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Transnational Economies of Export Education

Daniel Hiebert and Min-Jung Kwak

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Transnational Economies of Export Education

Daniel Hiebert

Department of Geography
University of British Columbia
dhiebert@geog.ubc.ca

and

Min-Jung Kwak

Department of Geography
University of British Columbia
mjkwak@shaw.ca

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Abstract: In the first half of this pair of working papers (“An Exploration of the Korean-Canadian Community in Vancouver”), Min-Jung Kwak discussed the general process of Korean settlement and economic development in Greater Vancouver. In that paper, the growing importance of the export education industry was highlighted, as it is becoming central to many aspects of the emerging Korean-Canadian community. In this second paper we focus directly on the complex economies of export education that bring Koreans to Vancouver. We concentrate on the intersection of three processes: permanent immigration; the temporary migration of students; and tourism. All three are facilitated by a new generation of immigrant entrepreneurs who have established transnational connections between Korea and Canada. We ask a basic question, which emerges from the large academic literature on immigrant entrepreneurship: how successful are these new immigrant enterprises, given that they are in parts of the economy not typically associated with immigrants or minority groups (in contrast, for example, to taxi transportation, construction, garment production, etc.).

Key words: globalization, export education, transnationalism, Korean-Canadians, immigrant entrepreneurship

Introduction

We focus on a form of travel that is gaining momentum globally, one that has attracted much attention from governments and local institutions but has hardly been visible in the literature on migration and tourism: export education, involving the movement of students across international boundaries. The idea of “international students” is not new; in fact, a facility for these visitors has existed at the University of British Columbia for more than 25 years. But we believe that a set of interlocking processes is increasing the scale of export education dramatically. In the first place, the level of tourism has risen spectacularly, and it is now one of the most significant economic sectors globally (despite the aftermath of 9-11) (Keller, 2003). Secondly, as Castles and Miller (2003) remind us, the significance of migration in the current age is particularly high. Thirdly, we know from a large number of statistical data bases, and studies in a wide variety of countries, that immigrants are prone to self-employment and entrepreneurship (Kloosterman and Rath, 2003). Finally, we would argue, we are witnessing the rise of a *global education industry*, with students increasingly moving across international borders to participate in educational programs that range across all grades and fields of study, and that can be either publicly or privately owned (Tooley, 2001).¹ Universities, for example, are eager to attract international students who pay enhanced fees for their programs.² But this is just one of many existing and emerging forms of international education (Waters 2004; OECD/CERI 2002).

¹ While we appreciate Tooley’s term, we do not share his enthusiasm for the profit-driven, private education sector, which he believes is capable of reducing disparities between rich and poor countries.

² Universities in many countries have developed campaigns to recruit international students. American and Australian institutions are, arguably, world leaders in this respect, though the number of international students in the US fell dramatically after 9-11.

These processes have largely been studied in isolation from one another. True, many scholars connect the second and third points identified above. Also, some scholars have pointed out that immigration and tourism can be seen as mutually reinforcing phenomena, and that immigrant entrepreneurship might be the vital link that binds them together (e.g., Kang and Page 2000). This is a new insight, however, and not yet widely shared. Moreover, no one, to our knowledge, has systematically brought together the issues of export education, tourism, and migration realm.

In this paper we plan to, first, show that the four above processes are all connected, that there is a new integration of immigration, tourism, entrepreneurship, and the global provision of high-order services. Secondly, we do this through a case study of Vancouver and, more particularly, its Korean-origin community. However, we believe that the processes we describe in Vancouver also operate elsewhere. We begin by setting a conceptual frame for our study and then turn to an explanation of our sources of information, before exploring the larger story of Vancouver's export education sector.

Conceptual beginnings

We situate this analysis within three conceptual or theoretical frameworks. The first of these is an emerging field of work examining the relationship between the regulatory practices of the state and the development of markets (Freeman and Ögelman 2000; Kloosterman 2000). In the most general terms, these scholars note that markets are hardly “free” and instead exist within—and are defined by—a plethora of regulations that govern employment relations, trade systems, distinguish between legal and illegal products, and so on (Engelen 2003). We focus on more specific matters, of course, and seek to show that the opportunities embraced by Korean entrepreneurs in Vancouver's education sector are, to a large degree, created or at least supported by activities of the Canadian and Korean states. On the Korean side, the state, through various mechanisms, encourages its citizens to gain foreign education and labour market experience. In fact, the Korean Overseas Foundation, a non-

profit organization affiliated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is designed to facilitate communication with the roughly 6 million overseas Koreans.³ These state activities are related to a growing trend, initiated by wealthier Koreans but increasingly popular within the middle class as well, for parents to send their children abroad to obtain language training (especially in English), and other forms of education.

On the Canadian side, there are several significant policies that support the development of educational programs attracting foreign students (export education): the business immigration class, which encourages entrepreneurs to settle in Canada but also demands that they establish functional businesses within two years of their arrival (Hiebert 2002a; Ley 2003); several programs designed to promote trans-Pacific investment;⁴ a regulatory environment within which it is relatively easy to establish private educational institutions (Vancouver Economic Development Commission, 2003); and active support for the export-oriented education sector (see below). The Canadian government acts out these policies both in Canada, as might be expected, but also in Korea. Similarly, the Korean government plays an active role in Canada, fostering the transnational character of Korean investment.

Secondly, our case study illustrates a point that is often made within critical scholarship, whether arising out of feminism, post-structuralism, or anti-racist research: taken-for-granted categories frequently conceal important social processes. While we emphasize the role of government

³ The Korea Research Foundation has also been established to promote Korean students and university researchers to study overseas, and to encourage international scholars to conduct research about Korea. These programs are described in various websites maintained by the Korean government or affiliated institutions. Most are posted in Korean.

⁴ For example, Canada's Department of Foreign Trade and International Investment (DFAIT) produces a monthly newsletter called *Canada in Asia Pacific* that highlights growing trade relationships and provides information on support programs.

in creating a welcome environment for the development of export education, it is equally important to note that many aspects of the emerging system defy the categories—and regulatory practices—of the state. Ironically, the very regulations that enable this type of entrepreneurship are sometimes circumvented by it. This point has been made by scholars studying transnationalism, since the pioneering work of Glick Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton (1992, 1995; also see Vertovec 1999), and is made most emphatically by Bailey (2001), who argues that traditional dichotomies and categories such as forced vs. voluntary migration, or temporary vs. permanent migration are invalid in the face of the flexible strategies employed by migrants (and, we would add, states). In our case, as we will demonstrate below, Korean students sometimes enter Canada through the student visa program, sometimes on the basis of a tourist visa, and sometimes without a visa altogether. This means that the export education sector is difficult to monitor by the state, and also suggests caution in accepting Canadian migration statistics at face value.

