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Policy Issues Surrounding Canada's Diaspora

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Introduction

Simon Fraser has recently decided to reposition itself internationally by creating several human gateways between Burnaby and China. Simon Fraser by its very existence creates knowledge with one primary input namely people. One Simon Fraser gateway initiative consists of an imaginative cohort scheme in which two student streams, one from China and one from SFU are merged into a single cohort for a five-year engineering programme. When completed, the students in the cohort will return to their home countries to be productive and interesting citizens thus in essence creating mini diasporas. Why would Simon Fraser initiate such a programme? Are there any general lessons here for Canada to learn? What are the costs of such adventures? Is it possible to construct policies to insure that everyone gains from this type of legacy programme?

In my allotted time I would like to discuss why the creation of multiple diasporas by Canada's robust immigration policy will necessarily lead to Canadian policy choices to insure that these diasporas are more of an asset than a liability to Canada.

Since the early 1990s until today Canada has enjoyed a substantial influx of highly trained Chinese from at first Hong-Kong and Taiwan and later the Chinese mainland. Many of these fine and energetic minds came to be educated, learn English and ascend to Canadian citizenship. However, many of them have moved on to the United States, note 35% of TN visa holders in the United States are foreign-born Canadians or returned home to China. This triangular flow – China-Canada-ROW – is no doubt good for the individual immigrant who is now a Canadian citizen. Armed with English, perhaps a Canadian education, citizenship and a very accommodating passport both the productivity and mobility of this émigré is more productive in her diaspora community abroad.

Canadian Interests

But what of Canada?

Canada's immigration policy has always been predicated on permanent residence even though in reality over 30% return or move on over their lifetimes. Will Canada lose or gain politically, culturally and economically from the twin diaspora communities that naturally arise whenever you have a robust immigration policy with substantial emigration?

My central point is that, in the absence of a coherent diaspora policy, the answer to this question is not clear. In fact, a coherent diaspora policy should insure the free mobility of erstwhile Canadian immigrants while enriching Canada politically, culturally and economically.

Politics of the Diaspora

Let us look to a few examples drawn from the political sphere. Currently it is possible but difficult to vote as a Canadian citizen abroad. A comprehensive diaspora policy would insure ease of voting at least at the federal level. Next, Canada could consider, as Italy has, the right of a diaspora community to elect members to Parliament who could run as at-large members. Both of these initiatives would of course only attract diaspora members who are keen on Canada already but would allow them continued attachment. Of course, these political benefits to the diaspora community also imply costs, such as appearing for possible jury duty.

In addition, Canada could consider extending Canadian citizenship on a mixed *jus sanguinis* basis for three generations based upon continued political participation, as the Irish have done. Thus, when the moment is right, a cadre of highly astute third-generation Canadians may return to Canada when it's Canada's turn to be a tiger or a haven.

Economics of the Diaspora

In the economic arena the simple free exchange of goods and services between Canada and the new diaspora communities should prove mutually beneficial. However, institutional infrastructure could direct more benefits derived from trade and investment to

Canada. The mutual enforcing citizenship succession rights to children of the diaspora, for example, could enhance the return of young overseas Canadians to Simon Fraser University or other rivals. This continued flow of intergenerational human capital would reinforce the first generation diaspora ties and build on a dynamic relationship without the need of visas since diaspora children would be Canadian citizens.

What if any is the case for worldwide taxation of a Canadian citizen's earned income? A hoary question, which I will only raise at this point. However, if Canada derives no benefits from its overseas diaspora community then a strong case for taxation on worldwide income could be made.

Cultural aspects of the Diaspora

Language and intermarriage are two fundamental ingredients that enrich both spectrums of the diaspora. The dual linguistic abilities of both the Chinese in Canada and Canadians in China will forge cultural links that currently are not possible. More fundamentally, diaspora intermarriage where ethnic Chinese in Canada intermarry with Chinese Canadian citizens abroad will deepen cultural and family ties and extend Canadian citizenship rights through expanded *jus sanguinis* and *jus soli* principles.

However, all of this optimistic scenario of rich cultural interchange coupled with economic intercourse and political interchange require imaginative policy measures. In their absence, any diaspora can be a latter day liability when they return under duress or in old age.

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