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Portrait of Canadians Abroad: Beijing

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Executive Summary

China entered the age of globalization in 1978 when it adopted the “open door” policy, which shifted China gradually to a socialist market economy. As a consequence, China has experienced unprecedented economic liberalization, industrialization, migration, urbanization and privatization – all are required by economic globalization. In particular, after China joined the WTO in 2001 and the subsequent completion of its market-opening pledges in 2006, the China was required to open itself to market penetration and deepening of service industries (Fang, 2007). Furthermore, globalization, migration and urbanization are inextricably intertwined. Migration and urbanization are responses to globalization; globalization further accelerates migration and urbanization. In this context, an increasing number of investors, foreign enterprises and service agencies are establishing themselves in China. Among them, many are Canadian, employing Canadians. However, we know little about their experience in China. Therefore, it becomes imperative to understand the transnational movements of Canadians by focusing on their experience in China.

This study investigates the experience of the Canadian diaspora living in Beijing, particularly among those who emigrated to Canada in the early 1990s and later returned to China. The study demonstrates that Canadians are becoming more internationally mobile as a result of globalization, modern communications and transportation. The study also shows that the Canadian diaspora in Beijing is a young and well-educated community which is economically active. This diasporic community is characterized by its dualities: they are simultaneously diaspora and returnees. While some hold Canadian citizenship by birth or naturalization, others are were still permanent residents. Unlike traditional diasporic communities which are often long-time citizens of their homeland, their length of stay in the home country is relatively short. Their previous homeland (Canada) is their adopted country, and their newly adopted country (China) is also their original homeland. It seems evident that the boundary between diaspora and transnational migration has been blurred.

The Canadian diaspora plays a double bridging role between Canada and China in promoting economic and cultural exchanges. Many members encountered difficulties in adjusting to life in China. Some had to hide or renounce their Canadian citizenship because of its limitations. Thus, it is now time for Canada to develop an explicit diasporic policy which recognizes the existence of a Canadian diaspora, facilitates the movement of Canadians, maintain their connection with their homeland, and helps them adapt to a new life overseas.

Introduction

This portrait of Canadians in China focuses on those who live in Beijing, particularly Canadians of Chinese descent who emigrated to Canada in early 1990s and later returned to China. Data draws from a combination of questionnaire and personal interviewing. The questionnaire seeks to understand the participants in terms of their age, gender, marital status, citizenship and their educational background. It is hoped the information gained will help me put together a profile of the Canadian diaspora in Beijing. A total of 65 completed questionnaires were received. However, limited space and the non-reactive nature of the questionnaire prevented me from further probing some of the responses in the questionnaire, and hence the resort to personal interviewing. The interviews took place with ten participants. All interviews were conducted in English. Each interview lasted about one hour. All interviews were taped and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Data from the questionnaires and interviews complemented each other in significant ways in enriching our understanding of the experiences of Canadians in Beijing.

A. Canadian Citizens Resident in Beijing

Beijing was chosen as the site for the Canadian portrait in China owing to the strategic role it plays in hosting international residents. Beijing is the capital of the People's Republic of China and the second-largest city after Shanghai. According to the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Statistics (2005), Beijing's population reached 15.38 million in 2005, among whom 3.5 million were migrants. Recent updates from the Xinhua News Agency report that Beijing's population exceeded 17 million in 2008. While the majority are Han Chinese, it also has a growing ethnic minority population representing 4.7% of its total population. Some of the largest minority groups are Manchu, Hui, Mongolian, and Korean. In addition, Beijing hosts a growing international community, made up of people from all over the world, including diplomats, international students and teachers, and foreign investors and entrepreneurs. Furthermore, the city has established official linkages with 27 countries and 31 cities in the world. The great success of the 2008 Olympic Games has presented Beijing to the world as a cosmopolitan city which will attract more people from outside China to work and live there. It is estimated that Beijing's foreign population has reached 200,000, among whom 10% or 20,000 are from Canada (Pillsbury, 2005).

