



# METROPOLIS BRITISH COLUMBIA

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**Settlement as Process:**  
***Investigating the Everyday Routines of  
Three Cohorts of Immigrants from Beijing to  
Vancouver***

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# **Metropolis British Columbia**

## ***Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Diversity***

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## Working Paper Series

### **SETTLEMENT AS PROCESS: INVESTIGATING THE EVERYDAY ROUTINES OF THREE COHORTS OF IMMIGRANTS FROM BEIJING TO VANCOUVER**

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## SETTLING AS AN EXPERIENTIAL PROCESS: SETTLING INTO A ROUTINE

Within the academic literature, the word “settlement” takes on a variety of meanings. A “pattern of settlement” has been used as a sort of shorthand for describing where immigrants set up formal residence. Residential addresses of immigrants and their location with respect to the native born form the basis for most analyses. Settlement patterns are viewed as the basis for assessing the degree of spatial assimilation or integration of immigrants, i.e., how well the distribution of immigrant residential addresses matches native-born patterns (e.g., Newbold and Spindler 2001; Ray 1994). Settlement might also be understood as a longer term outcome of immigration, understood as whether or not immigrants establish formal residence, set up local families, and/or express intentions to permanently remain within their host countries (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1995).

Settlement has also been tied to service provision, as when immigrant services are meant to assist with settling into a new country (e.g., Drolet and Robertson 2011; O’Neill and Kia 2012). This literature tends to conceive of settlement as a process, but built around the meeting of immigrants’ service “needs,” and more tightly bound to government reports. So, for instance, Mwarigha (2002) and Wayland (2006) suggest three distinct phases of settlement, where the immediate and intermediate phases are tied to needs for shelter, clothing, food, information, language education, and job training. The final, long-term phase of settlement is assumed to involve some sort of broader integration, perhaps involving the children of immigrants rather than their parents.

Finally, settlement has also been understood as a descriptive process akin to integration. For instance, Hondagneu-Sotelo (1995) summarizes Piore's (1979) work on settlement as suggesting:

In the initial stages, labor migrants are driven by purely utilitarian concerns, as their drive to rapidly earn and save income prompts them to work long hours at undesirable jobs, live frugally, and avoid leisure activities. But as time passes, and as they establish families and households in the new country, these same migrants work shorter hours, spend more and save less, and begin to congregate socially and enjoy leisure pursuits. No longer obsessed with returning to the home country as quickly as possible, the increasingly anchored immigrants' new concerns are with job stability and social position in the new society.

Hondagneu-Sotelo (1995) suggests that Piore's idealized version of settlement processes has mostly been confirmed by subsequent studies, but remains undertheorized with respect to how settlement processes unfold. Massey's (1986) work similarly builds on Piore, but more or less substitutes integration for settlement as a process. He ultimately suggests that the gradual accumulation of local ties transforms immigrants from sojourners (or temporary labour migrants) to settlers (or permanent migrants). As a result, Massey ultimately returns to viewing settlement as an outcome and integration as a process, a neat inversion of the settlement as service provision literature.

In this working paper, we are interested in both complicating and narrowing our interpretation of settlement. We view settlement as something more than assignment to a place.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, while settlement is likely quite influenced by connection to the sorts of services discussed in the policy-oriented service model, there is no good reason that connection to services and settlement should be conflated as one and the same thing. At the same time, integration

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<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, the recent Metropolis BC working paper by O'Neill and Kia (2012) similarly broadens "settlement" in useful fashion, though not in entirely the same direction as we take it here.

seems to presuppose settlement in many cases, unnecessarily broadening the matter at hand, as we discuss further below.

Here we suggest that settlement should be viewed as a time-bound process rather than an assignment. Time is implicated in settlement in two distinct ways: 1) Settlement manifests itself through time in the short term, and 2) Settlement unfolds through time in the long term. The manifestation of settlement is the presence of a set of routines binding an individual to place. Settling into a routine and settling into a place are part of the same process by which people come to make themselves at home. Routines are manifest in the repeated activities by which individuals engage with their environments. In this sense, people settle into the rhythms of life – with place-bound activities repeated in regular intervals (e.g., daily, weekly, monthly, yearly), providing an experience of inhabitation. In this sense, we suggest that settlement should be used to evoke the lived experience of dwelling in a place, rather than the administrative convenience of assigning an address to an individual.

Settling into a routine takes time. This is the sense in which settlement unfolds as a long-term process. The assumption is that people tend to move toward the establishment of relatively stable routines, at which point they might be considered “settled.” Immigration, by necessity, disrupts the routines which bind people’s activities to place. It is fundamentally unsettling. The literature often seems to assume that establishing a new address implies resettlement of a person. But there is no reason to assume this in any but a strictly administrative sense. After all, a truism (if often violated in practice) within the field of housing research is that a house is not a home. If a house is not a home, then housing should not be equated with settlement. We suggest in a more careful manner that housing provides a crucial resource for people to settle into the kinds of routines that make them feel at home.