Where does tourism end and migration begin? This is a difficult question to answer given the practices we explore. There is also a blurring of boundaries between temporary and permanent migration associated with export education, since individuals develop complex trajectories of migration based on their assessment of changing economic opportunities. The categories of the Canadian immigration program are also made somewhat “fictional” by the forms of migration related to export education: those recruited as Business Class immigrants may or may not initiate businesses (and if they do they may or may not be successful), while those admitted as Skilled Workers due to their professional qualifications may, after settling in Canada, abandon their profession and instead establish a business either directly or indirectly related to export education. Further, many of the transactions associated with export education are conducted in a cash-based economy that is opaque to tax regimes. The export education system, in effect, blurs the boundary between the “formal” and

“informal” economies, and profits from its ability to reveal certain activities to the state while concealing others.

Thirdly, our study is situated within the broad field of immigrant entrepreneurship. In particular, we draw attention to the tendency within studies of immigrant entrepreneurship to emphasize the participation of immigrants in traditional, low-level, economic activities, such as restaurants, laundries, garment production, taxi operations, and the like (Light and Bonacich 1988; Collins *et al.* 1995; Rath, 2002; Waldinger and Lichter 2003; some exceptions are Zhou 1998, Wang 1999; Li *et al.* 2002; Lo, forthcoming). In contrast, we explore immigrant participation at the heart of the knowledge economy: education. Through this research we consider an important question: does the shift from low-level to high-level service provision generate more stable opportunities for immigrant entrepreneurs? That is, do immigrant enterprises always suffer from economic uncertainty and marginal profit levels, regardless of economic sector, or does moving upmarket yield better outcomes?

Sources of information

As is increasingly common in contemporary migration studies, we have pursued several forms of information to make our case (see the first paper in this pair for a more detailed discussion of methodology). We have assembled both census data and administrative data on landings in Canada to build a portrait of the Korean-origin group in Greater Vancouver. Secondly, 17 key informants in the Korean-Canadian community have been interviewed as main source of information for this report. These include: 3 social workers who provide counseling to Korean immigrants and temporary residents in Vancouver; 2 representatives of Korean-Canadian community associations; 10 Korean-Canadian immigrant entrepreneurs; 1 Korean-Canadian real estate agent; and 1 investment advisor.

All the interviews were carried out in Korean (by Min-Jung Kwak) and have been translated and transcribed in English for use by both researchers.

Korean immigration and visits to Canada and Vancouver

During the long period of racialized immigration policy in Canada, until the mid 1960s, very few Koreans were admitted. The first period (1962-1975) of Korean settlement therefore began in the 1960s and was associated with the entry of skilled workers and their families. Changes in family reunification policy in 1976 led to a lull in immigration from Korea for the next ten years—a time when Koreans migrated to the USA in large numbers (see Light and Bonacich, 1988). Koreans entering Canada during the first two periods quickly turned to entrepreneurial activities, establishing a pattern of economic incorporation still relevant today.

The third and still current period began in the mid 1980s, when the Canadian government doubled its immigrant targets, and also put much more emphasis on attracting business immigrants (notably by creating a new class of Investor Immigrants). In recent years (1999-2001), Koreans have become the 5th largest source of immigrants to Canada. Since the late 1990s, Canada has become a more important destination for Korean immigrants than the United States.

The years since 1986 have also seen a rise in the share of Koreans settling in Vancouver, from around 12 percent of those arriving in Canada in the mid 1980s, to about one-quarter in 2001. According to the 2001 Canadian census, of the approximately 88,000 Korean who were either citizens or permanent residents in Canada, just over 24,000 resided in Vancouver. Of these, about 3,400 were born in Canada (the children of the earliest waves of Korean migration), 6,000 arrived before 1991, and nearly 15,000 arrived between 1991 and 2001.

The vast majority of Koreans landing in both Canada generally and Vancouver in particular were admitted through the Skilled Worker or Business Class programs, either as principal applicants

or their spouses or dependants. In recent years, Koreans have accounted for either the largest (1999) or second largest (2000-2002) source of Business Class immigrants to Canada (CIC 2003). On the whole, immigrants from Korea are well educated, with more than one-third landing in Canada possessing a completed university degree (CIC-LIDS 2003).

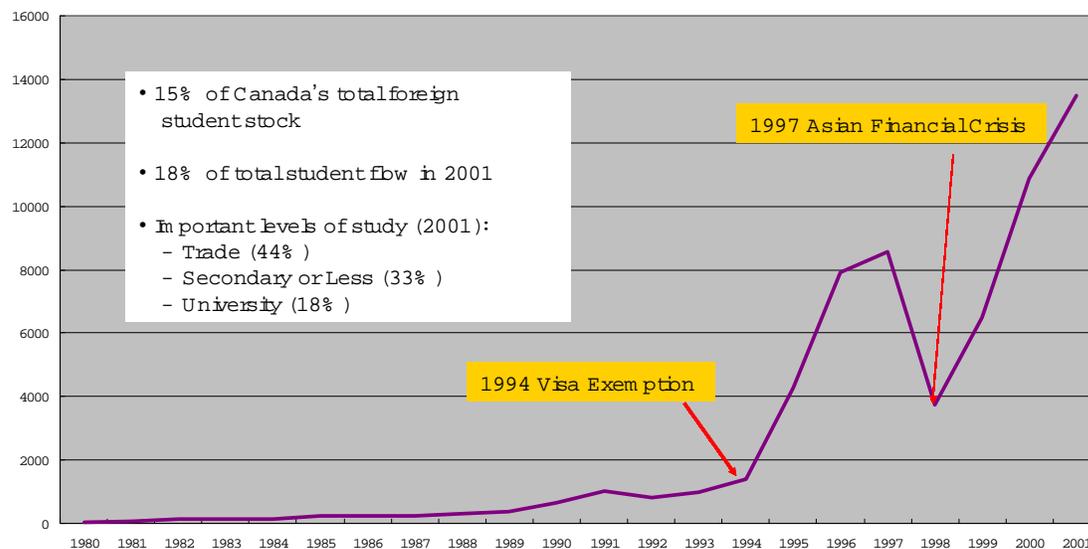
The growth in Korean immigration to Canada has been more than matched by increases in the number of Koreans coming to Canada as tourists, visitors, and temporary residents. In 2002, according to Tourism British Columbia, Koreans accounted for the 4th largest number of individuals cleared through customs in British Columbia (after the US, Japan, and the UK). This is a remarkable statistic, considering the high degree of transnationalism associated with the overseas Chinese (e.g., Ong, 1999; Yeung and Olds, 2000), and the fact that the Vancouver Korean population is far smaller than its Chinese- and Indian-origin counterparts. Altogether about 150,000 Koreans came to Canada as tourists in 2002, and 100,000 cleared customs in BC (Tourism British Columbia, www.hellobc.com).

