SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF NEW CHINESE IMMIGRANTS IN VANCOUVER

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ABSTRACT

Influenced by the ideas of Buddhist fatalism, old Chinese immigrants in Canada often used avoidance as their adaptive strategy in the face of discrimination from and conflict with the mainstream society. Only when confronted with serious threats did they unite themselves for a concerted action. Since the 1990s, new Chinese immigrants in Canada have changed tremendously; it must be interesting to see how the new Chinese immigrants adapt to the new situation and whether they still experience discrimination. This article studies new Chinese immigrants in the city of Vancouver. The research questions of this study are: How are they now related to the mainstream society? How are they integrated with it? And what are the main conflicts and how do they cope with them? The paper deals with their relationships in three main aspects: the new mode of concentration, new forms of conflicts, and the lived experience of Chinese entrepreneurs and their coping strategies. The paper concludes that while new Chinese immigrants enjoy a much higher social status in comparison with their predecessors, they never forget the past oppression and that some regulations in the current policy smacks of unfairness. The research is based on secondary data, but provides recent demographics of new Chinese immigrants in the city. In the paper, the term "new Chinese immigrants" refer to those who entered Canada after the year 1990.

提要

由於受到佛教宿命論的影響，加拿大華人在過去面臨嚴重的種族歧視政策和行為或與主流社會發生衝突的時候，經常用規避作為生存和適應的手段。只有在遇到嚴重威脅的時候，華人才能夠團結起來，共同采取行動。自從1990年代以來，加拿大的華人新移民發生了巨大的變化，和老移民的情況不可同日而語。因此，探討新華人移民如何適應新的情況，他們是否仍然經受主流社會的歧視這樣的問題是令人感興趣的。本文旨在研究溫哥華市的華人新移民。所要研究的問題是：新華人移民和主流社會目前的關係如何？他們和主流社會的融合情況怎樣？他們和大社會之間存在哪些衝突，他們是怎樣應付的，應用哪些應付手段？本文從三個方面探討以上問題：華人新的聚居形式，和大社會之間新的衝突形式，以及華人企業家的親身經歷和在加拿大的適應策略。本文認為，儘管新華人移民和他們的前輩相比享有較高的社會地位，但是他們從來就沒有忘記過去所受到的不公正對待、歧視和壓迫，目前加拿大的移民政策中仍然存在結構歧視的不公平成分。本文的資料主要依賴第二手文獻資料，同時也提供了最新的溫哥華新移民人口統計數字。本文中"新移民"一詞指1990年後在加拿大落地的移民。

INTRODUCTION

Although Chinese-Canadians have been in Canada for over 150 years, it is only in recent years that their contribution has been recognized. According to Yu (1997), old Chinese immigrants in Canada, influenced by the belief of Buddhist fatalism, often used avoidance as their adaptive strategy in face of discrimination from and conflict with the mainstream society. Only when confronted with serious threats did they unite themselves in concerted action. Concentration was a major strategy for self-defense.[1] However, in the new millennium, how are the Chinese in Canada related to and integrated into the mainstream society? Are there any conflicts between them

and the larger society and how do they cope with them? These are the questions this paper attempts to answer. The paper focuses on a special Chinese group – the new Chinese immigrants in Vancouver.[2]

NEW IMMIGRANTS IN VANCOUVER AND THE EFFECT OF THEIR PRESENCE

British Columbia has been the second largest province to accept new immigrants in recent years. From 1991 to 1995, immigrants from Hong Kong accounted for 27% of total new immigrants entering the province, while in the single year of 1994, 45,000 new Chinese immigrants swarmed into the province, most of whom came from Hong Kong and Taiwan.[3]

By 2000, the number of new immigrants in Vancouver came up to 339,000 (19% of the city's population), accounting for 16% of the total new immigrants of the country. The majority of immigrants were new immigrants, most of whom were Chinese and South Asian. This added greatly to multiculturalism in the city. One feature of Vancouver is the number of Chinese and the rapid growth of the Chinese population. Their population grew from 36,450 in 1971 to 99,800 in 1986, and again to 264,225 in 1996 (2001 Census of Canada). The number became 381,535 in 2006 (over tenfold growth in 35 years). In 1996, 32% of the total Chinese population in Canada lived in Vancouver (Cf. 40% in Toronto), while they made up 14.9% of the city's total population, much higher than their percentage in Toronto (7.7%) and in Montreal (1.3%). Actually, if calculated by multiple responses in the census, the Chinese population in Vancouver might reach 292,620.[4] Table 1 shows Chinese immigrants in five major cities of Canada.

