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Imagining Canada:
The Cultural Logics of Migration Amongst PRC Immigrants*

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Abstract: This paper examines the cultural logics of migration amongst recent skilled immigrants from the People's Republic of China (PRC) living in Greater Vancouver, British Columbia. A central concern is the kind of information sources relied upon before the immigrants arrive: how important are social networks, cultural discourses and immigration consultants in shaping their knowledge of life in Canada? What are the images that immigrants have of Canada prior to migration? In terms of methodology, I conducted focus groups and in-depth household interviews with 78 PRC immigrants. I also performed textual analysis of the Chinese media, the Internet and other sources. My research indicates that there is a cultural logic to migration, which reproduces, and is reproduced by, discursive practices located in both the home community and the community of migrants overseas. Key to this cultural logic is the significance of the imagination, where migration is tied to a particular representation of reality such that potential migrants view it as a route for success, regardless of the actual reality. Information reception is hence revealed as a value-laden process. The regulatory effects of immigration policies and rhetoric too are ultimately dependent on migrants' perceptions.

Introduction

> The most fascinating *terrae incognitae* of all are those that lie within the minds and hearts of men. (John K. Wright 1946)

"You have to understand the geography of China." With those words, Shuwen, a new immigrant in Canada, promptly drew a map of China, separating the territory into three areas: coastal, northeast and the interior, and annotating the locations of Shanghai, Beijing, Tianjin and Guangdong. The aim of this pedagogical exercise was to show me the regional differences in migration motivations, and to highlight the prime position of those cities, in terms of their exposure to the "outside world." Two questions arise. Why did Shuwen focus on China when I was asking her about migration *to Canada*? And why draw a map?

In this paper, I examine the intersections between culture and migration, focusing particularly on the role of the imagination. Scholars who follow an economistic view subscribe to the dominating imperative of capital and tend to consider sociocultural relations irrelevant in influencing migration decisions. It is this view that the present paper challenges. I argue that migration is socially and culturally embedded, and this manifests itself in migrants' perceptions of the destination and the cultural discourses surrounding migration. I also suggest that the imagination plays a key role in shaping migration. Transnational in the resources it draws upon, the sites it involves, and the flows it constitutes, the imagination seemingly knows no bounds. Yet, I emphasize that it is firmly grounded in a specific context, echoing Katharyne Mitchell's (1995) call to bring geography back into transnational discourse.

The significance of context in turn suggests that the relationship between migration and imagination should be analysed using local knowledge of particular places. This attention to locality has also influenced Shuwen's emphasis on place, on the site from which the migrant imagines Canada. Who or what, then, performs the "placing" of the imagination? A central concern is the kind of information potential migrants have about life in Canada, and more importantly, their reception of it. My objective is to rethink the human agency involved in information reception, diverging from a structuralist interpretation of the "network society" (Castells 1996). I seek to reveal the content of that information, and more crucially, unravel what it means to potential migrants. A key argument is that the information immigrants receive is distorted, and that even when it is "pure," they do not accept the stark truth (Mahler 1995).

To substantiate these inquiries, I draw on focus groups and in-depth household interviews with 78 skilled immigrants who migrated to Vancouver, British Columbia, from the People's Republic of China (PRC).[1] It is empirically important to examine this group because China has been the leading supplier of immigrants to Canada since 1998, with the numbers more than tripling from 12, 486 in 1994 to 40 296 in 2001 (CIC 1994, 1998, 2001). The rising trend essentially followed Canada's decision to start full immigration processing in China in 1995, thereby providing an opportunity for the Chinese to immigrate under the "Independent" (or "skilled") category. Due to the selection criteria, most Independent immigrants tend to be university-educated with professional backgrounds.

The paper begins by discussing the role of cultural logics in influencing migration, suggesting that it is in understanding migrants' personal geographies – how they imagine, negotiate and experience places; in short, their mental maps – that we can unravel the workings of these cultural logics. It then contextualizes these theoretical concerns through an empirical focus on the context of migration in China. In this exploration, it first looks at how potential migrants imagine Canada, particularly through examining the motivations underlying their choice of destination. Next, it analyses the information sources migrants rely upon before arrival, demonstrating information reception as a culturally negotiated process. The paper then reflects upon why potential migrants carry forth with their departure plans before finally concluding by considering the premium placed on experience.

The Cultural Logics of Migration

In discussing what "culture" means, Phil Crang (1997) perceived two main types of understandings. First, culture is cast as a "generic" facet of human life, bound up with human abilities to make the world meaningful and significant i.e. associated with questions of meaning and value. Second, culture is stressed as a "differential" quality, marking out and helping to constitute distinctive social groups, each with their own meaning and value systems. Drawing from the first definition, I am primarily concerned with the way culture has pervaded, what de Certeau (1988) terms, "the practice of everyday life" and is deeply intertwined with our beliefs, values and lifestyles. I also think of culture as an *ongoing* practice, following Shurman-Smith and Hannam's (1994: 79) observation that "Not only is culture a process and not a thing but…it is a process which is often treated as if it were a thing." The second definition, in my view, needs to be treated cautiously, in light of the heightened sensitivity in representing "other" cultures in the humanities and social sciences (see Marcus and

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[1] Most of the focus groups and interviews were conducted in Mandarin, and subsequently translated.

Fischer 1986; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Said 1978, 1989, 1993). I would, however, not venture so far as to reject it for I believe that its differentiating element still has analytical value, not least in our understanding of cultural globalization.

Indeed, rather than bringing about global cultural uniformity, the apparently widespread dissemination of globalization – Coke and McDonald's Restaurants being popular examples – to villages and world cities alike has greatly increased cultural diversity because these products acquire new interpretations and meanings in local reception (Ong 1999; Featherstone 1990). Returning to the issue of migration, the transformations accompanying the drawing together of people and places, commodities and capital, raise important questions of the meanings attached to "here" and "elsewhere." Not only is "here" constantly being reconfigured by the intervention of travel and communications, "elsewhere" is also a site of varying meanings. Amidst this flux of change, what are the cognitive geographies associated with migration? How do the interactions between cultural representations, products and regions shape notions about border crossings, and lives in other places? Influenced by Ong's (1999: 5) position on globalization, my concern is with the cultural logics that "inform and structure border crossings," and which make migration seem "thinkable, practicable, and desirable."

Scholars studying the Chinese in Europe have recently developed the idea of a "cultural logic" to migration. Referring to the reasoning behind migration decisions within a particular cultural context, this logic reproduces, and is reproduced by, discursive practices located partly in the home community and partly in the community of migrants abroad. It is tied to a representation of reality that focuses prospective migrants in the home community on an overseas career (Pieke 1998). In the Fujian home communities, folk theories of success translate into a veritable culture of emigration that stigmatises local alternatives as second rate or even a sign of failure (Pieke 2000). Similarly, in the Fuzhou area in the early 1990s, Ko-Lin Chin (1999: 9) found that people were "simply engulfed with desire to emigrate." Despite the high costs and hardship associated with being smuggled to the United States, many young Chinese were eager to take a chance because they were convinced that this is the only way that they and their families can dramatically change their economic and social status within China. For many people in the sending communities, a family has "hope" only if it can produce a *meiguoke* (Guest from the Beautiful Country i.e. America). Even those who do not see it this way may eventually go due to pressure from their families and relatives (Chin 1999).

In the Wenzhou *qiaoxiang* (emigration sources) area, a "culture of migration" has emerged that is distinctly different from the culture of surrounding areas (Li 1998:194). With little industry and even less agriculture, the local economy relies on two resources: soft stones and tough overseas

Chinese (Hood 1997). As *qiaoxiang* people, they are proud of their close connections with Europe. It is perhaps unsurprising then that "the Chinese transliterations for European cities roll off tongues as easily as the names of neighbouring counties, even if *Haiya* (The Hague) or *Duling* (Turin) remain abstractions" (ibid: 85). When visiting Lishan – a small and remote village in Wenzhou, Li (1998) learnt that the village population numbers about 1000 now while 700-800 adult villagers make a living abroad, most of whom have settled in the Netherlands, France and Italy. She was also repeatedly told, "all capable teenagers are preparing to find their future in Europe" (ibid: 184).

It appears then that the Wenzhou people believe "getting rich in Europe" is their common destiny, ignoring how few of their peers in Europe can truly be considered successful, and how hard life really is for many migrants (Li 1998). Instead, their eyes are turned towards the conspicuous consumption – and heightened status – of return migrants as well as the remittances received by the families of migrants. As Li (ibid: 194) notes, "The belief that every migrant is or can be a millionaire has been created, and migrants in Europe are widely admired and taken as a reference group." Therefore, despite the many opportunities that the booming Wenzhou economy offers and the tighter control of (illegal) migration exercised by the European and Chinese governments, emigration is unlikely to stop soon. The common sentiment among the people in Wenzhou's *qiaoxiang* is "We are richer than in the past, but we are much poorer than our fellows in Europe" (ibid: 185). Of note here is the concept of relative deprivation, whereby migrants compare themselves with other villagers and consider themselves deprived even if their absolute standard of living has risen. Increasingly, with improvements in technology and communications, the discursive practices are not limited to contact with previous migrants, but may also involve the media and the Internet.

Imagined Possibilities, Personal Geographies

No longer mere fantasy (opium for the masses whose real work is elsewhere), no longer simple escape (from a world defined principally by more concrete purposes and structures), no longer elite pastime (thus not relevant to the lives of ordinary people) and no longer mere contemplation (irrelevant for new forms of desire and subjectivity), the imagination has become an organized field of social practices, a form of work (both in the sense of labour and of culturally organized practice) and a form of negotiation between sites of agency ("individuals") and globally defined fields of possibility (Appadurai 1990a: 5).

