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**East Asian Immigrant Entrepreneurs in Vancouver:  
Provincial Preference and Ethnic Strategy**

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**East Asian Immigrant Entrepreneurs in Vancouver:  
Provincial Preference and Ethnic Strategy**

by

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**Abstract**

Since the 1980s, British Columbia (B.C.) has invited business immigrants from East Asia to start new business ventures in the province. In this way government officials hope the energetic entrepreneurs from newly industrialized countries, such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, and South Korea, will provide many Canadians with good jobs in the more lucrative goods production industries rather than less desirable employment in existing service industries. Of course, establishing a business in a new country brings new problems of language, investment, innovation, employment and of applying skills learned elsewhere. Seventeen interviews with East Asian entrepreneurs in Vancouver show that the strategies they used to overcome such problems did not lead to the establishment of the types of businesses the province preferred. As will be evident, rather than coinciding with provincial preference for manufacturing and technology investments, recent entrepreneurs followed ethnic business strategies that resulted in coethnic employment practices and reacted to the new economic conditions by devolving their entrepreneurial experience into less desirable service-providing industries.

### **Entrepreneur Immigration as Development Strategy**

In 1978, Canada's Federal Government introduced the category of "business immigrants" to the Immigration Act. This new categorization provided British Columbia's Ministry of Economic Development with an opening to influence policy for business immigration as this new federal legislative step expanded into the provincial legislative jurisdiction. By 1979, the provincial Ministry of Economic Development, specifically the Business Immigration Branch, had prepared the "terms of reference" for the business proposals made by all prospective business immigrants, which would enable the Federal Government to evaluate the business proposals with respect to the needs of the province. If the prospective business immigrant's proposal met the terms and conditions established by the province, the immigrant would then be considered a candidate for a visa. It is important to note that the Federal Government relied very heavily upon the recommendations of the provincial Business Immigration Branch when the time came to issue visas to the prospective business immigrants. In 1986, the Federal Government decided to change its approach to granting visas for prospective business immigrants and developed two-year conditional visas for them. The three major requirements for a prospective business immigrant to acquire a conditional visa were based upon the candidate's (1) business experience, (2) wealth, and (3) potential to establish a business in B.C. which would meet provincial preference.

Federal and provincial government officials in embassies and trade missions in Seoul, Taipei, Hong Kong, London, and Munich, among other places, may invite business people to immigrate to Canada (British Columbia, 1992, p.12). Such people can choose to apply under the Self-Employed Program, the Investor Program - minimum investment \$350,000 for five years - or the Entrepreneur Program - minimum investment \$150,000 (in Vancouver), the creation of at least one job, and the active involvement in the management of the company (British Columbia, 1994, p. 2). B.C.'s immigration officials prefer entrepreneur immigrants to establish their firms in the

goods production sector rather than in the service sector. Their program brochures, addressed to potential business migrants overseas, state that starting a business in insurance, real estate, health services, retail, or other services is simply “NOT ACCEPTABLE” [original emphasis] to the Business Immigration Branch (British Columbia, 1992, p. 8). Instead, provincial officials expect such immigrants to start new enterprises in high priority areas such as manufacturing or processing, development and application of new technology, and natural resource development (British Columbia, 1992, p. 7). B.C. business immigration officials expect immigrants from the newly industrialized societies of East Asia to be industrial entrepreneurs akin to Joseph Schumpeter’s “innovating entrepreneur” (1976, p. 132). This expectation is not surprising because, historically, horizontal mobility from abroad, rather than indigenous social mobility, has characterized the rise to industrial entrepreneur status in Canada (Acheson 1972). Formerly such wealthy migrants arrived primarily from places in Europe and the United States; since 1989, however, most business immigrants have originated from Hong Kong. It is therefore important to understand the major ideas that influence Hong Kong migration decisions.

### **Premigration, Postmigration, and Perspectives**

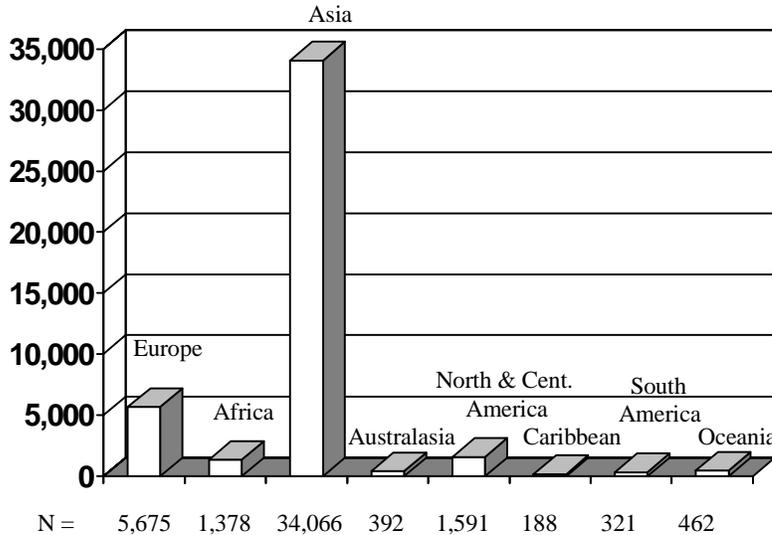
Edward Hardie maintains that Hong Kong’s official migration discourse and migration advisors try to persuade potential migrants to be “sojourners or non-migrants.” He identified two dominant views in Hong Kong’s public discourse on migration: (1) staying in Hong Kong was seen as reducing the “brain drain” of professionals from Hong Kong in its hour of need (its return to China at midnight 30 June, 1997); (2) leaving means becoming “heroic sojourners acquiring citizenship abroad as an ‘insurance policy’ in order to stand outside the local political system” (Hardie, 1994, p. 53). Most who intend to leave Hong Kong understand their migration initially as a form of “insurance policy” and see themselves as sojourners. This understanding differs from the basic assumption of countries, such as Canada, that expect new migrants to settle in their new country for the rest of their lives. To bridge this difference in understanding requires potential

migrants to renegotiate their own understanding of migration so that it becomes compatible with the immigration policies of destination countries. Hardie found that “In many cases, migration advisers handle that renegotiation” (Hardie, 1994, p. 54). More than a hundred migration advisors sell the idea of migration in presentations that highlight the following: destination countries’ social welfare benefits, accessible tertiary education, easy integration through Chinese communities abroad, and family-oriented opportunities for future generations, often employing in the process mock interviews with acting immigration officers. In addition, obtaining citizenship, foreign passports, and resident status in another country is also associated with rank. Many of Hong Kong’s very rich have been part of a truly international elite for years (Hardie, 1994). Being accepted as an immigrant by a foreign country in the context of the “brain drain” discourse enhances emigrants’ perception of gaining status within Hong Kong. However, the need to establish a new social identity in their new country adds to their sense of a drop in status and their experience of exile. Many return, others set up trans-Pacific households, and many try to create Hong Kong contexts abroad and thereby retain “a community which recognizes their accomplishments and status” (1994, p. 66).