TABLE 1: Chinese immigrants in selected cities (number and% in total population)

CITIES/YEARS	1996	2006
Vancouver	14.9%	18.2% (381,535 in 2,097,965)
Toronto	7.7%	9.6% (486,325 in 5,072,075)
Calgary	N/A	6.2% (66,375 in 1,070,295)
Edmonton	N/A	3.9% (40,200 in 1,024,825)
Montreal	1.3%	2.0% (72,015 in 3,588,520)

Sources: Statistics Canada, 1998; Statistics Canada, 2010

The presence of these new immigrants has greatly changed the city's outlook. The influx of new immigrants revised the city's population composition and cultural pluralism posed a challenge to the social service system, the educational system and the urban life experience of everyone.

In the past, the general living pattern was a segregation of Westerners in West Vancouver and Orientals in the eastern part. As far as Great Vancouver is concerned, the Canadian-born and old immigrants lived in suburban areas, while new immigrants chose to live in the densely populated East Vancouver. But from 1971 on, the living pattern of the Chinese started to change when some of the 36,405 Chinese (3.4% of the city's population) had already lived in large independent houses outside Chinatown and the index of segregation for the Chinese population was 54.5, ranking the third, lower than that for the Portuguese (60.5) and the Caribbean (62.5) communities.[5]

From 1967 to 1986, unprecedented numbers of Asian immigrants deeply influenced every aspect of Vancouver life. During these two decades, Vancouver's population increased about one third, while the Chinese population increased threefold and the South Asian population increased by five times.[6] There was no evident change in the general pattern but change in its details appeared – the population started to radiate towards the outskirts of the city. In the meantime, more and more Chinese lived outside Chinatowns. By 1986, 30% of the Chinese lived in suburban areas, a majority of whom chose to concentrate their homes in Richmond and Burnaby. After 1987, the number of economic-class new immigrants grew phenomenally. While the number of European and American immigrants declined, the number of immigrants of visible ethnic groups climbed steeply. The biggest change was that Vancouver attracted the highest proportion of Asian immigrants. Based on 1996 statistics, 365,000 Vancouver residents were Asian born, while HK immigrants surpassed British immigrants in numbers, becoming the largest immigrant group.[7] In the same year, people of visible minorities came up to more than half a million.[8] A new phenomenon in the period was that the few wealthiest people in Vancouver were not of British descent, but of Asian background.

DECONCENTRATION AND RECONCENTRATION OF CHINESE IMMIGRANTS

After 1986, the trend of new immigrants radiating out towards the outskirts and West Vancouver continued with more subtle changes. Firstly, the proportion of people choosing to live in the city or in the outskirts changed evidently. From 1982 to 1986, 55% of new immigrants chose to live in the city, but from 1991 to 1996, the percentage was only 36%, i.e., the majority of new immigrants chose to live in the periphery of Great Vancouver.[9] Secondly, while the population was scattering towards the outskirts, a reverse pattern of ethnic concentration reappeared. This trend was mainly caused by the white population fleeing the influx of ethnic new immigrants in their districts. Thirdly, the concentration of visible minorities was more evident. As far as Chinese immigrants were concerned, the purposes to immigrate were diversified. Some chose to live in Chinatown and once their economic status improved,

they moved to other, better areas. Some came to invest and had more flexibility in choosing a place to live. Still others, benefiting from the information technology, were better informed about the situation in Canada and had a wide range of choices. In short, Chinatown was no longer the only option for many new Chinese immigrants. Areas of Chinese concentration increased and some wealthy and skilled people could go live in the wealthiest areas right away. The segregation index for Chinese decreased from 54.5 in 1971 to 47.7 in 1996, but considering their total number increased by 6 times in the same period, the figure is still high.[10]