I suggest that the keystone in the cultural logic of migration lies in the realm of the imagination. Here, I am influenced by Appadurai's (1990a, 1996) conviction of the new role for the imagination in social life, a role based on the trinity of the image, the imagined and the imaginary.

This is not to deny that the imagination – expressed in dreams, songs, fantasies, myths and stories – has always been part of the repertoire of every society, in some culturally organised way. Rather, there is a new force to the imagination in social life today: more people in greater parts of the world consider a wider set of possible lives than before. As Appadurai (1996: 5) asserts, the imagination has "entered the logic of ordinary life… Ordinary people have begun to deploy their imaginations in the practice of their everyday lives."

The link between migration and imagination is established through the recognition of *possibilities*, of alternative constructions of future lives in other places. These possibilities may be nurtured through contacts with émigrés, or in some cases, the development of a "community of sentiment" through the media (Appadurai 1990b). As Benedict Anderson (1991) has shown, print capitalism can bring about groups that have never before been in face-to-face contact to think of themselves as belonging to the same nation, thereby creating an "imagined community." The power of the transnational media today is that they can work beyond the nation-state, for instance, in forging a "third space" of transnational Chinese identity through interaction with Hong Kong and Taiwanese mass culture (Bhabha 1994; Yang 1997). This is significant in that migrants may start to identify with Chinese overseas and imagine living on those shores. At the same time, although I subscribe to the notion that the media can, to an extent, influence migration via the work of the imagination, I think its influence should not be exaggerated since media reception analysis has drawn attention to the broad range of "creative but contradictory practices" in people's dealings with media texts and technologies (Ang 1990: 257), hence pointing to the necessity of situated negotiations in concrete cultural contexts.

By highlighting the role of the imagination in the cultural logics of migration, I have argued that it is the capacity to conceive of movement and/or other possible places to live that first lays the foundation for an actual decision to move. Now, I take a next step to argue that these cultural logics are ultimately filtered through migrants' personal geographies, which are in part influenced by their perception and images of places, i.e. their mental maps (Gould and White 1974), as well as a more general worldview. In a seminal paper entitled *Geography, Experience, and Imagination: Towards a Geographical Epistemology*, David Lowenthal (1961: 248) wrote, "Separate personal worlds of experience, learning and imagination necessarily underlie any universe of discourse." When applied to migration, the notion of personal worlds underscores the unique meaning that migration has for each individual, and that is because each individual has a personal history and inhabits a different milieu. While there is a wider "consensual world" that we all share, the private milieu is more complex, and "includes much more varied landscapes and concepts than the shared world, imaginary

places and powers as well as aspects of reality with which each individual alone is familiar"
(Lowenthal 1961: 249). Integral to these personal geographies is the dialectical relationship between
real and imagined worlds:

> The lineaments of the world we live in are both seen and shaped in accordance, or by
> contrast, with images we hold of other worlds – better worlds, past worlds, future
> worlds. We constantly compare the reality with the fancy. Indeed without the one,
> we could neither visualize nor conceptualize the other (Lowenthal 1975: 3).

Such a concern with the personal realm has its roots in the late 1960s when humanism was
"rediscovered as a central concern for a geography of man" (Ley and Samuels 1978: 1). My
objective in revisiting the humanistic approach is to draw inspiration from its commitment to
"interpret the meaning of human attachments and aspirations" (Tuan 1989: vii), and extend it to a
study of migration. By doing so, I am negotiating the difficult but unavoidable terrain of human
values, in which all our decisions are grounded. The decision to migrate, for instance, may be
implicated in a value-laden choice between adventure/ambition and stability/contentment. How much
weight is placed on each depends greatly on a person's temperament and biography, thereby echoing
Germani's (1965) notion of the psycho-social level where it is individuals' attitudes and expectations
that are considered.

Geography plays both a material and conceptual role in migration. Migration not only
requires movement from one physical place to another, it is also intimately linked with personal
worldviews. Consciously or otherwise, it involves an exercise in figuring out where places of origin
and destination fit within an individual's mental map of the world. Just as utopias, whether fictional
or experienced, are "ways of thinking about the world" (Porter and Lukermann 1975: 204), a
migrant's choice of destination also expresses something about his or her perception of the place in
contrast to other places. Appraisals are, of course, deeply affected by society and culture: each social
system organizes the world according to its own structure and needs; each culture screens perceptions
of the social environment to harmonise with its own style and techniques (Lowenthal 1961).
Essentially then, it is in understanding the personal geographies of individuals in their specific social
and cultural contexts that we can truly comprehend their migration decisions. I now turn to this
context in China.

Cultural Construction of a Mobile Chinese Identity

In recent years, bookshops in Chinese cities have been selling a new genre of autobiographical and semi-fictional writings by PRC citizens who have lived in the United States or Japan (Yang 1997). These themes have subsequently been taken up by theatre, film and television productions. The book titles include *Near the Sea Breeze*, *Manhattan's China Lady*, *America: The Stories that Papa and Mama do Not Know*, *Telling You about the Real America*, *The Bright Moon of Another Land*, *The Moon Back Home is Brighter* and *A Beijing Woman in Tokyo*, with the former two being especially popular among some respondents.[2] While a number of respondents had read the books long before they had considered migration, a few stressed to me their efforts in looking for such books so that they could learn about experiences abroad. Cheryl wanted to be mentally prepared for "I did not know what I might face or the level to which I might drop." Although she could not find any books on immigration experiences in Canada, she read five that depicted the lives of overseas students in America and Australia so that she could "look at their circumstances, and imagine in general what the lives of PRC Chinese are like outside." From reading books of this genre, Junnie sometimes had "the feeling that I know how Westerners will do certain things and the kind of reactions they will have." She brought *Near the Sea Breeze* – an autobiography by a famous female PRC television host who studied in New York – with her to Canada for inspiration since "the book is about success and optimism." After reading *Manhattan's China Lady,* Iris "didn't think about how the character walked her path but how I would walk it myself."

These responses indicate two issues. First, the substitution of America or other countries' experiences for Canada reveals the emphasis placed on "abroad" as a generic category. Apart from migration to Canada being a more recent phenomenon, this is related to a general absence of Canadian literature, films or news in China. Second, there is an imagining of a mobile Chinese identity travelling through foreign lands – a process in which the readers identify with Mainland Chinese characters experiencing life in an alien culture (Yang 1997). A caveat is that for the majority of respondents who had read the books, their motivation to migrate was not directly influenced by the characters' experiences. Textual analysis alone might thus have overestimated the impact of such books. Instead, I suggest that the significance of these books lies in the establishment of a cultural milieu in which discourses on "going abroad" became part of a wider social norm. I now turn to another popular realm that has been central to the normalization of a mobile Chinese identity in the public imaginary – the mass media.

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[2] In personal communication, Diana Lary notes the sentimental style attached to such writing. In Chinese folklore and songs, the moon often reminds an overseas person of home since it is the same moon that shines in the homeland.

Portraying a Beijing Native in New York

The television drama series *A Beijing Native in New York* was the first to be entirely shot on location overseas and the first of a genre that attempted to reflect the fate of PRC migrants in the West (Barmé 1999). Based on a widely popular book of the same title, the series was very well received in China when it initially aired in 1993 and was subsequently repeated twice. In fact, nearly all my respondents watched it. Ruhao suggested that one reason for its popularity was that in the past, the films were "divided into two extremes; one was propaganda for how corrupted and depraved the West was, the other adored the West blindly, everything about the West was good." In contrast, *Beijing* was "somewhat more objective, it didn't depict the West as being particularly good [or bad] i.e. very normal."

The plot essentially revolved around Wang Qiming, a cello player who migrated with his wife, Guo Yan, a doctor, to New York City. I briefly identify three themes that are central to the image of America as "abroad" in the series. First, the striking urbanity of New York where at the beginning of each episode, the same trailer depicts the city's nocturnal landscape through images of its towering skyscrapers, Brooklyn Bridge, endless traffic, neon lights and a general air of urban sophistication that appealed to almost all my respondents. Demonstrating the influence of the series, Shulin revealed, "The Canada we imagined was like the New York in *Beijing*, more prosperous, with a quicker pace and 'thicker' city ambience." A second theme was the formidable challenge of transforming hard work into success, where Wang and Guo had to start at the bottom of American society; he as a dishwasher in a Chinese restaurant, and she a seamstress in a garment factory. The third theme alluded to Chinese ambivalence towards America, epitomised by a couplet that appears at the start of each episode, "If you love him/ Bring him to New York/ For it is heaven./ If you hate him,/ Bring him to New York/ For it is hell."

A reliance on textual criticism alone cannot cover the full range of the social effects of media products because "audiences selectively misread or read past the intentions of the producers" (Yang 1997). I thus move on to the important consideration of media reception (See Ang 1990; Yang 1994; 1997; Lee 1999).

At the Receiving End: A Story of Success

When asked for their thoughts about *Beijing*, most respondents felt that the moral of the story was that migrants had to work very hard at first but eventually their efforts would pay off, hence representing a success story. Evelyn expressed a common sentiment:

> The ending of the series is that they made a fortune and did quite well. It produces a yearning in people after all [laughs] – that if you are willing to be hardworking and perseverant, you will be rewarded eventually. (Evelyn)

I was initially surprised by these responses because, although the protagonist Wang made a fortune, he became bankrupt overnight from a failed business venture and was struggling to rebuild his garment business in the last episode.[3] Jiansheng explained to me, "When he lost it, it was man-made, not forced by the environment." The rationale then seemed to be that others might not make the same mistakes as Wang did. Moreover, as Evelyn observed with a laugh,

> Although the film is mainly trying to let people understand how tough it is abroad but the ending may instead make people want to go abroad even more – just struggle for a period.