The 1980s, as Lloyd Wong and Nancy Netting point out, were marked by “an Asianization of business immigration, with Hong Kong being the principal source country. In 1981, Hong Kong was the only Asian country among the top ten but constituted a mere 4 percent of the total. The United States, United Kingdom, West Germany, Netherlands, Switzerland, and France were the top six source countries and together they constituted 51 percent of business immigration. ... However, by 1989 the top three ranked countries were Asian, with Hong Kong at 30 percent, Taiwan at 13 percent, and South Korea at 7 percent” (1992, p. 103). The trend of Asia replacing Europe as the predominant region that supplies Canada with immigrants is most evident in B.C. (table 1). It has become the favourite region for Asian immigrants. While 34,066 immigrants came to B.C. from Asia, only 5,675 came from Europe during 1995 (table 1). In 1995, of the total number of

immigrants, 44,073, arriving in B.C., 7,295 were business immigrants (including members of their family), constituting about 17 per cent of all immigrants

**Table 1**  
**Immigrant Landings by Region to B.C. - 1995**  
 Source: B.C. Stats, Population Statistics, 1996



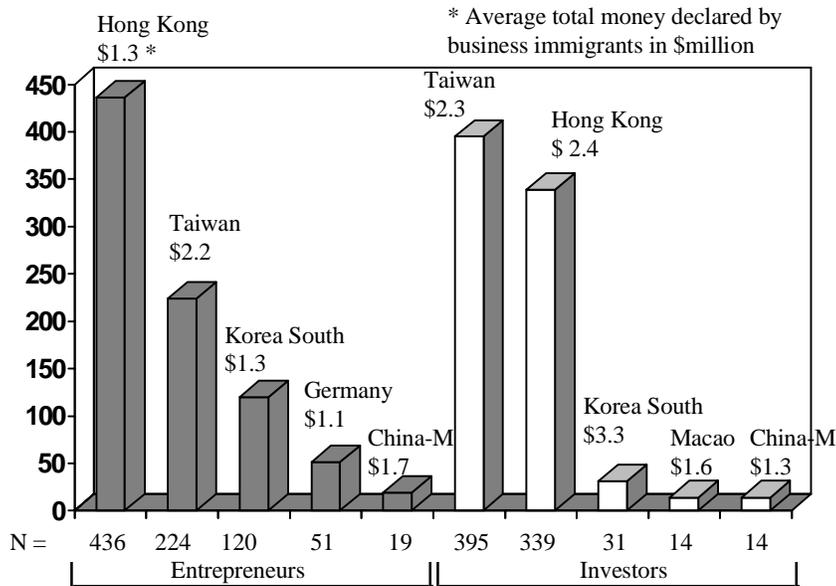
(BC Stats, 1996). This article focuses on those who entered Canada as entrepreneur immigrants. With their families, the entrepreneur category immigrants amounted to 3,399 and investors numbered 2,942 (BC Stats, 1996). Looking back over the last decade, 5,580 principal entrepreneur applicants (not including their family members) came to B.C. in the period from 1986 to 1993 (BC Stats, 1995). In 1995, principal applicants attaining their visas abroad with the intent to settle in B.C. the same year or later declared they had total funds well in excess of one million Canadian dollars, as seen in table 2. East Asians vastly outnumber European business immigrants and appear to be wealthier. For instance, the group of 51 entrepreneurs from Germany declared the lowest average funds of \$1.1 million, while the 224 entrepreneurs from Taiwan indicated they had \$2.2 million on average (table 2). Provincial preference has been that this group of immigrants invest a large portion of these sums in the goods production sector. This process can be viewed as

a renewed form of dependency on imported entrepreneurship. But before pursuing this idea, a brief review of perspectives on the economic rationale for, and social

**Table 2**

**B.C. Business Immigrants Visaed Abroad -1995**

Source: BC Stats, Population Statistics, 1996



impact of, such business immigration is needed. As Alan Nash (1996) tells us, the business immigration program has received relatively little focused attention from academics. What they have offered so far is a variety of answers to why the business immigration program exists and what its social and economic impacts are. Some argue it exists to serve the nation’s economic needs; others claim that it promotes the interests of international capitalist classes, that it leads to class antagonism and racism, that it swells the numbers of the suburban Chinese middle class, and that it brings with it new forms of Chinese business.

Don Devoretz argues that the flow of certain classes of immigrants, such as investors, could be directed to attain maximum benefits in Canada’s regional economies. He writes that “it could be argued that B.C. (given its mix of immigrants) benefits from increased immigration levels. Clearly, this points to the need for a regional immigration policy [in Canada]. The tap

[immigration flow] should only be turned on if it can be demonstrated that the growing regions receive the bulk of the immigrants and the weaker labour markets receive fewer immigrants and more [immigrant] investors” (1994, p. 26).

Peter Li (1992, 1993) focused on the changing forms of Chinese business and found a growing Chinese market in Richmond, a suburb of Vancouver, and the emergence of a local Chinese middle-class and its capital investments. Chinese business in Richmond changed in the 1980s; it experienced a decline in the small family retail firms and an increase in new forms of enterprise, in professional services, food retailing, and corporate investments. In this suburb, the Chinese population has increased, and a Chinese middle-class has emerged that creates both the consumer demand and capital supply for Chinese business.

For Trevor Harrison (1996), the business immigration policy favours a particular class: the international capitalist class. This class benefits from the commodification of citizenship. Inviting this class is not a good strategy to overcome economic problems, he maintains. According to Harrison, the global flow of capital has created economic crises in core states such as Canada. Its capitalists and others have become ‘major world investors’ and moved some of their capital out of the country, a situation that has put increased pressure upon the Canadian government to find investments and to sustain the Canadian economy and the country’s social programs. The business immigration program was launched to ‘capture’ foreign investment, create jobs, and rejuvenate the tax base (p. 14). Harrison doubts that the state’s attempt to deal with its fiscal problems by welcoming capital investments from business class immigration will be successful.