Ethnic concentration can be voluntary or involuntary and can be analyzed by economic status or social distance. Chinese immigrants have obtained a higher social status but their concentration is still high, which shows that economic position can only affect ethnic concentration to a certain degree. The social distance chosen by a given group is another factor. Now the Chinese have more choices in occupation, therefore more contact with the mainstream society, but in terms housing choices, Canada provides greater opportunity and attaches importance to self-determination and the positive aspects of ethnic concentration. This paper concludes that Canadian multicultural policy may have encouraged ethnic concentration.

RELATIONS WITH MAINSTREAM SOCIETY

Now all communities in Vancouver are inhabited by Chinese immigrants, except for a few. The proportion of Chinese people living in suburban areas grew from 29.3% in 1986 to 49.3% in 1996.[11] The new developments have affected their relations with the mainstream society, their social integration into the society, and adaptive strategies against subconscious anti-Chinese sentiments. The growth of the Chinese in number and power, specifically a few very wealthy Chinese immigrants who control the real estate market, greatly changed Chinese communities, causing resentment from the mainstream society. The conflict has emerged in three issues: "monster houses", "Asian malls", and daily contact with mainstream society members.

With regard to the "monster houses", it is generally assumed that they undermine the local landscape character and the housing price in middle-class communities, and that the Chinese lack awareness of environment protection, do not like Canada and ignore local residents' wellbeing. As to the Asian malls issue, people complain that only Chinese signs are displayed, they only serve in Chinese and Cantonese, they are unfriendly to other customers, and so on. Contact problems include various misunderstandings and daily conflicts, such as jumping queues, ignoring neighbors in greeting, Chinese kids requiring too many ESL classes, and so on.

It can be said that both sides of the conflict should shoulder some responsibility. Some scholars hold that "monster houses" indicate that the Chinese are proud of their cultural traditions, but they should also raise their civil virtues. Vancouver Chinese newspaper "Ming Bao" said that the Chinese need to conduct self-criticism for some of their bad habits, such as jumping queues, cutting down trees on their private properties, showing off wealth, jaywalking, and so on.[12] Old and new Chinese immigrants within the group even have different ideas on this issue. The former do not agree to the latter's behavior. But, the mainstream society usually does not distinguish this difference and stereotypes the whole group. Whereas some research studies show that while the mainstream society criticizes the Chinese for their behavior, the cultural contributions the Chinese have made to Canada and the discrimination the Chinese have suffered from in the past have not been fully recognized. All in all, the conflict between the Chinese and the mainstream society exists only at the cultural level and can be solved through communications. If we look at the issue positively, the "monster house" phenomenon is also a sign of change in the Chinese "sojourner mentality."

CHINESE ENTREPRENEURS' EXPERIENCE AND THEIR COPING STRATEGIES

Supported by the federal government's Chinese Business Immigration Program, a large number of Chinese entrepreneurs has entered Canada. Before 1996, Chinese entrepreneurs in Canada totaled 70,000, the majority of which lived in the three largest cities.[13] Since Vancouver is closest to Asia and its population has the largest proportion of Chinese, it has attracted many Chinese entrepreneurs, who add vitality to the city's economy. However, research shows that they have met with various difficulties in business initiation and development after entry.[14]

First, once they arrive, they face a difficult decision: choosing between entering the large market of the country or the small market in ethnic enclaves. Chinese businessmen are often pushed into the small market, serving the Chinese community, competing with other Chinese businesses, and carrying commodities given up by large companies. They are often denied goods in small quantities and are forced to buy in large quantities. Due to self-protection, large companies often ignore their business offers, while banks are unwilling to lend money to them.

However, the biggest challenge for new Chinese business immigrants is the restriction of the legal requirement, i.e., they must start a business within two years, which is not enough time for them to investigate the market. As a result, they often have to start a business before they are actually ready to do so. They believe this requirement is an example of institutional discrimination.