In addition to tourists, the number of Koreans in Canada, and especially Vancouver, on temporary visas has been rapidly growing. These include special categories of workers, such as employees of multinational corporations, a few other minor categories, and students. Figure 1 shows the rapid growth in this latter category in recent years. The number took off in the early 1990s, after Koreans were granted a visa exemption in 1994.⁵ There was a pronounced dip in student entries to Canada in 1998, coinciding with the “Asian flu,” but the number resumed its upward momentum the following year. Since then (the late 1990s), Korea has become the largest source of international students in Canada; over 100,000 temporary student visas were granted to Koreans between 1998 and

⁵ Since the 1994 change, Koreans can visit Canada for up to 6 months without obtaining a special visa (i.e., they simply receive a stamp on their passport upon arrival to Canada).

2003.⁶ However, we have learned that perhaps half of the Koreans studying in Canada do not bother to obtain a student visa, but simply enter Canada as tourists and either complete their studies within six months or renew their tourist visas if they are engaged in longer study programs (also see Vancouver Economic Development Commission, 2003). Thus there are probably at least 30,000 Korean students arriving in Canada each year. About 40 percent are destined for Vancouver (CIC 2003).

Figure 1. Korean International Student Flows to Canada (1980-2001)



Source: CIC Special Report on Foreign Students in Canada (1980-2001), 2003

They are enrolled at every level of the educational system: 33% are in primary or secondary school; 44% in what are generally labeled “trades”; and 18% in universities (CIC, 2003). These are a mix of public and private institutions. Public school boards and university administrators are eager to attract international students because they are charged high tuition fees, at least by Canadian standards. In an age of restrained educational budgets, these are welcome numbers. Nearly all of the

⁶ Administrative data of CIC – FOSS Data Warehouse Cubes – accessed on May 27, 2003; we thank CIC, Pacific Region, for providing this figure.

44% of the “trade” category are in private, for-profit, institutions, especially colleges teaching English as a Second Language (ESL).

New economic sectors for Korean entrepreneurs

With an increasing number of students and visitors from Korea, the entrepreneurial activities of Korean-origin people in export education and tourism have been burgeoning since the mid 1990s. According to *Korean Yellow Pages* (a business directory published by the BC Korean Businessmen’s Cooperative Association) published in 2003, there were 57 firms listed under the heading “Foreign studies and immigration agencies” in Vancouver. Thirty two businesses were also listed in the “Travel agencies” section. These are notable numbers, considering the fact that there were only 39 foreign studies and immigration agencies and 16 travel agencies in Toronto, the city with the largest Korean-Canadian population. While a small number of travel agencies and immigration consultant agencies existed before 1994, the vast majority of these businesses have emerged and become successful since 1995.

As the directory heading implies, these firms that specialize in the provision of education on the one hand and immigration consulting on the other. However, field research suggests that many of these firms actually perform a combination of two or all three roles, that is, a mix of travel arrangements, immigration assistance, and educational services. With a large number of Korean international students and Korean tourists visiting Vancouver, these businesses were largely oriented towards the co-ethnic market. Their business locations well reflect this point (see Fig. 2). In addition to a major concentration in Vancouver’s downtown, the overall spatial pattern of the new economic sector businesses is largely matched with that of Korean ethnic enclave businesses (such as Korean grocery stores, restaurants and beauty parlours).

Figure 2. Korean Businesses in New Economic Sectors (2003)
(International Education/Immigration Consultant and Travel Agencies)



Yet, it would be premature to view the nature of these businesses in new sectors as just another example of the ethnic enclave economy. Beyond their physical location at the local scale, we need to consider more detailed information on the ways in which immigrant entrepreneurs operate their businesses on day to day basis. Most informants in all types of agencies and ESL schools spoke about their marketing strategy beyond the local scale; many rely upon various connections maintained between Korea and Canada.

The economic impact of these activities is hard to calculate, though it is clearly significant. A recent study published by the Vancouver Economic Development Commission (2003) focused on just one part of the export education sector in Greater Vancouver, English language training. Unfortunately, the methodology of the study is summarized too briefly in the report to instill confidence in its results. Forty-nine institutions, out of a possible 170 identified in the sampling frame, returned questionnaires. Estimates were extrapolated from these to suggest that international

students spend \$500 million in Vancouver on tuition fees and housing, and an additional \$260 million on entertainment, transportation, and retail purchases. The average school that provided information employed 13 instructors and 6 non-teaching staff to serve around 860 students. From this, the Vancouver Economic Development Commission estimates that the industry, in total, employs some 2,000 workers in Greater Vancouver. These are impressive numbers, though it is hard to know whether they are accurate.

Drawing the threads together: The emerging Korean-Canadian transnational education economy

a) Regulatory regimes and the market for export education

We begin with the Korean side of the export education process. Actually, the Korean government's stance on international education is somewhat ambiguous. From a monetary standpoint, the state faces the dilemma that many parents want to send their children abroad, while few international students come to Korea; thus there is a large negative balance of payments in education. To manage this, the Ministry of Education has, for some time, prohibited K-12 students from leaving to pursue an education abroad.⁷ However, this rule is routinely broken and, between 1995 and 2001, illegal international education accounted for more than 80 percent of the total cases registered in official data (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2002). This amounted to some 25,000 elementary and secondary school students. Why could so many study abroad when this is officially prohibited? Regulations are weak. On the one hand, penalties to parents for sending children to other

⁷ This rule was relaxed in the latest revision of international education policy, in 1998. Students are now allowed to obtain high-school education elsewhere, under special circumstances (that students are evaluated as outstanding and recommended by their school principal), while it is still illegal for elementary and middle-school students to do so. The Ministry of Education is also stepping up its efforts to recruit foreign students to come to Korea for post secondary education.