Lloyd Wong (1993) also perceives immigration as increasingly tied to capital accumulation. He thinks entrepreneurial and self-employed migration programs provide opportunities for wealthy foreigners to obtain immigrant status and that economic benefits are questionable. But as long as Canada remains in a period of economic contraction, capital through immigration is likely to be encouraged by governments and, therefore, will affect class and race

relations. Wong and Netting found that Chinese business immigrants encountered racism and class antagonism, but they concluded that “most of the apparent racism is in fact class antagonism wrapped in a racial envelope” (1992, p. 121).

Josephine Smart contends that the business immigration program forced two incompatible issues together into a marriage of convenience: immigration (in the sense of settlement) and business (in the sense of operating a profitable enterprise) (1994, p. 118). Migration, for her, is the result of a complex phenomenon governed by “historical, economic, political, and cultural forces,” and Canada, historically, offered “stability and a favourable living environment” to those who immigrate. In its present combined form, she argues, the program will meet neither the immigrant’s nor the country’s expectations, nor lead to establishing a successful business for many immigrants. This failure is evident in the common phenomenon of “astronauts” (trans-Pacific households where the husband commutes to Hong Kong) and the closure of business ventures soon after obtaining permanent-resident status. These entrepreneurs move back because Hong Kong offers more “profits and opportunity” to international business people who are less governed now by geographical boundaries in a globalized economy (1994, p. 117-8).

Immigrants who come to Canada under the independent or family categories, for instance, can also take advantage of the entrepreneurial opportunities the country offers and start a business. Explaining the mobility of such non-wealthy immigrants into entrepreneurial positions is the primary concern of Waldinger and his colleagues. They point out that the structure of opportunities in modern industrial societies is constantly changing. Opportunities to attain ownership, they argue, is limited under market conditions that favour only businesses serving an ethnic community’s needs, but much greater when market conditions may favor smaller enterprises serving non-ethnic populations (1990, p. 21). Also, variations in attaining business ownership that occur between specific immigrant groups (e.g., Chinese or S. Koreans), according to the authors, is due to premigration experiences, circumstances of immigration and settlement, and postmigration

experiences (availability of ethnic networks and families) (1990, p. 48). Waldinger and his colleagues assume that migrants enter society at the lowest levels and work their way up within the host country to become members of the petty bourgeoisie. Canada's business immigration program results in segments of the old petite bourgeoisie and the international capitalist class being deliberately recruited from abroad. But what proportion of such immigrants will strengthen Canada's goods production sector (Nash, 1987, pp. 31-33)?

Estimates of the percentages of immigrant entrepreneurs that established manufacturing businesses in Canada vary from 17 to 46 per cent for Canada between 1979 and 1991 (Nash 1987, p. 31-32; Canada, EMIS, 1992, p. 55-6). When Alan Nash examined Ontario records, he found that between 1986-1987, of all immigrant entrepreneurs, 40 per cent intended to establish enterprises in manufacturing (plus those in agriculture, horticulture, and processing), and 40 per cent in services (Nash 1987, p. 32). He maintained that it was "in B.C., where immigrant entrepreneurs principally established manufacturing businesses [in the mid-1980s]. Industries such as retailing and food services occupy only a secondary position in the rankings" (Nash, 1987, p.32). When examining the period from 1986-93, actual, rather than planned, investment by immigrant entrepreneurs was not principally in manufacturing. Only 421 of an estimated 5,580 entrepreneurs that came to B.C. in that time period established a manufacturing business; in other words, only 8 per cent started to "manufacture" in B.C.<sup>1</sup> However, this 8 per cent was no longer valid by December 1994 and should be lowered by 2 per cent because one-quarter of this group could no longer be contacted.<sup>2</sup> Thus, at best, 6 per cent of B.C. immigrant entrepreneurs started or took over manufacturing firms; this figure is close to the 6.1 per cent rate at which manufacturing businesses are established overall by small business in Canada (Canada, EMIS 1992, p. 56). In other words, in B.C., immigrant entrepreneurs do no better than their Canadian counterparts in establishing businesses in the manufacturing sector. Table 3 shows that Hong Kong immigrant

**Table 3**  
**Number of Manufacturing Businesses Established in B.C. by Entrepreneur Immigrants Originating from East Asia and Europe, 1986-93**

	Hong Kong	Taiwan	Korea	Europe
Clothing	72	5		1
Electrical	14	12	1	1
Food	15	6		2
Furniture	24	3	1	1
Plastic	26	1		2
Other	54	21	1	3
Wood	10	7	3	2

Source: Entrepreneur Monitoring System (EMIS), Citizenship & Immigration Ottawa (unpublished statistics received from EMIS upon request in August 1994)

manufacturers vastly outnumbered those from Taiwan, Europe, and South Korea and produced goods categorized as clothing, electrical goods, food, furniture, plastic and wood products. Such a low percentage - 6 per cent - of entrepreneur immigrants establishing themselves in manufacturing from 1986 to 1993 means that most of the remaining 94 per cent simply took over or started enterprises primarily in the service sector (real estate, retail trade, wholesale, professional services, etc.).

Missing from the perspectives introduced so far is the idea that entrepreneur immigration, and particular in its Asianized form, is a renewed attempt by Canada to develop industries by inviting entrepreneurs from abroad (Naylor, 1975). Still trying to strengthen the industrial sector at the end of the twentieth century, federal and provincial governments now rely increasingly on East Asia's new industrialism - its technology, investment, and entrepreneurs. Reliance on immigrant entrepreneurs to replicate a manufacturing prowess in B.C., common in newly industrialized East Asian countries, is problematic since often they will buy or start enterprises in Greater Vancouver, a postindustrial city, where the majority of people are employed in providing services rather than in producing goods.