While views were divided over whether the drama series had any influence on their own migration, I argue that it provided a cultural context in which discourses on migration were introduced into the privacy of the home through the act of watching television. Discussions on the development of the plot and the issues involved could be exchanged amongst family members, friends and acquaintances. This approach reconceptualises migration not just as a single event but instead as a process rooted within, and informed by, the biography of an individual (Robinson and Seagrott 2002). Thus, even though *Beijing* might have been watched a few years ago, it nonetheless could have played a secondary role in shaping perceptions of life abroad, perhaps at a taken for granted level, what Giddens describes as "practical consciousness" (cited in ibid 2002: 7). Moreover, since nearly all my respondents watched *Beijing*, it provided a common platform for examining their perceptions at a particular point in time before migration.

My objective in this section is not to suggest that *Beijing per se* influences migration – many migrants adopt Ruhao's view that it provided a window to look at life overseas but it did not feel relevant to them then since migration was not yet on their minds. Rather, I am highlighting the cultural embeddedness of perceptions about abroad and suggesting that the way in which information is interpreted is contingent upon certain sets of cultural values and attitudes.

The Place of Canada in Chinese Imaginaries

Barsky (1995: 139) argues, "The choice of country is often motivated by perceptions and elucidated by complex discursive strategies, neither of which are easy to pin down or quantify." This can be appreciated since perceptions themselves are formed at the intersections of imagination and reality, reliant on negotiated images and knowledge. In my inquiry here, I particularly focus on the role of

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[3] An instance of my situatedeness as a researcher.

images in migrants' decision-making process while bearing in mind that Canada is not necessarily a distinct place to many of my respondents before migration. Instead it is often viewed as part of an "abstract abroad" with characteristics that may be projected from images of other places.

The Imagining of "North America": "Canada and America are One Family"

My research reveals that there was a remarkably close identification of Canada with America in the eyes of many migrants prior to migration. This was evident since responses to my question "Why migrate to Canada?" would frequently be along the lines of: "Because it's easier…compared to…" and the most common reference would be America. Sometimes, my respondents would add, "It's close to America." Their responses indicate an analytical distinction between why migrants leave and why they choose a certain destination (Mahler 1995). Coming to Canada, in most cases, was a result of the opportunity provided by the Independent immigrant category. I was told on a number of occasions that it was impossible for them to migrate to America because its immigration policy was tailored towards family reunification. When one focus group participant said that she had wanted to go to America but it was easier to come to Canada, another participant whispered to me with a smile, "The American dream."

Two issues lie at the heart of this replacement. First and foremost, the powerful attraction that America holds for PRC migrants. Central to this is America's position as the world's superpower. Thus common refrains among respondents include "Everyone knows that America is the world's number one country in economic development" and "America is the strongest country in the world." According to them, this perception is also shared more generally in China. Wanping, who had studied in America before migrating to Canada, explained the desirability of America as a destination:

> There are many aspects. One is that America's productivity is efficient, its technology advanced and everyone is learning its management style since it gives the feeling of being very competitive. Another is its western frontier spirit. What is frightening about America is that everyone can be a president. Everyone has an American dream, right?

Despite its favoured status, migration to America is often not an available option. Instead, Canada is presented as having a relatively more open immigration policy for skilled migration. This brings me to the second issue, which is the alignment of Canada with America in the migrants' imagined geography. In their words: "Canada and America are one family" and "Canada is part of North America, basically the same, not much difference." These views are very similar to

anthropologist Li Minghuan's observation that "before leaving for Europe, most migrants look to 'Europe' rather than to any specific European country as their destination" (Li 1998: 188). One reason could be the distance between China and Canada such that a homogeneous image is constructed. Canada is seen to be "just like America" but significantly, the reverse possibility is not mentioned. Another reason is the hegemony of America in the global media. Laifu pointed out:

> In China's media, the reporting is mainly on the US so the PRC have less understanding of Canada. When you watch films, they are US films. There are few on Canada. Indeed, Canada does not have a very dominant character in the world. It simply follows what US says; it is like a little brother.

Emerging from these responses is the sense that there is a hierarchy of destination countries, with America at the top, and Canada following due to its perceived proximity to America. The mobility associated with a Canadian citizenship status was recognised by Xianzong, who said with a meaningful laugh, "Just Canada means possible. If you want to move again…" A number of other respondents too had the same notion before migration. Once they came to Canada though, some changed their minds significantly. Xiaojiang told me with a self-conscious laugh, "Now… it seems… we are not thinking of this matter. After we came here, we did not think of this matter anymore." One pragmatic reason for this change in thinking is the recent downturn in America's economy, especially its information technology sector. Another more important reason is their difficult settlement experiences in Canada, which have made them reluctant to resettle elsewhere.

Although the concept of "North America" is common among my respondents, an abstract distinction exists for some. This may transform into a desire for America as an ultimate destination, or as the next section suggests, the differentiation may favour Canada.

Differentiation between Canada and America

While some respondents had personally considered moving on to America eventually prior to their immigration to Canada, far more respondents told me that this applied to *others* and not themselves. Frequently, the preference for Canada is described in terms of the migrant's personality (see Barsky 1995).

> Many people have this thinking but it is not very strong for me. […] Perhaps it depends on individual personality. I am not the kind who definitely wants to go and strike it out in US. I feel that Canada is quite suitable for me even though I know that Canada is very near to US and that we can apply for visas when we are here. (Angela)

Contrasting Canada with America, Sienna recalled, "I didn't have a specific image of Canada. I knew more about America. To me, Americans are more progressive, or even aggressive. Canadians are mild and friendly. That's the general image in my mind before we came." Some respondents also detected a benign politics underlying Canada's peaceful image. Selena felt, "It's different even though it is close to America. In terms of politics, if I were to choose, I wouldn't really want to go to America as it is more extreme. It has a stronger sense of superiority towards other countries whereas Canada does not." Ruhao discerned that Canada "doesn't have the kind of bullying attitude that US has. This way, it is also difficult to be embroiled into conflict." These concerns not only bring to light the migrants' wish for a safe country to settle peacefully but also suggest that the effect of Chinese politics and propaganda regarding America may have to be taken into account. Cheryl reminded me, "When I was young, whenever America was mentioned, it was called "imperialist," and Cheryl's father, Weimin, recalled America's tumultuous historical relationship with China:

> There was the Korean War where China and America had great clashes. And in the Vietnam War, they also had troubles. Moreover, there have been some clashes these few years. Their societal systems are different and there are many other important issues. Thus the relationship is sometimes very tense. Canada does not have this problem so to us common folks there is less weight associated with Canada. In my letters and phone calls, there is no great sensitivity. If it is with America, it is difficult when the relationship is tense. Before the Opening Up and Reform, it was not possible to have contact with America. Even if you have relatives and friends, you could not contact them.

Other distinctions between Canada and America included Canada's greater social stability. Jianming commented half in jest that Canada's welfare system was "a little like our communist society," therefore it would be easier for him to adapt. More importantly, the society was more stable compared to America, which "due to its economic motivations, I guess there are more problems. And it is in an unsafe situation." [4] Juntao felt there was less racism and better human rights in Canada. Overall, the pre-migration image of Canada was often cast in terms of it being a " very moderate" and "balanced" country.

Canada/Australia/New Zealand: How Perceptions Shape Choice

Rather than adopting the traditional linear approach in immigration studies, emigration from China needs to be viewed as a phenomenon that may involve multiple sites. In my research, respondents generally placed the two major immigrant-receiving countries of Australia and New Zealand in the

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[4] The perception of America as an "unsafe" place may be partly attributed to the post-September 11 psyche.

same tier of destination countries as Canada. One respondent declared that he had conscientiously compared the three countries' immigration requirements.

> I found that the three biggest immigration countries are Canada, Australia and New Zealand. In 1999, the annual immigration to Canada was 200 000 to 220 000, Australia about 50 – 80 000, New Zealand about 30 000 – 50 000. We are skilled immigrants. The requirements for skilled immigration are least stringent for Canada. Theoretically so but the process is the longest. I knew that it was 15 to 20 months. When I did it, it was 25 months. The immigration requirements were stricter for Australia and New Zealand. We might not have fulfilled the conditions. (Zhehui)

By contrast, immigration was synonymous with Canada as a destination for Cheryl because when she "knew about the matter of immigration, it was to Canada so it was not a case of me being able to choose amongst many places." This appeared to apply to a considerable number of respondents, which may be partly due to the promotion efforts of the immigration companies. In some cases, respondents had thought of immigration earlier. For instance, Jingwen had wanted to migrate to New Zealand a few years ago but her children were too young then and she later found out from a friend that she could migrate to Canada.

Where the possibilities of immigration were assumed to be similar, proximity to America emerged as a key motivation for choosing Canada. Huiling reasoned, "Being in Canada means being closer to America. It is not so confined, unlike Australia, on another continent." Another draw was Canada's multicultural image. The contrast was often drawn between Canada and Australia in this respect. Concerns were expressed about racial discrimination in Australia, to the extent that it caused Iris to change her destination .

> We were preparing to apply to Australia for immigration under the "skilled" category. There happened to be news of discrimination against the Chinese in Australia then which made us decide to immigrate to Canada where there was no discrimination against the Chinese.