countries are insignificant. On the other, there are no laws against Korean companies facilitating this practice, and the approximately 500 private education agencies in the country do not face sanctions if they provide services to send K-12 students to other countries, along with the larger business of foreign tertiary education. The growing demand for international K-12 education is worrying for the government, as it could be interpreted as a widespread lack of confidence in the national system of education. Moreover, the fact that some parents can afford to send their children overseas to study while others cannot is, arguably, deepening the level of social polarization in the country, and enhances the ability for those with middle to high incomes to pass their privilege to the next generation. This has led to protest from lower-income families. Still, we are unlikely to see enhanced regulatory activity in the near future. One of our interviewees made this point quite forcefully:

For such a long time, those high class officials have always sent their kids to the U.S. and Europe. Only in very recent years, it has become very popular among ordinary people. If they regulate international education, this would be something wrong. If the Korean government decides to criminalize those parents who sent their children abroad, they will be the ones who are most likely to be hurt. (Mr. I2, an international education agency owner)

Note that data on education abroad are gathered by the National Institute for International Education Development, which is affiliated with the Ministry of Education & Human Resources Development. This institute keeps track of foreign students in Korea as well as Korean students abroad, and maintains statistics on the annual number of Korean students around the world. In conjunction with marketing agencies in host countries, it also provides Koreans with official information about studying abroad.

The Korean government unambiguously supports the study abroad for tertiary education, especially in more industrialized countries. For many years, a small proportion of wealthy families were able to send their children to Japan and a variety of Western countries. Recently, though, as the

quotation above demonstrates, overseas education has become popularized among middle-class Koreans. Increasingly, English fluency is recognized as essential to be a competitive global citizen. In 2001, more than a half of the 150,000 Korean students studying outside Korea were located in the U.S. and Canada (Korean Ministry of Education, website www.moe.go.kr). The government also encourages Korean universities to be more active in establishing partnerships with overseas universities and attracting foreigners as exchange students (www.moe.go.kr).

Turning to the Canadian story, we again begin on the Western side of the Pacific Ocean, in Korea, where the Canadian government is active in encouraging several developments related to tourism and export education. Tourism Canada (a branch of the federal government) has an overseas office there, for example, which promotes tourism through advertising campaigns and a Korean-language website. Citizenship and Immigration Canada has established the Canadian Education Centre in Seoul, and participates in annual education conventions. And the Canadian embassy encourages trans-Pacific investment, providing advice to Canadian entrepreneurs operating in Korea as well as Koreans interested in Canada. Part of this interest, of course, is related to Canada's three programs designed to recruit business immigrants (a much more elaborate analysis of Canadian efforts to attract overseas students from Hong Kong can be found in Waters, 2004).

However, while the active promotion of Korean investment in Canada has likely been instrumental in attracting Korean investment, we believe it has been surpassed in significance by a more passive change in policy, the aforementioned relaxation of visa requirements for Korean visitors to Canada in the early 1990s. This point is emphasized by Ms. T1, a Korean who immigrated to Toronto in 1991 but moved to Vancouver to three years later to tap into the possibilities associated with the new regulations:

It was 1994 when the visa exemption was in effect between Korea and Canada. We thought that the travel business would be good. That is why we opened this business.

Well, since 1994, people have started to come. Also, Korean students began to come, an influx. It was much difficult to come to Canada before, because of the complex visa issue. (Ms. T1)

As the owner of an education agency in Vancouver put it:

In my opinion, there is little relationship between the size of the Korean community [in Vancouver] and the influx of Korean students. There could be, but what has been more important was the Canadian immigration policies that welcomed both immigrants and students. Also, the rapidly developing Korean economy has been an important factor. If the Korean economy was not satisfactory, the Canadian government would never have opened its door to Korean people like this. Thus, I think the most important factor is economic power. (Ms. I1)

Continuing with the theme of *passive* policies, the relative lack of regulations governing education services and, particularly, export education, is also a crucial factor in the development of this sector. The same informant (Ms. I1) illustrates this point in describing the origins of her educational agency:

I started my business at home, my small downtown apartment. When I first registered my business in 1996, they [the BC government] didn't even know what an international education information centre was for. My agency was one of the first for Korean students. Seeing my business was successful, many followed my business strategy. There are many agencies now. Some agencies have been established by my previous employees. I think this is a positive thing. You know, competition usually results in a higher quality of service provision to customers.

A coordinator of English as a Second Language (ESL) school programs in Greater Vancouver adds an important detail:

Our school has dealt with more than 200 agencies in Vancouver as well as worldwide. There are more than 100 Korean-owned and managed local agencies in Vancouver and the Lower Mainland that we have business relationships with. These include all the entrepreneurs who run their businesses at home as well. Most small home-based agencies don't last long. But, I can't neglect these agencies. You see,

often, some students prefer to receive more personalized care than systematic service... Of course, there is a difference in commission for small vs. large agencies. But, still, we also pay a commission for recruiting a small number of students. (Ms. E3)

Ms. E3 speaks here of an increasingly common practice: local elementary and secondary schools that are part of the public education system pay commissions to private agencies that recruit international students on their behalf. The schools engage with both established, large recruitment firms as well as tiny ones operated out of the homes of entrepreneurs. The lack of regulations governing the scale of agencies, and the apparent lack of preference for dealing with small vs. large agencies, provides opportunities for small firms eager to enter the field of export education. Start-up costs are low, and regulatory barriers for this type of business are virtually non-existent.

Regulations governing the academic environment of schools and colleges that provide export education are highly variable. Broadly speaking, there are at least four quite distinct types of institutions. First, public-sector schools, colleges, and universities are highly regulated and, of course, open to full public scrutiny, program review, etc. Secondly, there are private schools that are both registered and accredited by the Private Post-Secondary Education Commission of British Columbia (PPSEC), an accreditation board that was initially established by the provincial government but, in 2003, was made independent. According to the PPSEC website, 267 schools in BC fit this category (up from just 5 in 1996).⁸ Students attending these institutions are eligible for government assistance (e.g., student loans), and in this sense they are treated as equivalent to the first category. Also, students on unemployment assistance are able to register for courses at these institutions while collecting benefits. Thirdly, a much larger number (867) of privately-owned institutes are registered

⁸ The shift from public to private status of PPSEC has been accompanied by a major restructuring of the organization, including firing a significant number of staff and the appointment of new commissioners. Eventually, a new set of regulations—still under development—will be established and implemented.

with PPSEC but have not subjected themselves to academic review. In obtaining this registration, they must follow certain rules about their *financial* practices as businesses, especially the proper management of tuition fees (with the potential to provide refunds to students as needs arise).⁹ However, institutions in this category do not have to provide a specified curriculum, do not have to hire teachers who belong to professional associations, and their students are not eligible for public support.