Findings from the questionnaire provide a glimpse of who are the Canadians living in Beijing. Among 65 respondents who completed the questionnaire, 61.5% were male and 38.5% female. Most of them (86%) were married with one to two children. The majority of them were still young, half in their thirties, and 45% in their forties. Regarding place of birth, the largest group was originally from Beijing (20%). Their citizenship status reveals that about 52% held Canadian citizenship and the rest were permanent residents

of Canada. About 34% still have immediate family members residing in Canada. The average length of time the respondents stayed in Canada before returning was five years. Before returning, they were residing in Vancouver (31%), Toronto (29%), Montreal (11%), and Calgary (6%). Since returning, they have lived in China for an average of four years. This group is highly educated, 30.8% holding bachelor's degrees, 47.7% with master's degrees, and 21.5% with PhDs. Most of them (65.6%) received their highest level of education from institutions in China, a smaller proportion (26.6%) from Canada, and the remaining 8% from other countries.

The profile that emerges from the questionnaire responses is of a Canadian diaspora in Beijing which is young, well-educated community and economically active. Their movement indicates that this is a hyper mobile group.

B. Canadian Personalities and Organizations in Beijing

Personalities: Entertainment

The best-known Canadian in China is **Mark Rowswell**, commonly known by his Chinese stage name “Dashan.” Dashan works as a freelance performer. Relatively unknown in Canada, Wikipedia claims him to be “the most famous Western performer in China, where he occupies a unique position as a foreign national who has become a bona fide domestic celebrity.” Unlike Dashan, most Canadians remain unknown to the Chinese. In this study I interviewed ten of them. Most of them were born in China and migrated to Canada many years ago, the longest having lived in Canada for 15 years. The majority were in their thirties and forties, only two in their early fifties. This is a highly educated group, most of them holding a master's (5) or doctoral (3) degree. Seven have Canadian citizenship. One person has lived in China for 15 years. They are specialized in media, information technology, arts and humanities, education and commerce. Table 1 shows a summary of their profiles (see Appendix 1). In the following section, I will highlight the personalities of five of them, representing each of the areas mentioned.

Qiang Wu^{*} was born in China. He was in his late thirties. He received his MA from a prestigious university in Beijing, specialized in media and communication technology. Before moving to Toronto in 2002, he worked as a production director in Beijing for China Central Television (CCTV), China's official national television station. In Canada, Qiang had difficulties finding a job in his area, so he went into retail business working as sales representative. He received his Canadian citizenship in 2006 and moved back to Beijing the same year.

Returning to China, Qiang resumed his role as a production director of film and television. Reflecting on his experiences living in China as a Canadian, he highlighted the inconvenience that a Canadian passport brought him. He said he always hides his Canadian passport when he travels in China because: “Sometimes your foreign passport is really trouble. For example, if I go to make a documentary at the border of China and

^{*} All interviewees' names are pseudonyms.

another country, if I show them a foreign passport, that's a big deal... the passport you can show off to your friends but it's not convenient when you travel across China." He is planning to visit Canada in order to maintain his connections with his new homeland. His dream is to retire in Canada and purchase a house in Victoria by the seaside, where he will live with his wife and two children.

Michael Liang was born in Toronto and lived most of his life in Vancouver before moving to Beijing. He holds a BA in Asian Studies and moved to Beijing upon graduation in 1993. Currently he works in an international school as alumni and development officer in Beijing. He visits Canada once a year or two. What he missed the most about Canada are the beautiful mountains and the blue oceans. He noted: "Vancouver is still home. I am reminded of the lifestyle back home, the way things are done, so it (gives me) me a reminiscent kind of feeling." Despite this, Michael has no immediate plan to return 'home' because he claims he has got "the best of both worlds".