Those who migrated to Canada from elsewhere particularly noted the importance of living in a country that is more receptive towards immigrants. Biying revealed:

> I feel that the most important thing about being overseas is that the country should be balanced. If I am living in a more conservative or traditional country, I will feel very uncomfortable but here, there are many new immigrants around. I feel relatively good. There may have been too many restraints if I had really stayed on in Japan and UK – two more conservative countries with fewer immigrants.

There was also frequent mention of Canada being one of the developed Group of Seven (G7) countries. As such, Jiansheng felt that Canada's "strength is greater and its industry relatively more developed than Australia and New Zealand." A few respondents strongly associated Australia and

New Zealand with being "agricultural countries." Shixiong commented that New Zealand was "too small. There is less industry there. The employment may be lower. Canada is bigger and has rich resources so we thought there were more opportunities."

Overall, since my respondents eventually chose Canada, it is unsurprising that they professed to know more about Canada than either Australia or New Zealand. At the same time, most admitted that they had little concrete knowledge of Canada itself.

Images of Canada and Canadians

When asked about specific images of Canada, respondents drew upon a strikingly similar set of images that essentially revolved around its status as a member of the G7 industrial nations, natural beauty, excellent living environment, and good welfare and educational systems. Many respondents linked this common rhetoric to the immigration companies' publicity. Xianzong illustrated this vividly:

> I think there is a slogan, like a key button the agencies provide: "Canada is the best place. Voted by the United Nations for five or seven years as the best place for living."… It becomes a button. So although I have a vague idea of Canada as a northern country, it snows, it snows, whatever, but it is voted by the United Nations as the best country. That is the authority, gives you the confidence. I have no problem – that is the best place.

As part of their publicity efforts, immigration companies commonly distributed information brochures on Canada. Some also showed their clients videos of Canada. Shufen, who had watched one such video, felt that it essentially depicted "people and natural scenery." The companies also recruited earlier immigrants to return to China to talk about their experiences at immigration seminars. An extract from the website of Can-Achieve Consultants Ltd exemplifies the popular promotional rhetoric (Can-Achieve 2002):

> Canada enjoys full membership in the Group of Seven industrial nations and has one of the world's largest and most advanced economies. A Canadian passport, a privilege available to all citizens, allows one to travel freely without an entry visa to over one hundred countries including the United States and many European countries. Canada has been ranked first in the world for 6 straight years in the United Nations annual report based on a consolidated living standard index that measures a country's quality of education, income level and health care system.

A closer analysis of this text would reveal that it has been tailored to the PRC audience. The reference to a Canadian passport being "a privilege available to all citizens," in particular, contrasts sharply with Chinese citizens' restricted mobility. Another characteristic is the allusion to Canada being "one of the world's best," appealing to migrants' hopes for a better living environment. Since

most respondents had not been to Canada before migration, these introductions by immigration companies formed one of the main sources of their impressions of Canada before migration. Apart from highlighting the country's benefits to immigrants, the companies also stress that immigrants are very welcome in Canada because they fulfil a number of important functions. For example, they "help to combat the existing problem of under-population, a problem augmented by two factors: an aging population combined with low birth rates" (CanVisa 2002). Some respondents raised this point when asked about their choice of Canada. Contributing to the society seemed important for them since they felt that immigration was a two-way exchange. CanVisa proclaimed this in no uncertain terms on its website, "Immigration, as you see, is good both for you and for Canada, so if you are in any doubt as to where to settle down, think Canada!"

These contemporary images aside, a number of interviewees suggested that Canada might have a special place in the minds of the Chinese, where memory has already differentiated geography. Here, they are referring to Dr. Norman Bethune (1890–1939), also known as Bai Qiu-en, a Canadian doctor who cured many patients in China during the Second World War, and lost his life in the process. Upon Bethune's death, the leader of the Communist Party Mao Zedong immortalized him in an essay, entitled *In Memory of Norman Bethune*. In the early days of the Cultural Revolution, the essay was part of the narrow selection of reading materials that were considered to be ideologically correct: the courses of primary school students, for instance, centred on them (Landsberger 2002). The recent immigrants belong to the generation who read, and memorized, the essay, and speak of Dr. Bethune respectfully. Cheryl told me:

> From the time I was studying, there was this article on Dr. Bethune written by Mao Zedong. He wrote that we should learn from Comrade Bai. Every Mainland Chinese has to memorise, to read it, because he espouses internationalism… Those in our generation must have read about him, and can all roughly quote a few sentences from it. That is, he was a Canadian, he came to China despite the great distance, helped with its liberation, sacrificed himself, etc. Basically he was very good. So from young, I had the idea that Bai Qiu-en is a Canadian. Maybe many Canadians do not even know about Bai Qiu-en, but every Chinese knows about him…Maybe Chinese, because of this person Bai Qiu-en, will think of Canada as being very friendly.

This exemplifies an intriguing case of cultural politics – a war hero whom some Canadians may not even know, is now representing them through an ideological text written by the former chairman of the Communist Party in China. Cheryl further disclosed that her grandparents were initially very worried that she was going abroad. However, when told that she was going to "Canada, Bethune's place," they were immediately more relieved. It was perhaps no coincidence then that Xianzong said, "I think for most of our generation the most famous Canadian is Norman Bethune." Another well-known Canadian in China is Xu Dashan (his Chinese name) who is respected for his

excellent Mandarin. He performs the cross-talk[5] in Beijing and appears on the annual Chinese New Year Celebration program. Some respondents had also watched him in a series of educational programs that were geared towards learning English in everyday situations. After the language teaching, there would sometimes be a segment introducing the cultural and natural environment of Canada. Judging from the affectionate tones with which respondents referred to Dashan, he was also a favoured Canadian.

It is important to consider the role of images about Canada and Canadians in context. Migrants are not passive recipients of the images and knowledges that they receive (Robinson and Seagrott 2002). Moreover, they may be aware that reality could be different. Elaine, who felt that Dashan's shows were mainly for touristy purposes and "knew that the real society wouldn't be like that," voiced precisely this point.

Choosing Vancouver

As to why Vancouver was chosen as a destination, three factors were frequently cited, in order of importance: social networks, climate and relative proximity to China. One interviewee, Mingliang, who helped ten friends to settle in Canada, perhaps embodies the importance of social networks. Each time, he would find an apartment for them before they arrived and fetch them from the airport. These apartments would always be in Richmond, where he lived, not just because it was a place that he was more familiar with but also it would be more convenient for his friends if they needed his help.

Vancouver's climate was mentioned as a factor in an overwhelming number of cases. Orina had considered going to Alberta as it was more suitable for her profession as an agronomist. However, a good friend in Vancouver told her, "Alberta is very cold, it is in a freezing state half the year. Going to a new place, you don't know whether you can find a job so go to Vancouver where the climate is better." John had initially wanted to choose Toronto where he thought the employment opportunity might be better. However, his wife had strongly opposed as she was "afraid of the cold" so they eventually came to Vancouver. For some respondents, the prioritisation of climate over job opportunity also partly rested on the assumption of equal job opportunities across different cities. Ruhao and his wife, Eileen, explained:

> Ruhao said, 'If I can find a job, I would be able to find a job anywhere. If I can't find a job, no matter how good a city I go to, I wouldn't be able to find one'. So we came based on this kind of courage. [smiles] (Eileen)

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[5] Cross-talk is a stage performance that involves two persons exchanging witticisms.

It primarily depends upon a person's diligence. (Ruhao)

On the whole, Ruhao's attitude regarding job opportunities being generally similar and his emphasis on personal, rather than external, attributes resonated with many respondents. Cheryl knew that "there were more employment opportunities in Toronto but I felt that I wanted to give it a try first in Vancouver. If it is really too difficult then I will think of ways to go elsewhere but I wanted to first give it a try here." Other than hearing from Canadian colleagues in China that Vancouver is the "most beautiful city in Canada and the climate is good," an important reason for Cheryl was Vancouver's relative proximity to China. Toronto would "take another five hours from Vancouver, so I naturally felt that this was closer. Anytime I felt like returning, I could go back in 10 hours without having to change flights." This last concern indicated the transnational nature of their migration, and at least for some, meant that there was no intention presently for a permanent rupture from China.

When asked whether the large Chinese population in Vancouver had been a factor in their choice of destination, there was a consensus that this had not mattered at all. In fact, prior to migration, many had preferred being in a place where there would be few Chinese so that they could interact more with the "locals." However, once they were here, they found that language and other cultural barriers meant that their social circles were still largely Chinese.

Knowing Life in Canada…A Paradox in Practice?

During the course of my research, I became aware that there was a hinge upon which many of my respondents' narratives of disappointment turned – the gap between their expectations of life in Canada and the reality they confronted. Pieke and Mallee (1999) have rightly perceived that by leaving their native soil to settle in a foreign environment, migrants experience a profound biographical event, and process, that may permanently change their perceptions of themselves and their place in society. The recent PRC immigrants – of whom a great number have encountered drastic transformations in lifestyles – exemplify this point. According to both immigrants and immigrant service agencies alike, it has become commonplace to hear former engineers, doctors and teachers working as dishwashers, factory workers and janitors. The more fortunate ones have obtained jobs that have at least some relevance to their previous professions, such as former engineers working as technicians, or human resource managers working as salespersons. In most cases though, the credentials that made them eligible to immigrate to Canada in the first place, have ironically not been recognised. Their lives at this stage have frequently been described as a struggle, with the sharp drop in finances sometimes resulting in marital difficulties or in a few cases, the phenomenon of the astronaut family, where one spouse returns to China to work. There are also instances where their

young children are sent back to China for a period of time to overcome difficulties in childcare arrangements. Considering the immigrants' search for a better life in Canada, will these stories be heard…and believed?