There are, however, other associations that regulate the industry, which are especially relevant for this category. Many of the schools and colleges teaching English in Vancouver are members of either the Canadian Association of Private Language Schools (CAPLS) or the Private English Schools Association (PELSA). Members of CAPLS, for example, must within one year of joining show that 100% of their teaching staff has completed an undergraduate degree as well as specialized courses in English training. They also must observe the ethical guidelines of the association (see <http://www.capls.com/introduction.htm>). Finally, fourthly, there are private schools that do not belong to any of the above categories and are therefore unregulated. We are unsure of the number of these institutions. Generally speaking, viewed from an international perspective, the regulatory system for private educational institutions developed in British Columbia is modest (for example, schools are not compelled to join an association or to be registered). In saying this we do not wish to imply that the industry is poorly administered, or that teaching programs are inadequate, but rather emphasize the point that it is relatively easy to establish a private language school. The system is quite open.

⁹ Significantly, around 160 registered schools closed in 2003. According to the PPSEC website, nearly all of these did so in ways that did not adversely affect students, though approximately \$220,000 in refunded tuition fees had to be processed through PPSEC.

Where do the 15,000 or so Korean students who are studying at any given point in time in Vancouver find housing? For the most part, educational institutions arrange with local families to provide room and board for visiting students, and an elaborate “home stay” system has been established. Students typically pay \$700-800 per month for room and board if they are living with a non-Korean family, or between \$1,000 and \$1,500 for a Korean family, where they can expect familiar food and cultural understanding. A real estate agent explained the impact of this system on the housing market:

Home stay? Oh, yes. That is very popular for everyone in Vancouver. Many Koreans look for housing with a lot of extra rooms. In fact, many Indo-Canadian home builders seem to be well aware of this trend. They make appropriate housing for home stay. And, probably, this is the least risky business of all [for Koreans who want to generate self-employment income], I would say. (Mr. R1, a realtor who immigrated in 1975)

Students tend to choose non-Korean families when arranging room and board, both to reduce their costs but also to enhance their language training by interacting at “home” in English. After a couple of months in this situation, though, many post-secondary students find independent housing, usually with Korean roommates. For this they turn to the local rental market, and therefore provide a new source of revenue for landlords. Whatever the situation—home stay or private rental—there are virtually no regulations governing this aspect of the export education system (beyond building codes and other generic rules).

For K-12 students, one regulation provides additional scope for entrepreneurship. Nearly all of the municipal school boards in Greater Vancouver require international students to have a legal guardian, for which their parents typically pay \$4-6,000 per year.¹⁰ Guardians are interlocutors

¹⁰ Actually, students in primary school are required to be accompanied by at least one parent. In practice, however, this regulation is often ignored. The price for guardian services varies because some school boards

between the students, their parents in Korea, and the local school system and therefore need to be able to communicate in both English and Korean.

This relatively permissive regulatory environment has enabled a great deal of economic activity that ranges in scale from small, home-based businesses owned and operated by a single person, to medium-sized firms. We see in this process the emergence of global networks focused on export education. As one of our respondents, who initially came to Canada as a visa student in 1991, explains it:

Currently, we have in total 22 branches [that is, offices]. Korea has the most branches, a total of 8. Among others, 6 are in Vancouver and 2 of them are in other Canadian cities, Toronto and Calgary. We also have one in Mexico and 2 in Japan. Basically, our international branches collect students and send them here [to study in Vancouver]. Locally, we provide a variety of services that students need here. (Ms. I1)

This is a telling reminder of how globalization actually works. In this case a Korean company has arranged its practices globally, with the ultimate goal of gathering students from several parts of the world to Vancouver, and with profits shared between Korean and Canadian operations. Another entrepreneur confirmed this as a popular strategy:

We started as a small ESL school in Surrey [a suburb of Vancouver] in 1996. I think we were one of the fastest growing schools in Vancouver. We opened two more campuses in downtown Vancouver in 1997. We have another campus just opened in Toronto this year... Marketing is important. We do traditional marketing [through education agencies] as well as our own. Although Korean students are our main customers, we also have our own marketing offices in Japan, China, and Brazil other

have more elaborate requirements than others. The Surrey school board, for example, mandates that guardians must be at least 25 years old and either landed immigrants or Canadian citizens. This is not the case in other school boards.

than Korea. We also maintain business partnerships with 300 agencies in Korea. (Ms. E2, an ESL school coordinator who immigrated to Canada in the early 1990s)

The final point in the above quotation provides an indication of the scale of the Korean overseas education system, with hundreds of agencies operating in Korea around this industry. It also suggests a high level of economic fragmentation in terms of ownership and the existence of network strategies. As one of our interviewees put it:

MJK: How important are personal linkages? Do you have any partner agencies that you have never known personally before?

Mr. E2: Yes, of course I have. But mostly, even in these cases, our business relationship becomes closer when we find that we went to the same school in the past or something. Sometimes, friends who studied here [in Canada] went back to Korea and started to work in an agency. Those are the cases that we can maintain long term business partnerships. You know, otherwise it would be difficult. Some of them are people who used to work for me as well. They went back to Korea and worked for some companies. They have co-workers and friends whose relatives want to study in Canada. Then, they might as well recommend me, because they know that I am trustworthy. So, this business is all about connection. That is not something you can build up in a day. It should be built up on the basis of good personal relations and trust.