Restricted by various conditions, new Chinese immigrants have to adopt a variety of coping strategies to survive, some of which are traditional and some new. Traditional strategies include establishing good relations with customers and even providing extra services. Some resort to hiring family members, relatives and close friends. A special new strategy is that, with the rising economic power of China, Chinese businessmen maintain strong links with their home country in international business and trade. They conduct business in Canada with the help of the business network established before immigration. After they immigrate, they continue to conduct business in Asia or use Canada as a transit station to reach out to the American market.

CONCLUSIONS

The influx of Asian immigrants in Vancouver since the 1990s, especially new Chinese immigrants, has changed the outlook of the city and characterizes the city with increased cosmopolitanism.

Although their social status and economic power have increased, Chinese-Canadians have never forgotten the discrimination they experienced in the past. They were forced to live in a few ethnic enclaves called Chinatown, but the analysis of their recent deconcentration from their traditional enclaves in East Vancouver and the reconcentration in some suburban middle-class districts and in West Vancouver shows that the choice is voluntary, and that the multicultural policy of the federal government, which lends support to ethnic cultural maintenance, may have enhanced this choice.

In contrast to the past image of "sojourners", Chinese housing choices, in some cases referred to as "monster houses", may show that the Chinese have developed a new sense of belonging to the host country. The conflict between the Chinese and the larger society may be attributable to a lack of communication which resulted in cultural misunderstandings. Either side is to blame. The former should raise environmental and civil awareness, while the latter should give greater recognition to the past discrimination and the contributions the Chinese have made to Canada.

The experience of Chinese entrepreneurs shows that institutional discrimination against immigrants still exists, constraining their business choices and pushing them into traditional ethnic market. The analysis indicates that concentration is still a major coping strategy for new Chinese immigrants to maintain traditional culture, feel comfortable and help each other in business. Meanwhile, some new coping strategies have emerged specifically through the rising economic power of China; they try to maintain close ties with their country of birth and the original business network.

Finally, the increased cultural diversity of Vancouver, the greater freedom enjoyed by new immigrants, and their greater attachments to their host country are all signs of success for the Canadian multicultural policy.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Yu, Chongzhen. Human rights, discrimination, and coping strategies of Chinese-Canadians. In Chen Guoben (Ed.), (1997). Breaking off chains: A centennial history of anti-racial discrimination of Chinese in Canada: 124-133. Beijing: Chinese Social Sciences Press.

[2] New immigrants refer to those who entered Canada after 1991.

[3] BC Stats, 1996

[4] 2001 Census of Canada. Great Vancouver's 1996 – 2001 Population Growth Supports Livable Region Strategic Plan Objectives. (March 2002)

[5] Balakrishnan, T. R. (January 2001). Residential Segregation and Socio – economic Integration of Asians in Canada. Canadian Ethnic Studies, 33(1): 120-131.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Hiebert, D. (Spring 1999). Immigration and the Changing Social Geography of Great Vancouver. BC Studies (121): 35-81.

[8] 2001 Census of Canada

[9] ibid

[10] Hiebert, D. (Spring 1999). Immigration and the Changing Social Geography of Great Vancouver. BC Studies (121): 35-81.

[11] Rose, J. (2001). Context of Interpretation: Assessing Immigrant Reception in Richmond, Canada. The Canadian Geographer, 45(4): 474-493.

[12] O'neil, P. (20/03/1996). Anti – Asian Backlash Feared: Canadian Human Rights Chief Warns of Increasing Prejudice while Praising a Chinese Newspaper in Vancouver. The Vancouver Sun: A1.

[13] Citizenship and Immigration Canada. (May 2000). Recent Immigrants in the Vancouver Metropolitan Area: A Comparative Portrait Based on the 1996 Census.

[14] Wong, L. L. & Ng, M. (1998). Chinese Immigrant Entrepreneurs in Vancouver: A Case Study of Ethnic Business Development. Canadian Ethnic Studies, 30(1): 64-84.