I suggest that the "large gap between reality and expectations" Gerald discerned among new immigrants, and their accompanying "sense of loss," can be traced in part to the kind of information potential migrants have about life in Canada, and more importantly, their reception of it.[6] It is to these information sources that I now turn.

The Medium is the Message?

Images of "successful overseas Chinese" have been a prominent element in the Chinese media. Gerald shared his insights on this:

> In China, there are quite a lot of reports on the successful cases – of the older *huaqiao*… with their diligence, they started from scratch to build their business or career. Actually, from my own perspective, the positive reports are indeed very good. However, in China, the reports give people a certain impression. The reasoning is that as long as you become a *huaqiao*, as long as you go abroad, you will definitely succeed because all the reports are about the successful cases. So everyone wants to be a *huaqiao*. Everyone wants to migrate. There is such a logical connection [because] there aren't [many reports] about the process of struggle, about the difficulties that the *huaqiao* have to undergo before success.

Aside from such skewed representations, the conflation of success can operate in another way. Famous Chinese media personalities often achieve the status of "superstars" in their home country. When they are portrayed as being "successful" overseas, worlds are drawn closer as people imagine their fellow citizens enjoying popularity in terrains that gradually become less foreign. This imagination, however, may sometimes only dwell at the level of fantasy. Zhiyang discovered:

> The famous people who have gone back from abroad give the false impression that they are big stars in Hollywood. For instance, when stars such as Andy Lau have a concert in Vancouver, you may imagine that those sitting in the audience are all whites. However, that is not actually the case. It might be a bunch of Hong Kong people sitting there and clapping but the media would say that he has created a sensation in Vancouver. It would definitely be reported this way in China. So this is misleading. After coming here, I had the feeling that I was tearing down a scam. When you read those reports in China again, you will think they are very laughable. For example, "someone has caused a stir in Sydney." In fact, at the most, it has caused a stir in Chinatown!

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[6] Refer to Koser (1995) and Koser (1997) for work on the reception of information by refugees. See Koser and Pinkerton (2002) for the dissemination of information about countries of asylum.

There is a caveat to these recurrent tropes – respondents frequently emphasized that the "successful overseas Chinese" was a picture harboured by the "common folks," and being more educated, they were not easily influenced by the media. This scepticism not only highlights the difference they perceived between themselves and "others" but also reveals their ambivalence towards the media's reliability as a source of information. Ruhao affirmed this, "In the past, some of the reporting in Mainland was not very truthful. Thus even when somewhat more realistic situations are reported now, people do not trust it too much." Also, the difficulties portrayed may be downplayed through another kind of differentiation illustrated by Evelyn:

> I watched a TV interview of overseas students in the US. They said they had not found a job after more than a year – it was very difficult – and they advised people who were immigrating to reconsider various aspects. At that time, I thought if they were looking for a job while studying, it should be easier since language wasn't a problem for them. Perhaps their demands were higher and they were looking for better jobs. If we didn't have demands that were too high, [we could] simply find a job for survival first, and then gradually find [a professional job]…So we still thought of coming out. Who would have known finding a simple job is not that easy either?

Key to this distinction is the impersonal nature of the media as a source of information. Even when potential migrants come across "balanced" reports of immigrants' lives abroad, they may not necessarily identify with the subject. Hence, difficulties associated with living abroad may be dismissed or underestimated.

Partial Introductions: "Only the Good Aspects"

In contrast to the respondents' mixed feelings towards the media, there was a strong reaction against immigration companies, much of which was negative. A focus group participant, Peirong, recalled an incident when an immigration consultant jokingly introduced himself as a *renfan* (human smuggler) to friends at a class reunion party. The other participants spontaneously added that immigration consultants were all "*pian ren*!" (cheats). To comprehend their feelings, it is pertinent to note that over two thirds of the respondents had engaged the services of immigration companies. The general sentiment was that immigration consultants had (obviously?) only highlighted Canada's positive aspects, emphasizing its excellent living conditions and natural beauty, with little or no mention of the local economic conditions. In Junqiang's words, the immigration consultants "simply said the good things and avoided saying the bad things." Jiansheng elaborated:

> When you ask them whether it is easy to find jobs, they will say that it depends on people. Some people are able to find very good jobs after two months while others can't find it after half a year. You can't say that they are wrong, but you also can't say that they are right, as they have not truthfully introduced it to you. They will

definitely not say that it is very tough here, that there is a period of adaptation, that it is difficult for most people to find jobs. They won't say such things. Because if they do, who will still dare to immigrate?

In the immigration companies' defence, it is arguable that they are perhaps not too different from a whole spectrum of migration agents, past and present, in sustaining the myth of immigration as a positive route amongst willing people. Nevertheless, there is an uneasy tension between immigration being simultaneously a business and a process that has long-term consequences. Gerald observed:

> Their aim is to attract more people to depend on them to handle immigration cases…it is very natural that they will publicize only the advantages. Such publicity causes people to believe that this place is good, and they should come here. Actually, this kind of publicity is not very…it can cause great mental distress. Over in Toronto, there has already been a Mainland Chinese who committed suicide.

A more pragmatic reason also underlies the respondents' resentment towards immigration companies – the sense that the fees charged did not correlate with the actual level of services provided. On 3 October 2002, the Canadian Immigration Minister Denis Coderre appointed a panel to recommend ways to regulate non-lawyer immigration consultants – some of whom have been accused of unethical conduct (Clark 2002a). Such regulation could mean that the field – even abroad – will be restricted to Canadian citizens and permanent residents to enable Canadian authorities to take legal action against them if they violate regulations (Clark 2002b). The chair of the Canadian Bar Association's immigration section, Ben Trister, explained that the lack of regulation meant a few unscrupulous consultants could cause security trouble for the government and exploit immigrants since "it's the Wild West out there, and it's only giving Canada a bad name." He said, "Anybody who wants to be an immigration consultant can just print up a business card and instantly they become a consultant" (ibid).

This recent move is an added blow to immigration consultants, who are already facing a possible decline in business from Independent immigrants who are increasingly applying on their own. The latter trend is partly due to the proliferation of information on immigration. In the last few years, immigration guidebooks have also appeared on the market. Titles include *Walking Towards Canada: A Guide for Studying Abroad, Working Abroad, Immigration, Business, Family Visits, and Travel*, *A Guide for Canadian Immigration and Study* and *A User's Book – Living and Studying in Canada*. These guidebooks commonly provide general descriptions of Canada and advice on immigration application and settlement.

Apart from preparing potential migrants for their immigration interviews, the guidebooks also seek to introduce Canada as a place suitable for immigration. *A Guide*, for example, has a section devoted to the improving political and economic roles of the Chinese in Canada. When mentioning the economic situations of immigrants in Canada, a different tone is usually adopted, with carefully chosen words that suggest one needs to read between the lines. Even though warnings about the difficulties of job-finding are present, there are always attenuating factors meant to reassure potential migrants. In *A Guide,* a new immigrant wrote:

> My classmate sent a letter warning me that unless I have a VERY SOLID foundation in computer software or website programming, don't even think about being able to find a job immediately. I may not find a job even after half or one year. Well, if I can't find a job, then I will study. That is not too bad. (Yu et al. 2000: 366)

The option of studying thus deflects attention off the issue of job-finding. In other cases, initial hardship is reconciled by the promise of eventual success:

> One must know that now in Canada, many successful professionals, entrepreneurs, senior management personnel in finance and industry, and scholars, have all worked as waiters, labourers, cleaners and personnel in other low-paid jobs. (Xinni 1999: 136)

Likewise, in the preface to *Fulfilling a Dream in Canada: Canada's "Labour Models" Speak the Truth*, a collection of 28 biographical essays on PRC immigrants, Peter Mitchell of East Asian Studies at York University, wrote:

> The history of Chinese in Canada is replete with stories of hardships – the hardships of facing racist prejudice, of unemployment or underemployment, of barriers of language and adjustments to unfamiliar business and social practices. But it is *a history marked by many success stories*, the footprints of resolute individuals determined to overcome such hardships by dedication to hard work, thrift, ingenuity and education. (Mitchell 2001: 2, italics mine)

While sympathetic towards this genre of writing, I question how such selective portrayal, focusing on the lives of individuals who encounter hardships initially but nevertheless tend to "succeed" eventually, may indirectly influence readers. Overall, respondents' general sentiment towards guidebooks was that they were relatively useful for factual information. With regards to a deeper understanding about life in Canada after immigration, however, Jiansheng felt "I couldn't tell because from reading them, there are only the good things." Although the majority of guidebooks appear to correspond to Jiansheng's descriptions, there are some that do pay more attention to immigrants' working experiences in Canada. For instance, *A Guide* vividly described the hardships associated with *dagong,* which refers to work that is low-skilled and poorly paid, including

packaging, delivery and other forms of "labour work." At the same time though, an appeal is usually made to the "hardworking Chinese" who could accomplish everything through their diligence (Yu et al. 2000: 61).

Lest the optimism be attributed only to Chinese sources, Evelyn's experience with a Canadian immigration officer reveals otherwise. The immigration officer told her during an interview in 1997:

> You are still young and you have skills. English shouldn't be too much of a problem. When you are in that environment, you have many opportunities to practise. You should have rather good development when you are there.

By the time Zhiyang was interviewed in 1999, the immigration officer who interviewed him adopted a more cautious tone and warned him that he would "definitely not be able to find a job within half a year." From examining these different sources, the validity of the information that immigrants receive transpires as an important issue.