Anyone familiar with the literature on immigrant entrepreneurship will appreciate the network strategies listed in this comment, as they are prevalent within small firms, especially immigrant enterprises, everywhere. As noted earlier, Koreans in Canada have engaged in self-employment in many new sectors. These include more traditional entrepreneurial activities, such as restaurants, convenience stores, and laundry shops, but also businesses with transnational scope, particularly travel agencies. The burgeoning market for international education has provided these firms with additional business. According to an owner of one travel agency:

Our main customers are Korean immigrants here and some visa students and their families. Most of our package tour customers are new immigrants and their relatives from Korea. Often, many goose parents¹¹ visit their children here and travel during summer or holidays. In that case, they use our package tour as well. That is common. In many cases, parents eventually apply for permanent immigration too. We don't do immigration business but I have seen that about a half of the families with children here eventually decide to immigrate to Canada. (Ms. T1)¹²

The above quotation highlights the links we are trying to reveal in this paper: immigrants attract visitors, and visits reinforce the desire to immigrate. The immigration and tourism movements, together with the desire of Koreans to improve their facility in English and to gain foreign educational credentials, provides a base for an emergent form of globalized education. Students come to Vancouver and add to market opportunities for a growing Korean-Canadian network of small firms. These firms mainly employ immigrant workers. These interlocking markets are further illustrated in the following quotations:

MJK: As you said, students travel while they come to Canada to study. Do you have any connections with travel agencies?

Ms. I1: We have our own travel agency in our branch. Right now, it is located at one of our branches downtown. But, I am planning to move it to its own office, with an education agency function. If we deposit \$5,000, we can open an office. So, it is not something really difficult. Students came to Canada to study but they usually go for travel too. And, I think it is important for them to do so as well. Our travel agency will help them to explore Canada's different places. Later, they will come back on their honeymoon or with their family. (Ms. I1, an international education agency owner.)

¹¹ Koreans use the term "goose parent" in much the same way that Chinese individuals speak about "astronaut families." Goose parents are frequent fliers who shuttle between Korea, where they work, and Canada, the location of their children.

¹² Aitken and Hall (2000) argue that the skills of foreign-born workers are vital for the success of the tourism industry. Clearly, Ms. T1's business is based on her ability to interact with Korean customers.

I know that Canada now wants to consider international students as potential immigrants in the near future. In fact, I think this makes sense. To prepare for the business opportunity, I called my friend in Korea to help me here. I hired him in our agency and help him get through UBC's immigration consultant program. That way, our agency will have a fully trained immigration consultant. This will help many foreign students who wish to stay in Canada. (Mr. I2, an international education agency owner.)

My business focuses on selling tour packages to Korean tourists in the US and Korea. In the US, I have more than one partner agency in each major city. For the Korean market, I largely depend on my own social networks, families, relatives and, you know, friends. They also send their children to be educated here. I manage them too. During vacation season, those children's family visit Canada. They are a quite important income source for my business. (Mr. T2. A travel agency owner who immigrated in 1996.)

b) Blurred boundaries and collapsing categories

The above quotations help launch our second analytical theme: many of the boundaries between categories used within the policy/program system, and by academics as well, are transgressed in the export education sector. In fact, even the term "export education sector" implies a far more coherent and contained set of economic processes than is actually the case. In our interviews, many participants distinguished between small and large firms, explaining that small operations tried to recruit clients through highly personalized service that included a full package of options, including school placement, visa processing, travel arrangements (both for the journey from Korea and also for excursions in Canada), arranging home care for students, and assisting individuals who wish to immigrate to Canada. They contrasted this flexible, personal attention with the more formal business practices of larger firms. However, when speaking with the owners and managers of the larger firms, especially those that are linked in multi-node business networks, we found that they offer approximately the same range of services, though often at a higher price. Small- and middle-sized

firms alike, therefore, offer such a wide range of services to clients that they are difficult to classify. Are they education institutions, travel agencies, real estate agents, or immigration consultants? They are, in many cases, all of these things. As explained in the previous section, this is possible given a weak regulatory context.

A second form of blurred boundaries is hinted at in the previous paragraph: what, exactly, are the clients of these institutions? Recall the quotation from Ms. I1, “Students came to Canada to study but they usually go for travel too.” The categories of students, tourists, and immigrants are conflated in these cases. For Ms. I1, her clients are tourists as much as they are students. Ms. T1 notes, students become immigrants as well. In fact, three of the ten entrepreneurs we interviewed originally came to Canada as students. Two have become permanent residents and one is in the middle of the application process. Min-Jung Kwak also attended two immigration information seminars held in Vancouver, one jointly offered by Citizenship and Immigration Canada and the Korean embassy¹³ and one by a privately owned consultant agency, and observed that there is mutual interest between students/their parents and both states towards permanent resident status. Also, researchers in Canada (Ries and Head 1998) and New Zealand (Kang and Page 2000) have found that there are mutually reinforcing relations between immigration and tourism, each leading to more of the other. The four owners/managers of travel agencies interviewed for this project all corroborate this point.

The third “blurring” is the most difficult to discuss, and was not part of the conversation with many of our interviewees. A significant proportion of the money that changes hands in the export education (and related) sector appears to do so without documentation and is therefore untaxed. This is particularly true of the home stay part of the business, which amounts to tens of millions of dollars each year. According to one of our interviewees, many homeowners accept room and board fees

¹³ This in itself is a fascinating phenomenon, with a sending country actively participating with a host country in encouraging immigration.

without issuing receipts and without declaring the income generated from this activity to relevant authorities. The “paper trail” on these transactions is minimal, as money is paid by international students and drawn from banks in other countries. It is interesting to note that this practice appears to be widely known, and the income associated with home stay fees is included in a recent attempt to estimate the economic impact of export education for the Vancouver economy (Vancouver Economic Development Commission 2003), even though a significant fraction of it is hidden. In any case, the bulk of the export education industry is a fully registered part of the formal economy, but parts of it exist more informally.

c) Immigrant entrepreneurship in the knowledge economy

In the literature on the subject, there is ample evidence showing that the businesses established by immigrants and ethnic minorities are generally rather precarious, with high rates of failure, low profits, and low incomes relative to entrepreneurial investment (e.g., Li 2000). Several theories have been proposed to account for this lack of economic success: customers may discriminate against these firms, and only patronize them if they offer rock-bottom prices (Walton-Roberts and Hiebert 1997); immigrants and ethnic minorities may be propelled into self-employment when facing an unwelcoming labour market, even if they are not ready to take up the challenges of entrepreneurship (Teixeira 1998); these firms are in highly competitive sectors of the economy, such as restaurants, construction, taxi transportation, etc. (Langlois and Razin 1989; Li 1994; Phizacklea and Ram 1996; Hiebert 2002b); and they rely on local markets, but are frequently situated in poor areas of the city that house residents with little purchasing power (Phizacklea and Ram 1996).