Following the entrepreneurship analysis of Jeremy Boissevain and colleagues (1990) and

**Table 4**  
**Immigrant Entrepreneurs Interviewed in 1994-5 in Greater Vancouver**

<b>Entrepreneurial Experience in Country of Origin</b>	<b>Owner Mr. Ms.</b>	<b>East Asian Country of Origin</b>	<b>Enterprise in Vancouver</b>	<b>Service or Manufacturing Sector</b>
Garment Factory	Ma	Hong Kong	Garment Factory	Clothing.
Teaching & Misc.	Tsang	Hong Kong	Plastic Mold Company	Plastic Products
Mr. Mok Watches & Jewelry	Mok	Hong Kong	Jeans, Furniture Retail Mattresses, Investment	Clothing & Service
Printing Company	Lo*	Hong Kong	Label Printing Company	Printing, Publishing & AI
Typesetting	Lim	Hong Kong	Typesetting (books)	Printing, Publishing & AI
Publishing Co.	Chu	Hong Kong	Publishing (newspaper)	Printing, Publishing & AI
Medicine & Food	Chen	Taiwan	Asian Vegetable Import	Service
Construction & Jewelry Retail	Yim	Taiwan	Kitchen Range Hoods	Service
Import Export Co.	Yau	Taiwan	Farm/Slaughter/Export	Food
Semi-Conductors	Leung	Taiwan	Paper Mill, R & D Firm	Paper & Allied Products
Engineering	Woo	Taiwan	Internet Educ.& Daycare	Service
BASF Import	Tsai	Taiwan	Travel Agency and Hotel	Service
Mining Company	Meng	Taiwan	Video Store & Electronic Installations	Service
Construction	Kim	South Korea	Wood Packaging	Wood
Trading & Gift Shop	Oh	South Korea	Food Store Partner	Service
Fish Processing	Soh	South Korea	Food Store Partner	Service
Construction	Park	South Korea	Food Store Partner	Service

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\* Mr. Lo was not the owner but the shop manager  
the interview content analysis by Philipp Mayring (1993), my research assistant and I examined the strategy employed by East Asian immigrant entrepreneurs to meet problems related to operating their enterprise under postindustrial conditions. We used interviews to find out what actions entrepreneurs who came to Vancouver in the 1980s and 1990s undertook to overcome problems of language, skills and training, investment, innovation, and employment associated with immigrant entrepreneurship. In 1994-5, we, two white European males, interviewed seventeen immigrant entrepreneurs from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and South Korea (table 4). Since access to business immigrants willing to participate proved difficult, the starting point for additional interviews was provided by the B.C. Business Immigration Branch and the membership list of an East Asian entrepreneur association. All interviews were conducted face to face in English, and, except for the group of three South Koreans, they took place in the entrepreneur's place of business. All names of those interviewed have been changed.

**Table 5**  
**Common Business Problems That Confront Immigrant Entrepreneurs from East Asia**

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1. How do immigrant entrepreneurs overcome their language difficulties?
2. How do they adapt the entrepreneurial skills they bring with them to operating businesses in Greater Vancouver?
3. How do they start a particular type of enterprise in Vancouver and obtain the capital necessary to establish and expand their business?
4. How do immigrant entrepreneurs employ new technology and develop new products.?
5. How do they recruit and manage trustworthy and affordable workers?

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Source: Questions 2 and 5 modified from Bossevain et al. (1990, p. 133)

### **Ethnic Business Strategies**

The responses by East Asian entrepreneurs to semi-structured questions about their language difficulties, skills history, investments, and employment practices will show that becoming and remaining an entrepreneur in Vancouver means employing ethnic business strategies. This analysis of interviews focused on five problem areas (table 5) with which all entrepreneurs had to contend, and it will show that ethnic entrepreneurs bring distinctive resources and strategies to these business problems.

#### ***- Language and Communication***

Applicants who wish to immigrate to Canada do not need to speak English in order to qualify for the entrepreneur program. Hong Kong, as a former British Colony, affords more opportunities to its inhabitants to learn and speak English than do South Korea and Taiwan, which have been subjected to decades of Japanese occupation until after the Second World War.

Immigrants, such as those from Hong Kong, with a knowledge of business English from their home countries have fewer difficulties. Likewise, those who were sent abroad by their families to study English and business administration have fewer problems than those family members without a knowledge of English. How do they overcome their language difficulties?

Some Chinese entrepreneurs replicate their premigration situation; that is, while an English-speaking member of the family or an outsider deals with domestic or international sales to customers, work within the family firm is divided according to language competence, which also influences the hiring of coethnics. For example, Mr. Ma, an entrepreneur immigrant from Hong Kong and the son of a garment shop owner in Vancouver, finds that “it is important to be able to communicate with the workers, and my mother is in charge of this, and she can only speak Cantonese, so most of our employees have to understand Cantonese to understand and be able to communicate with my mother, their supervisor.” Some families, on the other hand, send their sons

to the US or to Canada to learn English and to complete business courses years before they immigrate as a family. Others upgrade their English in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, join clubs such as the Lions Club, and or take business courses to improve their English and management skills. Mr. Meng from Taiwan pointed to another path: “You can always find help from people here [in Vancouver], employees who can speak fluent English, like people who come from Taiwan and Hong Kong who can speak Mandarin and English. You can always find those employees and help to expand the business and even help to set up a business here.” However, many South Korean entrepreneurs who only have some writing ability in English experience initial difficulties and find it frustrating to communicate competently with English-speaking suppliers and customers. Although some store owners advertise only in the Chinese media and serve the coethnic market, other East Asians hold the view that they should conduct more of their business in English. Chinese and Korean entrepreneurs in Vancouver informed us that up to 40 per cent of business failures and many departures of fathers to Hong Kong and South Korea are due to language difficulties.

#### ***- Entrepreneurial Skills***

Occupational inheritance, post-secondary education, and retraining in Canada figure prominently among the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills by immigrant entrepreneurs. Inheriting entrepreneurial skills from one’s father predominates among the Hong Kong entrepreneurs interviewed. Also common is learning business proficiency in multinational corporations, technical schools in Hong Kong and Taiwan, and overseas college and universities. About one-third of the entrepreneurs from Taiwan have attended university or college in Taiwan or overseas for their business training. Such training and experience, however, often does not fit with their new situation in B.C. As table 4 above shows, fourteen of the seventeen East Asian entrepreneurs interviewed switched to or started enterprises in Greater Vancouver that were completely different from the ones they conducted in their countries of origin. As a result, they could not directly apply

their particular skills and training. Several, in essence, devolved their business experience from managing the production of micro chips to the selling of potato chips. What do entrepreneur immigrants do when the entrepreneurial skills they learned in their country of origin need to be adapted to completely different businesses they start in Vancouver? Several strategies they can pursue are to acquire the necessary know-how from their immediate or extended family, to take business courses at colleges or universities in the new country, to devolve their managerial knowledge about manufacturing and form a partnership to open a retail store, or to acquire the necessary information by hiring skilled employees, learning from suppliers, or from the previous owner or manager.