"Baoxibubaoyou" and the Issue of Face

My research reveals that earlier migrants are considered the most trusted sources. However, when talking over the phone with their family in China, many interviewees claimed a practice of *baoxibubaoyou* (reporting only the happy news and not the bad news). Besides being a form of self-censorship to prevent their families from worrying, there is also another aspect to *baoxibubaoyou* – the pressure to return to one's hometown only after making good (*yijinhuanxiang*). To Winnie, the latter meant, "you only dare to go back to your hometown when you are grand or rich. You will have more face among your kin and relatives." A greater pressure – whether self- or socially inflicted – therefore weighs on some PRC immigrants as they contemplate which stories to convey home. Phrases such as *baoxibubaoyou* and *yijinhuanxiang* suggest there is a wider set of cultural discourses and practices beyond migration that influence the mindset of migrants. The analysis of migration, thus, cannot be divorced from long-cherished desires and hopes that may continue after migration. In *American Dreaming* (1995), Sarah Mahler wrote:

> Most immigrants insisted that they suppress much of the grim reality of their experiences in the United States (and of their journeys) in order to keep their families from worrying about them. I suggest that another factor comes into play. This is migrants' desire to counter the attacks on their social esteem that they encounter in the United States by recovering or enhancing their social status at home.

Although I did not find a similar "countering desire" among my respondents, what remains pertinent is the geography of status. Even as most PRC Independent immigrants discover that their relative social status had plummeted in Canada, some may seek to preserve their status back home, harbouring the sentiment expressed by Minglu, "if they are not coming out, I would leave them with a good impression." One possible consequence would be the perpetuation of the notion of "going abroad as success," whereby family members in China may further share this good news with their relatives or friends.

For an audience other than their immediate family, the issue of *mianzi* (face) was cited. A fear of "losing face" meant that they would not want other people to hear about the problems they were facing. Thus Menglin found, "When friends go back, they won't tell you the details. They will only say things like the environment is good, the welfare is good." To understand why it is so difficult for some PRC immigrants to discuss their personal experiences, let us consider Shinan's experience. Formerly a senior computer systems analyst in China, he is currently working part-time as a dishwasher whilst preparing to apply for graduate studies. He revealed that he had initially been too embarrassed to take up the dishwashing job when an ex-classmate offered it to him. Part of his emotional struggle stemmed from the sharper societal distinction between blue and white-collar jobs in China compared to Canada. When asked by relatives and friends in China for advice about immigration to Canada, Shinan tended to describe in more general terms, "The economic condition is rather poor now, rather difficult. If you want to come, you must make sufficient preparation." His wife, Lanxin, confided:

> He has a younger cousin who is applying for immigration. I told her, "You must have mental preparation. The stress here is very great. I think it is not as good as you imagine it to be." I didn't say it too explicitly. Those in China would certainly not know our situation is so bad. They would definitely think that we are living well here because skilled immigrants like us were certainly living well in China. […] When we talk to people in China about our present situation, we don't tell the truth. We told his cousin to consider it carefully. He told her that when one more person comes, there is one more unemployed person. But as to him washing dishes here, I didn't tell her that.

A common thread is the tendency for some respondents to suppress their own experiences even as they warn potential migrants about the economic conditions in Canada and other immigrants' hardships. In such cases, the subtleties of language[7] provide a route out of a focus on the personal.

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[7] One example would be the use of the phrase "*burongyi*" (not easy) rather than "*hennan*" (very difficult) when describing the lives of new immigrants to their friends in China.

I will usually say, "You ask me whether it's good to come to Canada, whether it is right and whether I regret. *I cannot tell you because this kind of thing depends on the individual. Everyone feels differently.* (Haiwen, italics mine)

The generalised nature of the information supplied by family or friends in the destination country is not unique to the PRC Independent immigrants in Canada. In Robinson and Seagrott's (2002) study on asylum seekers in the UK, they made a similar observation. My objective is not simply to demonstrate the filtered nature of such information transmission, but also to explicate, from the immigrants' perspectives, *why* this is the case, and *how* they engage in this process through rhetorical strategies. Eventually though, several respondents believe:

The information will return to China with a certain discount, but once the time is long enough, and there are more cases, people will slowly understand that it is quite tough here in the beginning […] The earlier the information returns, the better, and the fuller the information, the better; because potential immigrants can consider this for reference. They can then make a more complete judgment. (Gerald)

In the next section, I show another, quite different, reaction to "truthful" information.

Inadmissible Truths

While one group of respondents would censor the information transmitted home, another group was emphatic in stressing that even though such a practice might be common, they would "tell the truth as it is" and "not merely say the good things." What is referred to as "the truth" in these responses is almost invariably the difficulty in finding professional jobs in Canada. There is no one "truth," however, since subjectivities create different kinds of truths. Respondents were anxious that potential migrants should be able to "judge for themselves," and saw their own roles as purveyors of "objective" information. In terms of sharing personal stories, Cecilia said, "I won't just tell them my example. I will also tell them the stories of the friends around me, because one doesn't represent everyone." As Orina expressed, the intention is "to let them consider this issue in a more coolheaded fashion, not rush out and then feel disappointed." Therefore they advised potential immigrants to be "mentally prepared" and "think about it carefully."

Thus far, I have suggested that a substantial number of respondents will make an effort to inform potential migrants about the possible realities, both positive and negative, that they might face once they have immigrated to Canada. The question is: how do potential migrants react to this information? Respondents were almost unanimous in their view:

If there were originally 100 people who wanted to come over and they learn that jobs are difficult to find in Canada presently, I estimate there are 80 who will still come. (Laifu)

> Basically 80–90% [will come]. Most of the people who have this thinking are almost there already. We can't really prevent them much. They have already made up their minds. They just want to hear the positive news. Maybe they can't even absorb the negative ones! *Just like when we first came, we thought how bad can it be, right?* (Cecilia; italics mine)

> Even if friends say bad things, you won't pay attention to them. You only listen to the good things. (Menglin)

Their statements reveal that even if an accurate picture were painted of life in Canada, the rose-tinted lens through which it is viewed would colour it in the minds of those who wish to migrate. One interviewee explained, "when you are seeing the outside from the inside, you have many dreams, many illusions…a more romantic kind of thinking." Thus contrary to rational expectations of information reception, there is a twist to the story, which suggests that even when migrants convey the negative aspects of immigration to potential migrants, this will not necessarily affect the latter's decision to immigrate. I suggest this demonstrates the phenomenon of the "inadmissible truth." I was alerted to the issue by respondents who, like Cecilia, had themselves been advised by earlier migrants but nonetheless decided to migrate. Now, I turn to the respondents' accounts to understand why this phenomenon occurs.

> My friend [in Vancouver] thought of broadcasting a news report on Central TV in China, telling people not to come, what's so good about Canada?! My husband said, "They won't believe him. They will only think, "Then he is stupid, he has no ability. If we go, we won't be like that." Everyone thinks like that, because back in China, people like us are all considered *jingying* (crème de la crème). If it's like that for him, maybe it's because he's stupid so he can't earn money. If I go, it won't be like that! (Menglin)

As Menglin's comment indicates, the disbelief partly emerges from a process of self-exclusion, whereby potential migrants' confidence in their own abilities precludes them from seeing themselves being vulnerable to the same kind of problems that "others" might encounter. There was a general consensus that Independent immigrants tended to be the ones who were "doing quite well" in China. Often "self-made," in that they had risen through the educational system to professional jobs on their own merits, this may have given rise to Evelyn's view that "Everyone thinks 'Maybe my ability is stronger than other people, maybe my opportunities are better than the others. I won't have to suffer as much compared to others.'" Another form of self-exclusion was by thinking of the stories they had heard as particular cases. Yet when they were here, Cuilin found that "actually the majority is like that." Participants at a focus group further pointed out an oversimplification of problems prior to migration:

> I didn't imagine finding jobs to be so difficult. I thought after one year, I should be able to find one.   However, ha, I had simplified this problem. (Aining)

> In China, people think that after coming out, with an English language environment, they would be able to cross the language barrier after one year. Little did they know, ha, actually it's not possible to cross the barrier that quickly. (Menglin)

Elaine remembered how she and her husband had "made some mental preparation to endure the hardship even if we have to do labour work. My husband said that it is all right; it is only temporary. […] After coming here, we were really very disappointed, because it is very difficult even to find labour work." Many respondents also admitted holding the mentality that hard work would overcome any difficulties they might face. Another rather common attitude was: "if others can survive, I can survive too." Shulin depicted this:

> My friend had sent me a letter telling me to think about it carefully, that if I'm in China and managing all right, then don't come. But reading it was like not reading at all – I didn't take it to heart. I thought, "Since you have managed to survive, it means that it's ok. At the most, it means to struggle for a few years but after that, it'll be ok." Even though I saw this negative stuff, I didn't consider it.

From the accounts above, it is evident that when receiving information through the social domain of friends, interpretation occurs within potential migrants' private worlds. How they view the information depends, to a great extent, on how they relate this information to themselves. At the same time, the identity of the information providers also plays a role. Several respondents told me how they had met with a sharp rebuttal when advising their friends not to immigrate to Canada. Junqiang recounted, "If I were to tell my friends in China that it is hard to find jobs here, they wouldn't believe. They would say, 'Why aren't you returning if it is not good here? You are only saying it's not good because you have gone.'" His wife, Shuwen, added, "Their thinking may be, 'If it is not good, how is it that we know you have bought a house and changed to a new car? You yourself are intending to stay on but you don't want us to come.'"