We might expect a different set of outcomes for the firms investigated in this paper. In the first place, we are dealing with education, hardly a sector traditionally associated with immigrant and ethnic minority entrepreneurship. Secondly, we are dealing with firms that, either by themselves or

through networks, reach across international borders and are by no means reliant upon a local market. The export education sector could, in fact, be considered an emerging form of transnational immigrant entrepreneurship, which is discussed in a recent paper by Portes *et al.* (2002). These authors identify four types of transnational immigrant entrepreneurship, none of which quite fits the export education sector explored here. They are: circuit firms that transfer goods and remittances; enterprises that transfer cultural products between countries; small retail firms catering to the specific needs of migrant communities; and return migrant enterprises, set up in the source country after a sojourn abroad. We would add a fifth type: immigrant-owned firms that facilitate the transnational circulation of people. In any case, Portes *et al.* find that transnational immigrant entrepreneurs are relatively more successful than those operating traditional immigrant enterprises. Again, this suggests that we are likely to encounter relative success within the export education sector.

One theme that emerged in our interviews certainly fit this expectation. The owners and managers of educational institutions, travel agencies, and recruitment firms frequently voiced a degree of pride in their business, which they see as more prestigious than the enterprises typically owned by Korean-Canadians, such as corner shops and grocery stores. As Ms. I3 put it: “I am proud of what I am doing. Helping students is a spiritually fulfilling profession.” A travel agent also spoke about the resilience of demand for his firm, which seems to exist regardless of economic events:

We are not much affected by the Korean economy. Also, there is a bit of impact from the bad local economy. But, overall, our business is very stable. Think about it. Koreans here always visit Korea once a year or two years. That is their vacation. They don't go much to different places. They go to Korea for their vacation. Also, Korea is not some place that you can't go because of economic difficulty. Since we have many Korean-Canadian customers who regularly visit Korea, we are less likely affected by the regional economy. (Mr. T3)

The rapid growth of the industry also suggests the potential for success. As the Vancouver Economic Development Commission reports, there are now nearly 200 businesses in Greater Vancouver dedicated to ESL programs alone, which is just one facet of the industry.

However, there are also indications that export education may not be a robust a sector for entrepreneurship in the long run. We have already seen one of these, the sharp decline in students associated with the Asian recession of the late 1990s. This unpredictable, and distant, economic event had painful, though temporary, implications for Vancouver's export education sector. One of our respondents articulated this worry:

This business is very vulnerable to many factors. It is sensitive to the world economy and of course, the Korean economic situation. This year hasn't been too good because of the slow economic situation in Korea. Also, here, there was SARS and the Iraq war. People are sensitive to exchange rate too. So, this is a difficult business to maintain consistency. To be successful, I have to develop new strategies all the time.
(Ms. I3)

The fact that these firms are targeted to the ethnic Korean market also offers both advantages and problems, which are summarized by Ms. T1, a travel agent:

Korean people have come at a steady pace so. Umm, since we are located right in the downtown... we first served Korean embassy people. Our previous office was in the same building where the embassy was. So, embassy people and Canadians were our main customers. But, more and more Korean people come to Vancouver and they now take up the major proportion of our business. They generate enough business so that we don't even need a Canadian staff. Another reason is that marketing for Canadian travelers is more difficult and the business with them leaves us a very small profit. Because there is enough demand from Korean customers, both in ticket sales and package sales, we began to neglect Canadian market. For the last ten years, our sales towards Korean customers have kept growing. So, I think the growth of the Korean immigrant community in Vancouver has been helpful to my business.

Another travel agent spoke about the difficulty of gaining access to customers from different ethnic backgrounds.

MJK: What about the Vietnamese community? I notice many Vietnamese commercial signs in this area [Kingsway].

Mr. T3: Yes, there is a large Vietnamese population but it is very hard to target the community.

MJK: What about the Chinese?

Mr. T3: We have a Chinese agent working right over there [pointing with his finger]. Amy has worked with us for 7 years now. She is from Hong Kong. So, as you can see, without someone who speaks the right language, it is very difficult to target other ethnic communities.

Many Korean international education agencies and ESL schools have tried to recruit different customers from different countries and ethnicities, and have been somewhat successful. This is typically true only for the larger educational institutions. However, most of the Korean-owned firms still depend on the Korean market, which means that their fortunes will be linked with economic circumstances in Korea.

There is also worry that safety concerns in Vancouver might drive away potential students. There was a highly publicized case in May 2002, when a Korean young woman studying in Vancouver was brutally assaulted. She suffered permanent, debilitating physical damage, and she and her family have been allowed to remain in Canada while their case for immigration (on compassionate grounds) is being heard.¹⁴ Thinking about the aftermath of this case, one of our interviewees stated:

¹⁴ The mother and daughter are being assisted by a fund designed to help the victims of crime, and their housing, medical, and living expenses are being paid by the BC government. While we agree that this

I think all levels of government should realize the significance of this education industry and react efficiently when bad news breaks out. This industry has great potential. Think about it. It is pollution free. Those students came to achieve educational goals but above all, they spend money, not small money but enormous amounts of money. Then, they should also pay more attention to the safety of international students as well. For example, there are so many stories on rental deposit fraud by property managers in downtown apartment complexes. There are even sexual harassments against female students. Theft problems! Vancouver is full of thieves. International students usually carry cell phones, credit cards, electronic English dictionaries and Walkmans. They have been good targets of thieves. I don't know what the police are doing. Are homicides the only crimes worthy of investigation? (Mr. E1)

There have also been numerous complaints about the quality of care provided by paid guardians, sufficiently so that several school boards are contemplating removing this requirement.¹⁵ In a system geared toward profit, costs are cut and quality may suffer.¹⁶ In any case, if a message like "Vancouver is full of thieves" becomes popularized in Korea, the Vancouver export education and tourism industries will suffer.

Finally, there is also considerable worry over rising competition in both the tourist agency and export education sectors. In essence, we can see a familiar scenario operating in both. A few innovative entrepreneurs see market potential and establish businesses. In so doing they actually shape the market by offering services where none (or few) existed. Their success inspires others to enter the market. Eventually, the market becomes crowded, even saturated, with competitors, prices fall, and profit margins are reduced. A few businesses develop successful strategies in these stressful

compensation is fully justified, the fact that it was offered to a foreign student is significant and shows that the government is making an effort to deal somewhat generously with a potentially embarrassing case.