Michael has two children who were born in China. He often shows the Canadian flag to them and educates them about their Canadian roots. He was worried about the new citizenship act which came into effect on April 17, 2009. The new policy will stop conferring citizenship to children born abroad to parents who themselves are also born abroad. He stated: "I don't agree with the policy personally because I'm thinking about the future of my family, you know. If I decide to continue working closely with Canada and China here and pass that down to my children, then they may become future diplomats or something like what we're doing now. If they decide to stay here, what about their children? They'll be stateless." Then he commented: "They should get rid of the policy. That'll deter future families from coming overseas, going overseas because we need to find a policy that's fair and balanced, that encourages growth, encourages families to go overseas, and be able to have the children who are born overseas and retain their Canadian citizenship to Canadian parents who are Canadian."

Xinsheng Wang was born in China and is in his early forties. He received his bachelor's degree in English in a prestigious university in China and worked as a translator in Beijing prior to moving to Canada. He moved to Montreal in 1993 to accompany his wife who was an international student there. As a spouse, he was allowed to work and found a job as a freelance journalist for an international radio in Montreal where he worked from 1993 to 1996. In 1997, he decided to go back to school and studied for his MBA until 1999, when he also received Canadian citizenship. Since there are fewer opportunities for him in Canada to be a manager in a multi-national company, he moved to Hong Kong in 1999 where he worked for an international company. In 2002, he moved back to Beijing and found a job as a deputy general manager for a Hong Kong-based company.

One issue Xinsheng highlighted concerns China's income tax policies for foreigners. He commented that it is unreasonable for China to require them to pay income tax, given that they are not receiving any benefits such as a pension. He plans to return to Canada in 2012. He explained why: "I want my kids to speak, to learn the languages there, and to learn the culture there. You know such experience, to have more exposures to different

cultures, to different countries; we really enjoy it. So that's why we want to also give them this kind of advantage for them to explore.”

Feida Deng was born in China and now in his mid-thirties. He holds a Bachelor of Science in computer science from China. He worked for ten years in the field of information technology in Beijing before moving to Canada. He moved to Calgary in 2006 and back to Beijing in 2007. He had a hard time finding a professional job in his field in Canada. As a consequence, he had to take a job as an office cleaner, volunteered for a recycling company, worked on a job as an entry-level computer technician, and finally moved up to be a middle level consultant. He found no challenge with what he was doing in Canada, so he decided to move back to China to take up a job in an electronics company as the Chief Information Officer (CIO).

Recalling his experience in Canada, Feida stated: “I have 10 years experience in IT technology. Yeah, so you feel that you've failed in Canada because your English is not good and you don't have a network. The employers in Calgary don't recognize our education background, work experience. That is bad. That is too bad.” He has no immediate plan returning to Canada.

Huawei Li was born in China and now is in his early fifties. He taught in a prestigious Chinese university before moving to Canada in 1989. First he went to the University of Toronto to pursue his PhD in English literature. After his graduation, he taught at universities in Toronto and in Newfoundland. He received his Canadian citizenship in 1997 and returned to China in 2003. Since his returning, he taught in three universities as a visiting professor.

Huawei mentioned that he encountered difficulties in adjusting to Chinese academic culture, facing issues of plagiarism and academic integrity. He decided to renounce his Canadian citizenship owing to the limitations of Canadian citizenship, which prevented him from applying for research grants, submitting his work for awards and be considered for promotion. He stated: “After returning to China I was first hired as so called foreign expert. But then I realized that unless you become a full member in Chinese society, you would face a lot of difficulties working in academia. For example, funding applications . . . you're not allowed to apply for any funding. And your published work theoretically cannot apply for awards . . . so that's a big drawback. And also you won't be considered in the normal academic ranks as a lecturer, associate professor, full professor . . . so I was only appointed as a visiting professor of English. You cannot fully integrate into the Chinese academic society. So I decided to renounce my Canadian citizenship and resume my Chinese citizenship. As you know the Chinese government does not recognize dual citizenship, yes so you have to make a choice there, that's the choice I made.” He noted that it is not a straightforward process to return to his Chinese citizenship. It took him two years to complete that process.