About half of the entrepreneurs interviewed acquired skills through experienced family members and continue to draw upon them. The case of Mr. Yau, an international Taiwanese trader who started farming in Canada, is typical. In Taiwan, the expertise he developed involved international trade, and he started farming only when he came to Canada. His family were “famous” farmers in Taiwan, he said; “My father and my grandfather were farming professionals - I never do that. I asked my family to help me and they are here in Canada now to teach me. I ask them things every day. My father is too old to work now, but my brother helps to teach me. Otherwise, I would not know what to do.” Of two women entrepreneurs who arrived from Hong Kong, Ms. Lim and Ms. Chu, one learned how to typeset books and journals in her father’s business, the other learned publishing in her father-in-law’s firm. After marriage, Ms. Lim rented an IBM computer for typesetting; she explained, “Eventually we started to contact the publishers and sent them samples and they began to send us some more work with commendations that we were doing great work. We received seven books in our first year. Gradually the publishers began to ask us how many employees we had and how many books we could handle per year - so we decided to develop a business out of this.” With her husband as her assistant, she started a

typesetting company in Vancouver that serves the same European and US clients she had in Hong Kong.

Given the East Asian emphasis on providing a good education for sons, several business people sent their sons to Canada before their own immigration or enrolled them, upon arrival in Canada, in language and business courses to acquire the necessary qualifications for entrepreneurship. The case of Mr. Tsai is typical: he worked in his uncle's business since his mother and her sisters all invested in the uncle's company. "It was a real family business. I conducted the business deals [contracts] of imported BASF products in English. After one year, my uncle financed eight months of learning English in Vancouver in 1985 until I passed the examination, and then went to Seattle Community College for two years to study management. I liked it here, so I wanted to stay. I returned to Vancouver and began to work for a local produce importing company. Actually he is still my partner and the company is still going; we import frozen fruits and vegetables from Taiwan." Others who are not as familiar with Canadian business situations decide to downgrade their expectations about being able to apply their business experience.

A group of three Koreans realized they could not transfer their entrepreneurial know-how to the situation in Vancouver. Initially, Mr. Park thought his Korean experience would qualify him to renovate houses in Canada. As he put it, "I was experienced in building management. Now, I don't understand the regulations here in Canada, so I changed my mind." Mr. Soh, former president in a "very famous" Korean cold storage company, responsible for storage, liaising with foreign bases of the fishing fleet, and the sales division, wanted to fish, process and export from Vancouver. Since he was unaware of limits on fish stocks and "labour problems, unions and fishermen's associations" here, he felt the procedures to start a fish processing venture were too difficult. Mr. Oh with experience in plywood trading and jewelry retail planned to start a jewelry store here. "Previously," he said, "I was operating a gift shop in Singapore, selling jewelry, and I

wanted to establish a jewelry store here - but the economy [in Vancouver] is such that nobody can afford these luxury items.” All were frustrated by the lack of transferability of their Korean business experience to Canada.

Mr. Tsang, a former teacher from Hong Kong, retrained himself to manufacture plastic molds by relying on his employee and his employee’s B.C. Institute of Technology (BCIT) instructor. As he put it, I “hired a [coethnic] student graduate from BCIT in the plastics program here who had been living in Canada for more than ten years. He could speak the language, knows something about plastics and the business mind here.” When Mr. Tsang has any difficulties, he asks the student’s instructor for help. In this way, he learned manufacturing by trial and error. Mr. Tsai, the former importer of German BASF products to Taiwan, said, “When I bought Sunshine Travel, the former manager stayed in the business for one month while I learned and studied. I spoke with lots of travel agency owners and managers and learned the industry, the regulations etc. So, I learned all the laws, taxes, labour codes, etc.” Having a relevant business background, however, is insufficient to meet the conditions of the entrepreneur immigration program: everyone must establish a business to fulfill the immigration requirements.

**- *Investment***

Half of the Hong Kong immigrant entrepreneurs and the majority of the Taiwanese bought existing Canadian businesses. One bought a manufacturing shop with his own capital; another bought a paper mill and financed it with his own capital, with that of investors, and with a government grant. Others started their own production shops, mostly with family capital. The majority of the immigrant entrepreneurs interviewed financed their service sector enterprises by borrowing money from family and friends. Only one bought an existing service sector business. Two entrepreneurs set up horizontally or vertically integrated firms or both, including retail outlets within regions of Canada or of the Pacific Rim, or both. Whenever they required capital,

Canadian banks, they all found, are extremely conservative about lending money to small manufacturers.

Mr. Kim, from South Korea, bought a nearly bankrupt millwork shop to produce small wooden boxes used for packaging sea urchins and smoked salmon for the seafood souvenir and export market. He bought the plant with his own capital and now generates enough revenue to expand into the Korean market in the US. Banks, nevertheless, denied his request for an overdraft provision. The case of Mr. Leung, from Taiwan, is rather exceptional. He and others purchased a large portion of a research and development (R&D) company and a paper mill in Quebec. He describes how he became involved: "The R&D company was set up in 1989. We got involved at the end of 1991. The original founder is the CEO, and he runs the company, but we contribute to it, and we became the shareholders and now own more than 60 per cent with another 15 per cent owned by the employees." He also purchased a "big chunk" of the paper mill in Quebec with the help of a \$4.5 million grant from the federal and provincial governments. Banks will say, as Mr. Leung put it, "no assets, no loan" when such funds are needed to support research and development - "but the assets are in our heads." These were the only East Asian owners who bought existing goods producing plants.

Four other East Asians became entrepreneurs in Vancouver by starting small goods production shops. One set up a family-run garment shop, another a plastic mold company, and the two women entrepreneurs started printing businesses. Ms. Lim, actually the principal immigrant entrepreneur, applied to come to Canada from Hong Kong in 1990. Together with her husband, she established a new typesetting company in Richmond, a suburb of Vancouver. This was a business they had previously operated in Hong Kong. They invested their own money and recently had an overdraft provision cut in half to \$20,000 by a coethnic bank manager. As a result, they had to borrow money from Hong Kong to stay in operation. When Ms. Chu arrived in Canada, she spent a year and a half deciding what she wanted to do. She started a newspaper. It has yet to

make money but has afforded her many opportunities to network with others from East Asia. Ms. Chu also provides services such as offering legal advice, as well as business and investment information, to new immigrant entrepreneurs. She treats her new consulting role through the newspaper as a marketing strategy that will eventually raise the profile of the newspaper. Her contacts with entrepreneurs through her newspaper allows her to develop trading opportunities for her recently established trading company. She did not rely on banks for financing her venture.