To illuminate these findings, I consider some points made by the social theorist Fei Xiaotong. Contrary to most modern interpretations, he believes that Chinese society is not group-oriented (Hamilton and Zheng 1992). Instead, he sees Chinese society as being centred on the individual, and that it is built from networks created by relational ties linking the self with discrete categories of other individuals. This focus on the individual sheds some light on why potential migrants might suspect their informants of harbouring ulterior motives for not wanting them to migrate to Canada. It also elucidates the rationale behind some migrants' belief that "I" can succeed even if "you" cannot.

Returning to the earlier discussion on the issue of face, such a theoretical perspective clarifies why some migrants do not present an accurate picture of their predicaments in Canada to friends in China. Fei further observes that the key factor in the network structure of Chinese society is that one's obligations to family and kinship networks override the obligations to more distant network ties. This does not contradict the stance that Chinese society is individual-oriented since the preferential attachment to the family is still negotiated through the lens of the individual, such as in the practice of *baoxibubaoyou*. The different stories that were told to family and acquaintances could then be attributed to their different network obligations.

In this section, I made the basic argument that selection occurs at both ends of the information flow between earlier migrants and potential migrants. The social embeddedness of information is evident through the decisions to tell or not to tell, to listen or not to listen. The next section focuses on another, ultimately social, medium – the Internet.

Anonymous Interventions: Opening Up a New Forum?

A minor revolution has occurred in the transnational flow of information across the Pacific Ocean. In recent years, the increasing popularity of the Internet in China,[8] coupled with the burgeoning number of websites on immigration, has resulted in the Internet being regarded as a highly important source of information for potential migrants. In fact, almost all the respondents who arrived in 2001 had utilised the Internet for their immigration. Apart from accessing official websites such as that of Citizenship and Immigration Canada and Human Resources Development Canada, respondents relied on websites maintained by two other major categories of webmasters – immigration companies and earlier immigrants. My focus here is on websites maintained by earlier immigrants in Canada. Sophisticated in their design, these websites contain an array of detailed information that range from pragmatic guides on application procedures; to message boards which allow the exchange of queries and comments; to personal accounts in the form of journal entries, some of which have gathered a steady following. Table 1 shows some of the more popular websites among my respondents.

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[8] Official estimates indicate there were 22.5 million Chinese with online access as of early 2001 and 200 million users are forecast by 2005 (Harwit and Clark, 2001).

Table 1. Popular websites on immigration issues.

No.	Title	Website address
1.	*Dabenxiang*	http://immi.virtualave.net/links.html
2.	Chinasmile	http://www.chinasmile.net
3.	VanSky.com	http://vansky.com
4.	Online Community for Chinese Canadians	http://www.rolia.net/index.php
5.	Tigtag.com – We put the world at your fingertips!	http://www.tigtag.com/community/whatsnew.asp
6.	Sina living space	http://eladies.sina.com.cn/aboard
7.	Everything for you	http://www.is4u.net/index.php3
8.	NWIC.com	http://www.cnwic.com/newdiscuss/index.asp

A distinctive feature of such websites is their interactive nature, where users can enter discussion forums. Common forum topics include "immigration application," "finding jobs" and "life in Canada." Potential immigrants frequently pose questions to earlier immigrants, who would in turn share their experiences. One feature that particularly distinguishes the Internet from other sources of information on immigration is the frank outpouring of immigrants' frustrations and disappointments. Orina observed, "what the media and the newspapers publicize tends to be more positive, what the immigration companies publicize is all positive. The Internet is more detailed and there are all kinds of information." Shixiong suggested, "you may even get more information from the Internet than interviews. Moreover, these are from the heart." Essay titles such as *Think thrice before immigrating to Canada, Thoughts on Vancouver: immigration was a mistake, I hate Canada through and through* are apt illustrations of the stronger, and by no means isolated, sentiments circulating in cyberspace. Warnings appear quite regularly, such as that below on *Dabenxiang*:

> To compatriots who are thinking of immigrating: if you are already past your prime
> years, if you have your own piece of sky in China, if you have a house and income
> that is not bad, if you have the ability and opportunity to make contributions towards
> the country's scientific technology, then you should think carefully before making
> the decision to migrate. Once you step out, it will not be easy to turn back.

In essays revolving around the theme "My immigration journey," immigrants document their actual experiences, as well as their thoughts and feelings of the process. I will now look briefly at a series of essays written by Wang Youxin to provide a sense of the detailed nature of some of these explorations while at the same time recognising the potential for multiple interpretations by subjects.

Highly recommended by respondents, the series is entitled *A letter from a new immigrant to friends in the home country*.[9] An overarching theme in Wang's letters is the difficulty of finding jobs. In one letter, he outlined the experiences of 10 married couples, each with a similar tale: of former Associate Professors and engineers in China now working as factory workers and babysitters. Piling the stories one after the other, he concluded:

> These situations are what Mainland Chinese – who love their face – would not be willing to tell truthfully in their letters home. […] Dear family and friends, please eradicate your illusions about abroad. Begin with what you have by your side, and be down-to-earth about doing things for your country, your civilisation and yourself.

I suggest the desired poignant effect might nonetheless be undermined by his own experience of finding a "proper job" as a technician in his professional field after being in Canada for 66 days. Despite emphasizing that his situation is "extremely rare" – "it's like being on an express train, obtaining what people get only after four or five years of hardship" – there is a possibility readers might think that they could be an exception like him, especially now that they have his letters to read as a guide. This is, of course, only a surmised guess. The more important issue here is the different interpretations that readers have of these letters. On one hand, the rationale of the "inadmissible truth" could apply here. Wang himself lamented, "friends in China didn't have the expected responses," giving the example of a reader who told him that he neither understood nor believed the content of the letters when he was in China.[10] Among Wang's letters, readers in China found the one on *dagong* (labour work) the most difficult to understand.   What puzzled them was: "if PhDs and Masters all have to *dagong*, and even *dagong* jobs are so difficult to find, why don't they return to China?"[11] Their conclusion was: "Since they don't return, life abroad is still better than in China."[12] On the other hand, Wang's letters might also successfully convey the impression he intended. Shulin recounted how PRC immigrants who arrived in the last two years told her that they had "some mental preparation about Canada because they looked at Wang Youxin's letters on the Internet, and thus know what the situation is like."

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[9] Wang's letters can be found on Dabenxiang <http://immi.virtualave.net/links.html> and Chinasmile <http://www.chinasmile.net>.

[10] Upon arrival in Canada, he felt that Wang had not written sufficiently about the difficulties that would be encountered.

[11] In recounting stories of other PRC immigrants' situations in Canada, there is a tendency for some respondents to especially emphasize that PhDs were also working in labour jobs. One reason may be to highlight the consequent pathos.   Diana Lary also suggests that there could be a desire to conflate their own academic qualifications by alluding to PhDs as part of the same group of independent immigrants (Lary, personal communication).

[12] Significantly, Wang's response was cast in romantic terms, comparing the initial hardships immigrants have to face to "the mermaid drinking the potion, tail becoming legs, walking into the human world. For her love, she has to face so many tests, undergo so much pain!"

My objectives in highlighting these extracts are twofold. First, I wish to provide a sketch of the vast resources available on the Internet for potential immigrants. The possibilities of the Internet as a medium for the exchange of information, interaction and the formation of identities have only recently been recognised (Nyiri 2000; Crang and May 1999; Turkle 1996). By virtue of their education and professional status, potential Independent immigrants are precisely the ones who are likely to have greater access to, and proficiency in, using the Internet in China. On these websites, "forums" are both *places* in which, and *media* through which, ideas and views on immigration can be exchanged. These forums should be distinguished from the other sources discussed earlier since obtaining information from friends and family consists of interaction at the personal scale, hence possibly involving the complicated intercepting issues of "*baoxibubaoyou*" and "face," which is different in nature from the anonymity associated with Internet usage; moreover, print materials such as guidebooks do not allow for the feedback functions allowed by the websites. In light of these considerations, I think the growth of websites on immigration is a significant development in the history of recent PRC immigration to Canada because potential immigrants can be better informed of the process and likely prospects upon immigration to Canada.

This leads to my second – and what appears to be contradictory – objective: to demonstrate that the Internet should not be over-valorised as a source of "objective" information since it is still highly socially mediated, not least at the reception end. As Shixiong noted, "there are all kinds of voices, you have to analyse for yourself to see which are the right views." Selective reading is one possible tendency. Junnie, who regarded the Internet as a more "genuine" source of information than guidebooks, commented, "Letters with a positive attitude are more widely spread because people hope to receive upbeat information. The Internet also has views that are very pessimistic. When I was thinking about it, I didn't think too much about the pessimistic ones since I wanted to carry on with this [immigration] matter." Furthermore, even when potential migrants come across negative stories, Orina believes "most people will still come because people usually want to keep walking forward and are unwilling to turn back."

Hence, while the advancement of information technology can collapse space and time in transmitting the stories of immigrants in foreign lands to potential immigrants in China, certain cultural logics still persist. In the next section, I reflect upon why potential migrants carry on with their plans for immigration even when they are aware that it will not be an easy path.

Taking the Plunge: Dilemmas and Decisions

Junnie and her husband Guanghui applied for immigration to Canada in mid 1999. Between their application approval in early 2001 and their landing in the latter part of the year, they were making preparations for a new life in Canada. The news relayed to them over the Internet was, however, very negative. Junnie confided, "The pressure was very great; we were very uncomfortable." They faced a dilemma that confronted a significant proportion of the very recent PRC Independent immigrants: whether to continue with their decision to immigrate or to remain in China. Quite frequently, the very recent immigrants told me they had waited until their landing papers almost reached the deadlines before they came to Canada. Adeline characterised this reluctance, "the closer it was to the deadline the more unwilling I was to come." Cheryl described her conflicting feelings:

> On one hand, I felt that even if I did not go out, I was doing very well. I have so many opportunities staying in China. I can earn so much money. I can buy a car and a house etc. Those who come out have to start all over again. They have to rent a house there, work very hard, and start all over again. I felt that I did not envy them. On the other hand, I felt it is quite good for those who are overseas. They have, after all, obtained a *shenfen* (landed immigrant status) from overseas and so on. Thus, PRC people are in a very ambivalent situation.