Organizations: Education

The Canadians in China (CnC) is a network founded 1998 by Richard Liu, a University of BC grad who currently works in an international school in Beijing. It is a non-government organization which started as an email network for Canadians residing in China. On Canada Day 2000, the Network launched its website to share information and news and build an online community among Canadians in China. Over the past ten years, this Network has become an important conduit in publicizing Canadian events, promoting the presence of Canadians in China, and maintaining connections with the homeland. According to Richard Liu, currently the Network has an online membership of more than 8,000 people.

The Canadian Alumni Network started around the same time as the CnC. It provides support to alumni chapters and their representatives in China. It is for everyone who has graduated or attended Canada's post-secondary institutions and who is now living in China. Currently the Network has 22 active alumni representatives in Beijing representing more than 220 registered members. It also provides information for potential students in China who are interested in attending Canada's post-secondary institutions.

Beijing Concord College of Sino-Canada (BCCSC) was established in 1997 as the first joint co-operative college in Beijing. It offers bilingual programs in senior high school and post-secondary education. It is operated in a partnership among the Experimental Middle School of Beijing Normal University, the Ministry of Education of New Brunswick and RBC International Education Investment Corporation. It combines Chinese and Canadian curricula and its graduates receive both Chinese and Canadian diplomas. It is heralded as a successful example of educational cooperation between Canada and China.

Canadian International School of Beijing (CISB) was founded in 2005. Using a Canadian curriculum, CISB offers a range of programs from Montessori to Grade 12. Its high school includes an international baccalaureate diploma program (IBDP). In its short existence of three years, the school has quickly grown from an initial population of 250 to 600 students who represent over 40 countries.

Western Returned Scholars Association (WRSA) was established in 1913 for Chinese scholars who have returned from studying overseas, particularly from Europe and North America. Now the network has extended to include all returned Chinese scholars and students as well as those who are still overseas. The association has thousands of members all over China and abroad. Some of them returned from Canada. Most of them are Chinese citizens.

Organization: Business

The Canada China Business Council (CCBC) is the country's Canada-China bilateral trade and investment facilitator, catalyst and advocate, bringing more than three decades of experience and business relationship building to its members. A private, not-for-profit

business association, CCBC is dedicated to building its members' business success in China and Canada by offering unmatched business service and support. From direct operational support in China to trade and investment advocacy on its members' behalf, CCBC is a vital resource in enhancing Canada-China bilateral trade and investment and in building prosperity for Canadians through enhanced Sino-Canadian business.

The Canada China Business Council was founded in 1978. Its members range from the largest and best-known Canadian and Chinese firms to leading innovators and SME entrepreneurs in both countries. Members are operating in a diversity of sectors including financial services, legal services, information and communications technology, education, manufacturing, construction, transportation, mining and energy. With over 300 member companies, the CCBC also has a small but growing number of Chinese member companies.

In addition to its head office in Toronto and an office in Vancouver, the CCBC has offices and professional staff in two of China's leading economic centres, Beijing and Shanghai. With this network of offices, the CCBC is well placed to gather market intelligence and information and to connect its members to opportunities in China's emerging regions. The CCBC also operates a CCBC Chapter in Beijing and is allied with the Canadian Chamber of Commerce in Shanghai, offering a range of events and broad networking opportunities at the local level.

Organization: Social Network

Club Canada is a social club serving Canadians in Beijing, aiming to help new Canadians ease their transition in Beijing, maintain Canadian culture, and establish connections with fellow Canadians. It organizes social and leisure activities, such as a Thanksgiving celebration, hockey night Canada, etc.

D: Summary of Chinese Immigration and Citizenship Policies

China does not recognize dual citizenship. There are different types of visas for foreigners who are visiting or working in China, depending on the nature of their visit and stay. Most Canadians who are working in China are on work visa or residence visa. To apply for the work visa, they are required to obtain a letter of employment from an employer and a work permit. It is not usually difficult to find a job, but they need to apply for a work permit which can be a complicated and bureaucratic process. One interviewee had to leave the country to renew her visitor's visa every six months before obtaining a work permit. Sometimes the Canadian passport creates inconvenience; luckily some of them can still use their valid Beijing ID card.