Financing obtained from extended family and friends, rather than banks is, in fact, the norm. Sons often have an easier time than daughters, since the practice of patrilineal inheritance of the family business continues in Vancouver among East Asian entrepreneurs. For instance, Mr. Meng's father came to Canada with his children in 1986. He was the actual entrepreneur who first applied to immigrate. After establishing two separate businesses, a joint venture in a hardware company and a video camera rental service in a chain convenience store, the father helped establish an audio/video store for his son on one of the main shopping streets in Vancouver. To our surprise, he informed us that the "Taiwanese government does help us. They provide entrepreneurial funds up to five times the amount you want at low interest rates." Why? Because in "the long term," he explained, "it benefits Taiwan because we will trade with Taiwan."

Three of the seventeen entrepreneurs interviewed started a mix of horizontally or vertically integrated firms or both, consisting mostly of retail outlets but also including food processing, mattress, and clothing companies. Their corporations span both across Canada and across the Pacific Rim. For instance, Mr. Lo, the manager from Hong Kong, told us the immigrant owner's family (mother and father and brothers) run the same printing business in Hong Kong. "It is a 'huge company' in Hong Kong, and they have branches in Australia - they've expanded everywhere," he said, including to mainland China. "We are like a branch of that company." Mr. Mok, who emigrated from Hong Kong in 1989 and whose businesses are regionally spread across Canada, first settled in Toronto. After a frustrating year there, in which he "lost money and wasted

his time,” he came to Vancouver to produce a line of clothing, a mattress manufacturing enterprise, an upper-end furniture store, a property management company, and he also formed Gold Rain Capital Inc. in Toronto in the 1990s. He expects major expansions in almost all of his enterprises in the near future. The third entrepreneur, Mr. Yau, first started a car export firm in Nova Scotia and later a farm on the outskirts of Vancouver raising grain-fed chickens, free-range goats and beef cattle. He has plans to retail the meat from his slaughterhouse in his planned chain of butcher shops in Vancouver, and he also grows cabbage for export to Taiwan. He too said, “I kept borrowing money from my family members and other investors coming into the country - you know that every Taiwanese family coming here has at least two million dollars; so since these investors have a minimum of two million each [see table 2], we can borrow from them for the first few years. We also borrowed money from the banks.”

In Hong Kong and in Taiwan, the commercial and trading classes have developed a symbiotic relationship with manufacturers (Choi, 1994). On the contrary, the Canadian commercial class, particularly bankers, has a long history of stifling the expansion of small manufacturers. The motto among immigrant entrepreneurs has become: “We don’t depend on banks. They won’t help new immigrants.” Mr. Tsang attempted to get a loan on his machinery. He said, “We tried the banks, but they don’t help manufacturers. In Hong Kong, all I need is 10 per cent down to buy equipment and then when the machines are running, I can begin to pay for them ... but here, there is no way. The banks here told me that if I wanted to get a loan for machines I would have to put one hundred per cent down.” Similarly frustrating to Korean entrepreneurs is the reality that banks do not recognize Korean business experience. “Even though we might have been the president of the company or something like that in Korea,” Mr. Oh explained, “now here that experience is useless. So we have to start our business with our own investment.” Thus, many downscale their investment plans. Overall, East Asian immigrant

entrepreneurs rely on their families, on investor immigrants (who are required to invest but not set up a business), and on their network of friends and association members to raise capital.

**- Innovation**

One of the indicated preferences of the B.C. government is to invite entrepreneurs from across the Pacific who will develop and apply new technology. How do immigrant entrepreneurs employ new technology and develop new products? With the exception of one entrepreneur who bought an existing research and development company, most East Asian immigrant entrepreneurs in the interview group neither develop, invent, or significantly modify new technology, nor do they produce many new consumer goods or commodities. This was not an expected outcome.

The irony of the situation is that Vancouver's weak manufacturing base, which entrepreneurs were invited to strengthen, hinders innovation and expansion plans. Mr. Tsang from Hong Kong fabricates custom injection moldings and produces medical and consumer products, such as casings for radio pagers, and joints for prosthetic hips and knees. His frustration and that of other goods producers is represented in the following description: "There is so little industry here [in Vancouver]. ... So all the materials and supplies we need (like steel) comes from Europe, from Japan, from the US ..., and in Hong Kong the availability of equipment is great - you can often easily get what you want just down the street. But here it is totally different. ... All the supporting industry in Canada is back East. All the materials are from Toronto or from the States - Chicago - nothing is here." In a similar way, Mr. Yau, an entrepreneur from Taiwan, compared the Vancouver situation of getting spare parts for machinery with that of Taiwan, saying, "There were so many parts and the costs of parts in Taiwan are about a tenth of what they are here." East Asian entrepreneurs import machinery and supplies mostly from East Asia (Japan, Hong Kong, China) and secondarily from Europe, the US, and Canada, in that order. In other words, value-

added supporting industries (or backward linkages) are rarely created in association with the influx of East Asian entrepreneurs.

Some business immigrants would like to have labour cheapened and taxes lowered. Mr. Yim, from Taiwan, contrasts manufacturing conditions in Vancouver with those of California and China: “We tried to assemble our kitchen range hoods here - the parts, the materials, would all be subject to a 10 per cent duty tax.” Such high taxes he claims would have killed his manufacturing business in Vancouver. In addition, he believes labour in Canada is not cheap enough. According to Mr. Yim, “In L.A. [Los Angeles] there are too many Amigos; so it is easier to pay them \$5.00/hour. But here labour is too expensive and yet the workers strike. For example, if someone is making \$23.00/hour here, then that same worker in China would make so much less that you could hire 10 Chinese for every one Canadian.” Thus, he views manufacturing as impossible, since he thinks the tax on imported parts is punitive and really cheap labour is not available.