Their personal dilemmas about giving up their jobs and a familiar way of life were sometimes compounded by pressures from family and friends to remain in China. Ruhao's family was "unanimously" against his immigration, and many of his friends tried to persuade him to abandon the idea. Minglu's best friend even commented disapprovingly, "What are you going there for? What can you do?" At this stage, the same motivations for migration may persist but with the amount of effort,[13] time, money and emotional commitment invested in the process of application, immigration, for many, is a matter that *has* to be completed. Junnie divulged:

> At first, we thought that we would do it first. It's only a case of sending the application, we can continue doing other things. It won't affect me. However, when you have actually started doing this, it is very hard to stop. Because it means a person's dreams and her hopes for development in the future have been invested. How can you change it? It is very difficult to take a step back. (Junnie)

A common feeling was that since the application had been successful, they should "go out and take a look." This was, after all, an "opportunity" which they felt could not be given up, even if they were unsure about its consequences. Moreover, the sentiment was – as Peirong had explained to

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[13] Acquiring notary documents for the immigration application tends to be a lengthy affair. Passports, too, are difficult to obtain although in recent years, this has been relatively easier. A popular strategy that appears to be "common knowledge" among my respondents is to join regional package tours, such as those offering the Singapore-Malaysia-Thailand itinerary. Learning English to pass the immigration interview is another major undertaking for the principal applicants.

her concerned friends – "if it is not good, I will come back." Otherwise, it could be "a new path." Several respondents adopted a more philosophical approach towards the prospect of immigration. Aware that there would be hardship involved, Edward believed:

> Young people have the spirit to take hardship. I do not think people are living to enjoy life, right, but to experience life. […] No matter whether one succeeds or fails, when a young person has an opportunity to experience such a kind of life, there is a different meaning to his life. In the past, he might have merely wondered what overseas is like.

These responses indicate that the very recent skilled PRC immigrants – especially the ones who arrived from 2000 onwards – are likely to have pondered over their decisions after being informed about the possible difficulties ahead. Nonetheless, as C.S. Lewis (1952: 40) commented, "You cannot see things unless you know roughly what they are." Gerald echoed this view. "You can't imagine without experiencing at first hand. If you haven't seen something before, how can you imagine it?" Here, Gerald is alluding to the imagination being grounded in the "reality of everyday life" (Berger and Luckmann 1966). Other respondents perceived a clear distinction between imagination and reality.

> I have told my family and friends not to imagine what this place is like. It is totally different from your imagination. (Siwan)

> They may believe but in their hearts, they still do not understand. Even though they know that they will have to suffer hardship when they come out, and that it is difficult to look for jobs, but what you imagine compared to reality – does not have that kind of personal experience, that kind of feeling. You are only thinking in your head that it may be very difficult when you are looking for a job, but as to how difficult it actually is, you do not know. So those who have not come out are still trying their utmost to come out. (Evelyn)

Experience is deemed to be the necessary bridge between imagination and reality. The passive reception of information about abroad is insufficient since as Cheryl expressed, "Listening to other people, it is other people's experiences." In Haiwen's view, "You have to experience the bitter and the sweet for yourself." Zhehui had many friends in Vancouver who provided him with information before his arrival. "However," he said, "it is indirect experience. Only when you personally experience this place, will you know what this place is like." The desire to experience Canada prior to immigration is, despite that, not a feasible option for most PRC independent immigrants. Frustrated with the prevalent misrepresentations, Junnie exclaimed:

> I have heard people – including the native Canadians – say, "Why do you people come without sufficient understanding?" For example, many people will complain that they regret coming here, and people will say that they deserve it because they came without understanding it properly. However, PRC people have a special

situation in that they are not able to come over and understand it properly. It is very difficult for them to come out. One factor is the requirements by the PRC authorities for leaving and another is economic. Apart from studying abroad, family visits and work visits, there aren't many other reasons you can use for coming out. You have no choice. […] I feel that native Canadians still have prejudice in that they feel PRC immigrants are very blinded. Nevertheless, to a certain extent, this cannot be helped.

Even when given the opportunity to visit Vancouver before immigration, I suggest that it may not necessarily always be possible to give an objective appraisal. Jianming came to Vancouver for a conference before his immigration. After staying for two weeks with his friends and distant relatives, he felt that Vancouver was "too good," and was impressed with its natural and social environment. On a sunny day at Stanley Park, Lihuan met a few PRC tourists who told her she was "like living in paradise." While Jianming and the tourists might have experienced the *place* of Vancouver, their *subjectivities* are also central to the nature of their experiences. Following the drift of this argument would imply that potential migrants would naturally not be able to fully understand the predicaments of actual immigrants in Vancouver since it is not yet an everyday reality for them. Such a perspective would privilege experience as an important means of knowing the migrants' destination.

Conclusion

I now return to the two questions raised in the introduction when Shuwen drew a map of China: why did Shuwen focus on China when I was asking her about migration *to Canada*, and why draw a map? To begin with, a focus on China extends the lens on immigration back in space, and time, to the phase *before* immigration occurs (Teo 2003). Emphasizing the local context from which migration arises reveals the importance of viewing migrant origin and destination as interdependent entities within a broader decision-making framework. This approach underlies the paper's argument that decisions pertaining to the choice of Canada as a destination are intricately tied to perceptions about the *place* of, as well as *life* in, Canada before departure. Next, while migration, by definition, implies the crossing of physical borders, a different kind of journey is also involved. The maps that I have examined are those in the mind's eye – mental maps.

Taking into account Lowenthal's (1961: 257) insight that "all information is inspired, edited, and distorted by feeling," the paper has sought to understand potential migrants' prior knowledge of Canada. This empirical focus has, at the same time, served to illuminate a wider theoretical concern on tensions between the objective and subjective facets of knowledge, in particular drawing out the significance of individual subjectivities in interpretation. By studying potential migrants' perceptions before their migration – albeit upon hindsight – different worlds of reality are traversed. First, is the world of their everyday life in China, which is normally taken for granted as reality, and is a world

that "originates in their thoughts and actions, and is maintained as real by these" (Berger and Luckmann 1966: 21). Second, is the imagined world of Canada that is removed from them in terms of space and time, and yet holds the promise of *becoming* real. There is an ongoing correspondence between the two different worlds as potential migrants seek their desired realities in the imagined world even as they wonder whether that world would still offer them the familiar comforts of their everyday world.

At the crossroads of human experience, the two worlds are brought together. Immigrants place a premium on experience as an avenue to truly understand life in the new country. This can be appreciated for what seems to be real and true depends "on what we know about ourselves and not only on what we know about the external world. Indeed, the two kinds of knowledge are inextricably connected" (Hutten 1959 quoted in Lowenthal 1961: 258). Since experience is "compounded of feeling and thought" (Tuan 1977: 10), and by definition, implies practical engagement with external facts or events, it is an apt medium. Without experience, the information received by potential migrants lacks personal meaning; and in many cases, it is precisely the hope of experiencing a different way of life that draws migrants to the *New* World of Canada.

Meanwhile, another imagined world is being produced, this time from inside Vancouver. On 12 December 2002, a team of eight Chinese actors and about 20 production crew members led by producer-director Zhao Baogang arrived in Vancouver for two and a half months of shooting (McCullough 2002). Titled *Farewell Vancouver*, the production is adapted from a 1997 novel by Chiang Ling, and is a romantic drama surrounding the experiences of Chinese immigrants, refugees, students and professionals on temporary work permits in Canada. Fifteen of the twenty episodes will be shot in Vancouver and the remainder in China. It began airing in China in May 2003 at 8 p.m., during prime time, and is expected to garner a large audience. According to Zhao:

> There is always a set TV audience in China where people who are seniors usually stay at home and watch TV. That would probably be 100 million. Because this TV drama is made for a younger age group, so include that and it would be such a large audience. (McCullough 2002)

Is art imitating life, or life imitating art? About a decade ago, almost all my respondents had watched *A Beijing Native in New York*. Now, in what appears to be the newest product of a genre of films on PRC citizens living abroad, *Farewell Vancouver* is depicting the lives of the Chinese in Vancouver. One reason that Zhao thinks this production will appeal to Chinese viewers is that the Canadian setting makes it more exotic:

As China is developing economically, people like to see more of how people live in a foreign country such as Canada and this would be a good way to show people. (McCullough 2002)

What Zhao neglects to mention is that Canada has also been one of the most popular destinations for PRC migrants in recent years. Locations including Gastown, Chinatown and the English Bay beaches will "feature prominently" in the series. Zhao also hopes to have scenes of mountains and snow in the series, and has specifically chosen a shooting season in the middle of winter to have a grey light in the scenes, which would match the wistful atmosphere of the subject matter. After watching the series, would images of Vancouver's natural scenery come to the minds of the Chinese, just as Brooklyn Bridge and towering skyscrapers did for New York?

What kind of stories will travel back to the PRC audience with this series? To what extent will it reflect the "real" experiences of the PRC migrants here? Essentially, how will it shape Chinese imaginaries of migration, and of life abroad in Vancouver?

Yet another episode unfolds in the spiralling cultural logics of migration.

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