¹⁵ The Langley school district, for example, now allows the school itself to sign on as the guardian of children aged 13-18.

¹⁶ *Vancouver Korea Press Daily*, 2003.

circumstances, but many do not. The lack of regulations, which permits easy entry into an industry, also permits heightened competition between firms that engage in quite different business practices:

Well, I hope government supports the small travel industry more in general. But, I also think there should be more strict regulations on the qualification issues. I have seen so many international consultant agencies enter the travel business now. They are not permitted to sell air tickets and they are not qualified to give professional advice to customers in the first place. We [qualified travel agencies] are damaged by excessive competition with unqualified small travel agencies. Also, we have to compete with big companies. It is difficult. As a qualified travel agency, you should deposit C\$20,000 to the travel association. Many unqualified agencies do business without this deposit. So, when the business goes bankrupt, customers will not be compensated. I think government should more strictly intervene into this issue. (Ms. T1)

Mr. E1, who manages an ESL school, speaks about the situation of recruitment agencies in similar terms:

However, as competition has gotten worse, agencies began to ask more and more from schools. As result, it becomes a price war in this industry. I think price has to be the last option, not the best option for business management.

A real estate agent put this issue into perspective. He senses that the long-run situation in the “new” Korean-Canadian economy might be quite bleak:

I usually recommend new immigrants to look at the most popular businesses among Koreans. The typical Korean businesses such as grocery and coffee shops, fast food restaurants and laundry shops are safe choices for them. I always tell them if you can make 3 to 4 grand a month, they should be happy. I have seen many new immigrants with high entrepreneurial spirit and enthusiasm looking for other business opportunities. They try everything. But, at the same time, I have seen enough failures. New areas require enormous time and energy. In reality, many new immigrants can't afford to invest that much. Hard work and modest incomes are something to contend with in Canada. (Mr. R1)

Final thoughts

This initial and partial investigation has only touched on the basic story of Korean transnational entrepreneurship in the education and tourism sectors. There is much more involved in this process than we have had scope to discuss, such as the ways that entrepreneurship in the tourism and export education sectors are related to the rules and expectations of Canada's business immigration program. It is clear, though, that we are seeing the outlines of a form of globalization that has hardly been noticed. Many of the activities described here are largely invisible to the state and therefore go unrecorded in all of the standard sources of data used in Canadian immigration research. True, statistics are kept on student and tourist visas, but even these seemingly straightforward categories are in reality confounded, since students do not necessarily need to apply for visas.

Ironically, while some of the activities we describe are invisible to the state, the state is the key institution that generates opportunities for export education. Or, more accurately, we should say *states*, as this form of economic development is arising due to the intersecting policies and programs of both the Korean and Canadian governments. In this field, one cannot speak about markets without speaking about politics, and *vice versa*. It is also clear that the entrepreneurship we have explored is highly flexible and encompasses several sectors of the economy that are usually seen as quite separate: tourism, education, and housing. The linkages between these activities are generated by immigrants, who are assertively creating a new branch of the "knowledge economy".

There are indications that the industry is economically precarious, however. We have seen that a downturn in the Korean economy in 1998 led to a precipitous drop in the number of student visas issued and closure of some private schools. In other words, the economic opportunities we have described in this paper are unstable and could continue, or vanish, depending on factors beyond the control of the entrepreneurs who have established, and run, the industry. In the future we might see

export education, and its tourism linkages, as another marginalized sector of the economy associated with immigrant entrepreneurship and immigrant workers. For the moment, though, the emerging transnational education sector is contributing a significant amount to the well-being of the Korean immigrant community in Vancouver, and indirectly to the rest of the population as well.

We resist the urge to specify policy recommendations in areas distant from our expertise, and therefore provide no opinion on the question of academic regulations in this sector. That is for others to decide. However, from a policy standpoint we would make the following points:

- It is clear that there is a trade-off between regulations and economic opportunities. Weak regulations (whether to do with business practices, educational standards, labour relations, etc.) enable easy access to an industry and a proliferation of firms; strong regulations tend to restrict the scope of small-scale entrepreneurship and to make for more stable economic practices. We wonder if the current regulatory atmosphere is yielding the best outcomes. Is it desirable, for example, to have such a high rate of business failure (recall that some 160 registered schools and colleges ceased operations in the past year) in an industry attempting to reach a global market?
- There seems to be something of an unmitigated view that export education has high economic potential (e.g., Vancouver Economic Development Commission, 2003). This is true in Canada and, of course, many other jurisdictions (see Waters, 2004). We share the belief that, in broad terms, the number of international students will increase, and Vancouver has the ingredients to be a popular destination for these students. However, we would caution that this does not translate into a stable base for economic planning, since so much of the demand for export education is governed by forces beyond the control of any single nation state. Wars, health concerns, and economic downturns in Asia are difficult to predict, and yet can

collapse demand almost instantaneously, as already noted. How will the cycles of growth and decline in the industry be managed? Or, perhaps more accurately: *should* some mechanism be devised to manage what will almost certainly be volatile demand in this industry?

- Part of the future success of the export education industry in Vancouver will depend on the reputation of the city as a place for students to live. For this reason, the provision of adequate housing, health services, and the creation of a safe environment are essential. This relates to a larger issue. In Canada we make a sharp distinction between permanent residents, who are accorded a substantial package of citizenship rights, have access to a range of services, and who *matter* politically, vs. temporary visitors, who have limited rights, services, and are politically invisible. For example, there are a large number of NGOs in Vancouver that receive funds to provide services to landed immigrants, but *not* for temporary residents. If there is a desire to capitalize on the economic rewards associated with international students, we might wish to reconsider this distinction. The same holds, of course, for temporary workers, who provide important economic benefits to Canada. Is there a moral obligation of a state towards individuals who provide material benefits to the people of that state? We think so.
- Finally, we note the many complications associated with regulating a form of economic activity that crosses national jurisdictions. As we have shown, the entrepreneurial practices behind export education are highly internationalized, with many firms operating in two or more countries, and with entrepreneurs themselves shuttling between Canada and Korea (and sometimes elsewhere as well). Significantly, the transnational practices of entrepreneurs are to a degree matched by states, with the Canadian government helping promote Canada as a destination for students in Korea, and the Korean government conducting several programs

that facilitate this movement. It is difficult, to say the least, to envision a set of efficient and meaningful regulations under such complex and flexible circumstances. This, of course, in the broadest sense is the challenge of globalization writ large.

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