Not all technological innovations, however, occur outside the group of East Asian entrepreneurs interviewed. Mr. Leung, a former manager of an electronic equipment multinational in Taiwan, became a major investor in a university-based research and development company that invented an automatic welding machine, water depth sensors, and a process to remove oxidization agents. This company found little interest in Canada for its inventions, for which the firm holds worldwide patents and has customers in Georgia (US) and Germany. Outside Canada, though, according to Mr. Leung, their innovative technology has been noticed: “The University of California, Davis, recently selected the five most advanced technologies of the year, and they had more than 5,000 applications - but we were chosen one of those five. ... But Canada - I don't know what to say. ... There are companies right here in Delta [a suburb of Vancouver] who could use our technology....” In Greater Vancouver, it appears, with its traditionally weak manufacturing base, locally produced innovative technology is not sought out by local industry.

Used to high annual rates of economic growth, East Asians, in their until recently recession-free, newly industrialized economies, found making profits easier in their former home than in Vancouver. One grumbled about lower B.C. profits in manufacturing: “In Hong Kong it was easy to make a million dollars net profit, but here it is about 30 per cent of that, so we are losing about 70 per cent.” Disappointed, many return to Asia for higher profits, for lower taxes, and for sustaining their assets and business connections there. Entrepreneur and lifestyle immigrant Mr. Oh, speaking for his small group of Korean businessmen, summed up why they migrated to Canada and what are their difficulties in meeting immigration conditions and making money in Vancouver. “Everything is OK, just not the business immigration conditions, but once these are removed, then we will be OK so we can enjoy ourselves--play golf, go mountain climbing, whatever we want. But in Korea, it is very easy for us to make money there, but we threw that away and gave up our chances down there because of the quality of life. I don’t want to inherit [sic] [pass on] those kinds of situations to my children. We want to give a better life to our children here.”

### ***-Employment***

The B.C. government’s invitation to entrepreneur immigrants to set up enterprises was accompanied by the hope that they would provide jobs for Vancouver’s multicultural work force. The East Asian immigrant entrepreneurs who we interviewed, however, operate almost exclusively ethnic firms that are relatively small and employ, outside of family members, from 2 to 40 workers. As Jeremy Boissevain and his colleagues found, ethnic enterprises rely heavily upon family, kin, and coethnics for cheap labour (1990, p. 141). East Asians, they found, make greater use of extended family as workers than small business owners in general (1990, p. 142). “Why is family and ethnic labor so important? The answer is simple: family labor is largely unpaid, and relatives and coethnics, while not always paid excessively low wages, are prepared to work longer hours and

at times that outsiders find unacceptable” (p. 142). According to Boissevain, “Thus viability and durability of small ethnic business results, in part, from familial perseverance rather than mere profitability. The long hours, low wages, and uncomfortable working hours characteristic of many ethnic businesses are often regarded as exploitation of family members and coethnics” (p. 143).

There are exceptions, however. Two of the seventeen immigrant entrepreneurs interviewed did not hire solely coethnic employees. They operated enterprises that they co-owned with Caucasians or members of other groups in Vancouver and recruited an integrated, rather than coethnic, work force. Mr. Leung from Taiwan maintains such an integrated enterprise that employs a multicultural work force in innovative jobs. He employs technologists with Masters and PhD degrees from many ethnic backgrounds and also extends 15 per cent share-ownership to his employees. All work in close cooperation and meet weekly to share their ideas. Mr. Woo, from Taiwan, and his Caucasian partner employ a multicultural and gender-integrated labour force. They are developing an internet English program for children in Singapore and Japan and plan to expand their daycare venture to compete with the largest daycare provider in Vancouver, the YWCA (Young Women’s Christian Association). Their integrated enterprise is still the exception among business immigrants from South Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong.

Fifteen of the seventeen immigrant entrepreneurs interviewed pursue an employment strategy in which “trusted” family members and coethnics make up the vast majority of employees, in which recruitment of unskilled or semi-skilled low-wage workers takes place from within the ethnic community (through local Chinese daily newspapers or by referrals), and where workers are offered bonuses as incentives to work harder and are supervised according to familial or paternal relations. In such firms, Caucasians are hired primarily for front line communications only when the business clients are Caucasians. “We need people who can speak both Mandarin and English; so we cannot hire the ‘real Canadian people,’” one Taiwanese owner reasoned. A case in point is the electronic equipment installation firm that hired Caucasian carpenters to deal with other

tradesmen on building sites and an Asian sales staff to serve its Chinese clients. South Koreans, like entrepreneurs from Hong Kong and Taiwan, hold preconceptions about the “Canadian work ethic” and the Canadian lack of employee loyalty. One thought that in Canada “there is too much ‘job hopping.’” He added, “We won’t employ such ‘job hoppers’ in Korea, because you need to spend so much money on training and educating a worker and, then, if he leaves then you lose time and money.”

East Asian employers who employ coethnics also experiment with various employee relations: subcontracting of work to increase productivity, hiring freelance workers, offering small percentage equity shares in the firm to their employees, and giving punctuality bonuses. The intent behind some of these strategies is to avoid losses caused by training new staff who then quit, to make employees more loyal to the firm, and to avoid layoff difficulties. One immigrant entrepreneur from Taiwan was so afraid of the costs of unionization that he proposed a horizontal expansion of his firm that would divide his company into small branches with four or five employees, rather than let the staff grow too large in one business location.

Since most immigrant entrepreneurs provide primarily service sector employment and women are overrepresented in service work, an examination of power relations and how work is divided in firms owned or managed by East Asian entrepreneurs is important. Mr. Yim’s employee, Ms. Kwok from Hong Kong, recounted the experience of her family and relatives that inequality based on sex is not an important issue in Hong Kong. Women in Hong Kong, claims Ms. Kwok, are treated as equals: “Women have the same status as men now, they are on equal footing” with men in executive positions, that “education is egalitarian in Hong Kong;” and hiring practices are gender equal “as long you have a proven track record and relevant experience.” A closer examination of the power relations in businesses owned by East Asian immigrant entrepreneurs shows coethnic immigrant women are at best allowed to rule other women but rarely males. Such relations can best be described as neo-patriarchal. Clement and Myles (1994)

distinguish traditional patriarchy where senior males rule and women are not allowed into the public realm of power but may subordinate women in households, from neo-patriarchal relations where senior males still rule and women are in the public realm of power but are part of an economy in which women may rule women but rarely men (p. 132-3). In Mr. Ma's garment shop, for instance, the senior male owner from Hong Kong has recently retired and passed on the family firm to his son, the junior male in the family. His mother supervises Chinese immigrant women sewers while her daughter-in-law remains the administrative assistant in the firm, a replication of the neo-patriarchal relations typical of Hong Kong and other increasingly postindustrial cities.

