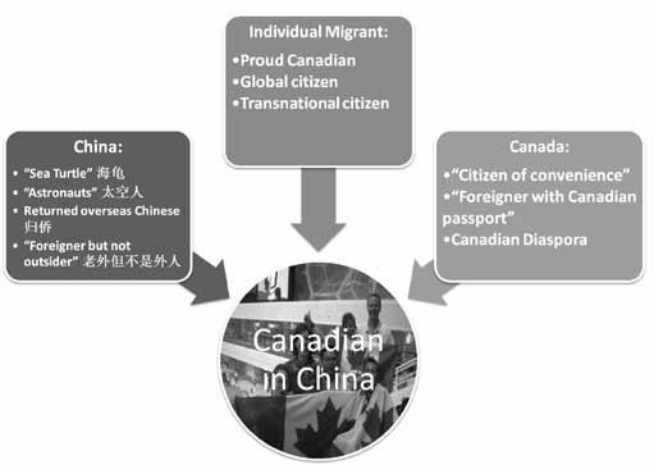
For individual Canadians who live abroad, the Canadian elements in their self-claimed identity remain obvious. According to an online survey by APF Canada, nearly two-thirds of Canadians abroad still see Canada as their home and 69 percent have plans to return to Canada in the future for various reasons, mainly related to family in Canada. (Zhang, 2007).

Canadians abroad may possess more than one identity and their identities may vary in different circumstances. For example, the same APF survey finds that in terms of their professional lives, individuals identify themselves no-differently being closely with Canada (47 percent) and their country of residence (46 percent). In terms of their personal or family lives, respondents overwhelmingly identify more closely with Canada (66 percent) than with their country of residence (31 percent) (ibid).

Many of them believe they are the human bridge connecting Canada and China. They do business globally and therefore are global citizens or transnational citizens (Canadians in China, 2000-2010; ibid).

In short, the identity of Canadians in China can be observed from three angles as illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Identities of Canadians in China



IV. WHY DOES IT MATTER? POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The above-discussed variations in recognizing Canadian, Chinese and individual migrants' identities, have created a fundamental base on which governmental policies can move into different directions and have a mixture of impact on each country and individuals as well.

Beijing has developed a number of policies targeted at different groups, which will have an impact on various types of Canadians in China. Aimed at the highly-skilled "Sea Turtles", the "Thousand Talents Program", a project launched by the Organization Department of the CPC Central Committee in early January 2009, aims to attract top international talents to work in the mainland. With the project, China expects to break technological bottle-necks and enhance its research and development capabilities in science and technology. The project plans to attract around 2,000 talented overseas Chinese back to China over the next five to ten years (Chinese Academy of Sciences, 2009).

Many preferential treatments are accorded to the returned overseas Chinese, which are delivered through high-level offices in the major arms of the State, Legislature and Party dealing with the overseas Chinese. For instance, the Chinese Constitution (Articles 50, 70 and 89) protects the legitimate rights of Chinese nationals residing abroad and the lawful rights and the interests of returned overseas Chinese. It also mandates the Cabinet of the Central Government to exercise the above powers and functions as well as the setting up of the Overseas Chinese Committee of the Chinese Parliament (People's Daily Online, 1982). The 1993 "Measures for the Implementation of the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Returned Overseas China and Family Members of Overseas China" lays out the preferential treatment to be given by governments at all levels to overseas Chinese when they return/invest in China (Asian Legal Information Institute, 1991).

Since 2004, foreigners have been able to apply for official permanent residence in China under a system similar to the US "Green Card" scheme. The government immigration authority indicated that "high-level foreigners or foreigners who make large direct investment" may apply for permanent residence status and if successful, live in the country indefinitely. Eligibility will apply mainly to high-level foreign personnel who hold posts in businesses which promote China's economic, scientific and technological development or social progress, foreign citizens who make relatively large direct investment in China, foreigners who have made outstanding contributions or are of special importance to China, and foreigners who come to China to be with their families (China Daily, 2004).

All the above Chinese policies open the door for interested Canadians to consider and decide whether to move to China. In contrast, many Canadian rules and regulations discourage Canadians abroad, including those in China, keeping a close attachment to Canada. For example, naturalized Canadian citizens living abroad cannot pass on citizenship to children born outside the country. Also, a Canadian who lives in Beijing or Shanghai for more than five years is no longer permitted to vote in federal elections. A Canadian practicing professional may no longer be able to practice in Canada after having lived in China for some time. Even a Canadian driver's licence has to be surrendered after some years outside Canada (Zhang, 2007).

The divergent policies between the two countries will also make the citizenship and consular issues more complex and important in Canada-China relations. Canada recognizes dual citizenship while China does not. According to the Chinese Nationality Law, Hong Kong residents and former residents of Chinese descent who were born in mainland China or in Hong Kong are Chinese citizens. They will not be entitled to Canada's consular protection in the HKSAR or the PRC, even though they hold a Canadian passport. The estimated 300,000 Canadians residing in PRC and HKSAR, therefore, could be a huge challenge for Canada's consular service.

Given the reality of circular migration and divergence of policy environment in China and Canada, it is essential for both governments to understand the changing identity/identities of Canadians in China, and to work together on policies that will benefit Canada and China, as well as the individual migrants.

V. CONCLUSIONS

This paper argued that current international human migration patterns have become increasingly circular movement. Furthermore, China is no longer a country that just produces emigrants. It has also become a magnet for professionals and students from around the world seeking better job opportunities and a good education.

Given the growing number of Canadians in PRC and HKSAR, many challenges arise in defining identity or identities of this group of Canadian population in China. We observed huge variations in recognition of their identities in Canada, China and by individuals of this community. We also observed a divergence in the policy environment in China and Canada based on such a variety of identities.

It is the time now for both governments of China and Canada to understand the changing direction of people mobility and changing identity/identities of Canadians in China. The Canada-China human circular mobility is a unique focal point for relations between Ottawa and Beijing (Woo, 2009). There is an urgent need for both countries to work together on policies that will deepen the connections across the Pacific and ultimately benefit Canada and China, as well as the individual migrants. While other countries are lining up to sign trade and investment deals with China, Canada can go a step further and investigate the possibility of an agreement on the circular movement of personals between Canada and China (Woo, 2009). Such an agreement could encompass issues such as citizenship, visa, education and training, professional accreditation, social security, taxation and even extradition.

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FOOTNOTES

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[2] Pronounced as "*Hai Gui"* which means the returning «Sea Turtles»* - an abbreviation that sums up returnees from overseas. The pronunciation also suggests the Chinese phrase for sea turtles that were born on the shore, grew up at sea, but eventually returned to the shore again.

[3] The Chinese language has various terms equivalent to the English «Overseas Chinese». Huáqiáo (华侨) refers to Chinese citizens residing in countries other than China. Huáyì (华裔) refers to ethnic Chinese residing outside of China. Another often-used term is hǎiwài huárén (海外华人), often used by the PRC government to refer to people of Chinese ethnicities who live outside the PRC and are not Chinese citizens.