There was a consensus among research participants that Canada and China should work together to design a policy that recognizes dual citizenship. Xiaopeng Sun, who is actively involved in advocating dual citizenship in China, had this to say: "I recommend

they [Chinese government] should recognize dual citizenship. They should really relax on the visa, you know. They should for Overseas Chinese who have joined foreign nationality, they should give them something like the same treatment as people from Hong Kong, have a returning home permit, or maybe they should enjoy all the same benefit as the local Chinese.” However, not everyone is optimistic about this possibility. Guohua Fang noted: “If there is a dual citizenship, I would welcome it. I heard people talking about it. The Chinese government is discussing about that law but whether it’s possible or not I really doubt it because there are too many people.”

D. Conclusion

This study reveals that Canadians are becoming increasingly internationally mobile as a result of globalization, modern communications and transportation. Drawing from questionnaire and personal interviewing, the study demonstrates that the Canadian diaspora in Beijing is a young and well-educated community which is economically active. This diasporic community is characterized by its dualities: it is both Canadian and Chinese. While some members hold Canadian citizenship, others are yet to be naturalized. Unlike traditional diasporic communities which are often long-time citizens of their homeland, the length of stay for this group in their home country is relatively short. Furthermore, they have a dual belonging. They are simultaneously diasporas and returnees. Their previous homeland is their adopted country, and their newly adopted country is their original homeland. Their movement indicates that this is a hyper mobile group. The Canadian diaspora plays an important role as cultural and economic broker between Canada and China.

The Canadian diaspora experienced tremendous opportunities as well as challenges. The above discussion has clearly shown that the glow is off Canadian citizenship. The limitations of Canadian citizenship hinder those in the Canadian diaspora in re-integrating into Chinese society. As a consequence, some of them had to hide or renounce their Canadian citizenship because it created limitations and inconvenience for their work and life in China. Fortunately, their dual identity as both overseas Canadians and Chinese returnees helps minimize the limitations.

The study has important implications for consular services, immigration and diaspora policies. It shed new light on the current debate on citizenship regarding whether foreign-born Canadians are equal to Canadian-born citizens when it comes to deciding whether their children who are born overseas should automatically receive Canadian citizenship. The study raises important questions about the definition of Canadian in the age of transnational migration. It is time for Canada to develop an explicit diasporic policy which recognizes the existence of the Canadian diaspora, facilitates the movement of Canadians, maintain their connection with the homeland, and helps them adapt to a new life overseas. The implications also extend beyond the Canadian border and call for the Canadian and Chinese governments to collaborate on designing a policy that recognizes dual citizenship.

E. References

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Appendix 1

Table 1: Profile of Interviewees

Name	Age	Sex	Education	Citizenship	Canadian City	Time in Canada	Time in China
Qiang Wu	37-39	M	MA-China: Media	Canadian	Toronto	4 years	2 years
Guofang Zhang	43-45	M	MA-China: IT	Permanent Resident	Windsor	3 years	7 years
Michael Liang	34-36?	M	BA – Canada: Arts	Canadian	Vancouver	23 years	15 years
Lixia Liu	43-45	F	Med – Canada: Ed	Canadian	Vancouver	5 years	4 years
Xinsheng Wang	40-42	M	MBA – Canada: Commerce	Canadian	Montreal	6 years	9 years
Guifang Lin	40-42	F	PhD – Canada: Ed	Canadian	Toronto	8 years	3 years
Feida Deng	34-36	M	BSc – China: IT	Permanent Resident	Calgary	1 year	2 years
Guohua Fang	49-51	M	PhD – Canada: Ed	Canadian	Montreal	15 years	6 years 4 mths
Huawei Li	52-55	M	PhD – Canada: Ed	Canadian – renounced	St. John’s	14 years	5 years
Xiaopeng Sun	40-42?	M	MBA – Canada: Commerce	Permanent Resident	Vancouver	Don’t know.	Don’t know.