It seems from our interviews that women often do not speak for themselves. Only Ms. Chu, the owner of a Chinese newspaper, spoke for herself, whereas Ms. Lim, the principal immigrant entrepreneur and owner of a typesetting firm, was represented by her husband in the interview. Other power differentials are evident for Hong Kong immigrant women in trans-Pacific household relations. One employers told us that when the husband arrives for a visit from Hong Kong or Taiwan, women are expected to quit their jobs to stay with their husbands. Or, for example, as Mr. Tsai knows from his travel agency, married bus tour guides are not allowed by their husbands to stay away for several nights. In family businesses owned by entrepreneurs from Hong Kong and Taiwan, the trustworthy sister is all too frequently an accountant, rather than an owner. In the Chinese-owned garment industry, the pressure for women sewers to do piece work and thereby produce more at less cost to the employer, rather than work for minimum wage, continues. The cutting of cloth and design of clothing is mostly done by men. In the Quebec paper mill owned by Mr. Leung, workers on the floor are 100 per cent men while women do secretarial work in the office, in part, however, because the working environment on the floor is so unhealthy. Nevertheless, relations between East Asian immigrant men and women are far from equal, not only in power relations within the firm and family business, but also in the way work is divided and paid for within immigrant enterprises.

## Conclusion

As we have seen, East Asian immigrant entrepreneurs employ ethnic strategies when resolving problems with their business ventures. In other words, they rely on patterns of interaction with people who share a common national background and migration experience (Waldinger et al., 1990, p.33). They turn to coethnics for help when having problems with English, business experience, capital, technology, and employment. While dealing with the public, English-speaking family members and trusted coethnics, rarely others, communicate with customers, sales people, and suppliers, while inside the family firm, non-English-speaking family members prefer to hire coethnics workers they can supervise. To attain the missing business skills, East Asians often consult locally educated coethnics employees, more experienced East Asian business partners, and family members. To reduce their financial risk, most bought, rather than started, enterprises that serve the ethnic market instead of the public at large. Apart from one innovative firm, businesses owned by those interviewed developed no new technology. Except for the two firms with an integrated multicultural work force, East Asian business immigrants employed “trusted” family members and mostly coethnics. Recruiting employees through recommendations and Chinese newspapers was the norm. However, they tended to hire Caucasians when they are required in businesses that serve a Caucasian clientele.

Their business strategies, nevertheless, are not solely shaped through interaction with their ethnic community but also by the local opportunity structure (Waldinger, 1990, p. 48). The B.C. government expected them to provide opportunities through new high-technology firms, new manufacturing, and a new quality of employment. Yet their performance has fallen short of this provincial expectation. The province’s preference for investment in manufacturing does not coincide with the immigrants’ investment in services. This lack of coincidence is not only the result of ethnic strategies but also of their reactions to economic conditions.

Contending with refusals by Canadian banks to help finance their new manufacturing ventures and preferring the lower start-up costs in service-providing industries, most changed from a line of business they pursued in their home country to one that was completely new: from producing medicine to vegetable import, from teaching to making plastic molds, from mining to video equipment sales, from fish processing to ethnic food retail, from trading to farming and slaughtering, from making jewelry to jeans, and from engineering to daycare (see table 4). Unrelated business background and the lack of knowledge about the conditions they would encounter in Vancouver has weakened, so they claim, their performance in the manufacturing sector.

Economic conditions, such as Vancouver's weak manufacturing base which entrepreneurs were invited to strengthen, hindered their innovation and expansion plans. Western Canada offers little support for production technology; it also does not have many industries that are keen to apply new technology that is developed locally. Thus, the import of machinery and parts from Central Canada, East Asia, Europe and the U.S. continues. Such conditions discouraged all but five entrepreneur to manufacture on a small scale. They think also that labour in Vancouver is not cheap enough, that infrastructure for manufacturing is missing, and that the tax system is too punitive. Fearing lack of profitability and unionization, and holding preconceptions about Canadian workers and wage rates, all but two East-Asian enterprises employed a coethnic work force. Within employment relations, neo-patriarchal power relations between men and women continue.

Provincial immigration officials and development officers who invite entrepreneurs to strengthen innovative goods production perceive Vancouver's manufacturing base as too weak. East Asians from newly industrialized countries view Canada as one of the fully industrialized nations, and they experience Vancouver's weak industrial infrastructure as a surprising obstacle that hinders their innovation and expansion plans. The irony of this situation is that Vancouver's

weak manufacturing base, which entrepreneurs were invited to strengthen, also hinders the immigrants' manufacturing plans.

Arriving from newly industrialized economies with fast employment growth and profits for business owners, immigrant entrepreneurs are dissatisfied with profit margins in Vancouver compared to those available from investments in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, or South Korea. Furthermore, since these newly industrialized countries have a weak welfare system and few social programs, they find the tax system in B.C. is too punitive.

Are the East Asians more or less successful than other groups who were invited into Canada to enhance manufacturing? The answer to this question calls for a comparison between East Asian, European, and other immigrant entrepreneurs. The idea, however, of relying on entrepreneurs from abroad to strengthen the industrial sector of B.C. has a long tradition. Historically, industrial development by invitation, as identified by Tom Naylor, was to augment Canada's weak tradition in goods production at the time of building the national railway in the 1880s. For more than one hundred years, until the mid-1980s, however, Canada has relied on Europe and the US for many of its industrialists. East Asian entrepreneur immigration, via the business immigration program, is merely a renewed attempt by the state to develop industry by invitation. What has changed in this latest attempt is the context. Canada is in the process of increasing its dependency (or better neo-dependency) on newly industrialized countries in East Asia for its technology, investment, trade, and entrepreneurs.

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<sup>1</sup> Information obtained from the Entrepreneur Monitoring Information System (EMIS), Department of Citizenship and Immigration, Ottawa, in form of a table categorizing immigrant entrepreneurs who came to B.C. between 1986-1992 by having established business categorized in standard industrial sectors. These unpublished statistics were received in August 1994. The 1993 figures are estimates.

<sup>2</sup> During a mailout in December 1994 to 240 of the 421 immigrant manufacturers by EMIS, over one quarter of the immigrant manufacturers could no longer be contacted.

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