The adoption and stability of routines has received surprisingly little attention in the study of immigration. Nor has it received much attention, at least recently, in the study of home. Nevertheless, as Hopper (1997) notes, attention to the routines of everyday life fits into an older tradition of the study of homelessness. Definitions of homelessness once focused upon disaffiliation and broader notions of vagrancy (which were, in turn, problematic in their own ways). Only relatively recently has research on homelessness taken a more materialist turn to focus exclusively on lacking housing (e.g. Springer 2000). One of the reasons for the materialist turn has been the vague fuzziness associated with home relative to the seeming solidity of housing characteristics. There is, in fact, a large literature on home emphasizing the diversity of definitions and underlying ambiguity surrounding the concept (e.g., see Mallett 2004; Douglas 1991; Manzo 2003; and Rybczynski 1987 for reviews from sociological, anthropological, psychological, and architectural perspectives). But newer syntheses and research into the habits, routines, and rituals associated with everyday life have the potential to provide clarity to home understood as an experience or sensation, if not necessarily to home viewed as an infinitely interpretable symbol (e.g., Blunt and Dowling 2006; Jacobson 2003; Lauster forthcoming).

Our starting point for reconstructing a theory of settlement, connected to the ways immigrants might come to feel at home in a new place, builds on the ways the stabilization of everyday routine seems necessary for people to inhabit their environments. To inhabit is literally to interact with one's environment in a habitual way. This accords with a dual-process understanding of human behaviour as based in both a ponderous, creative, forward-looking mode, and a habitual, reactive, backward-looking mode, a theory now well established in research literature in sociology (Gross 2009; Vaisey 2009), psy-

chology (Evans 2008; Wood and Neal 2007), and neuroscience (Redish, et al. 2008; Yin and Knowlton 2006). Operating in the thoughtful mode may provide for flexible responses to one's environment, but is challenging and demanding to maintain. By contrast, operating in the habitual mode provides for a certain familiar and comfortable automaticity in one's responses to one's environment, and establishes rituals that reinforce belonging (Jensen et al. 1983; Wood and Neal 2007). Inhabitation means no problems arise to interrupt the flow of actions (Joas 1996). Here we suggest that when people seek home, they seek to engage in inhabitation, or to safely operate in a habitual mode, a point reinforced by more phenomenological investigations (Berger and Luckman 1966; Jacobson 2009). Habits for interacting with one's environment are slowly learned by the body over time and repeated interaction (Crossley 2001). It takes a stable set of interactions to allow habits to form and inhabitation to flow (Wood, Quinn and Kashy 2002). Just such a stable set of interactions, configured as a routine, or a network to traverse through everyday life, may be thought of as constituting home.

A better, more nuanced understanding of settlement as a process has implications for better demarcating and exploring the various processes associated with acculturation, adaptation, and integration (considered together here for simplicity's sake). Each of these, to some extent, presupposes that immigrants will move toward sharing a common set of everyday routines with the native born. Little research has explored how immigrants' daily routines in the host country are different from those in the home country. To understand the complex settlement experiences of immigrants, it is crucial to examine how space and time influence the construction of daily experiences and subjective senses of belongings of immigrants (Waters 2011). However, it is far from clear that host countries have well-established common sets of everyday

routines. For instance, the variety of institutional affiliations with school and work greatly influence Canadians' construction of routines (Statistics Canada 2011). Similarly, characteristics of one's household matter a great deal, with housework and childcare, as well as the gendering of these activities, greatly influencing the establishment of various routines (Daly 2002). Rather than fully moving into a comparison between immigrant and native-born everyday routines, we focus here on simply establishing a trajectory of routines as they pertain to the immigration process. As such, we are more interested in how immigrants settle into routines than how these routines reflect their similarity with the native born.

How do immigrants come to settle into a new home? In the paper ahead, we attempt to start addressing this question through simple description of change and continuity in the routines associated with three immigration cohorts, moving from Beijing to Vancouver. The first cohort we studied were those who lived in Vancouver for over a year. The second cohort represents recently arrived immigrants, living in Vancouver for less than a year. The third represents prospective immigrants, living in Beijing while they awaited their final approval to emigrate to Canada. In addition to describing change and continuity in routines, we also attempt to categorize a few of the basic organizing processes by which new routines get established.

## METHODS

Three different cohorts of immigrants were recruited from Beijing and Vancouver. This includes eleven applicants for immigration to Canada living in and around Beijing, nine recently arrived immigrants (since 2010) moving from Beijing to Vancouver, and eleven more established immigrants moving to Beijing from Vancouver (prior to 2010 – the earliest landing in 2005). Samples

were recruited through advertisements placed on popular on-line immigration forums.

As is often the case, more women (19) than men (12) enrolled in the study overall. The balance between women and men was relatively even for applicants and well-established immigrants, but less so for recent immigrants, where only two men took part in the study relative to seven women. This discrepancy may relate to the transnational character of many immigrant families, where fathers often remain working in China while mothers and children work through the immigration process (Waters 2002). Not surprisingly, well-established and recent immigrants were both generally older (average age of 38) than applicants waiting in Beijing (average age of 33). In terms of official immigration categories, nearly all migrants landed through the “skilled workers and professionals” category, though three recent immigrants came through the business category<sup>2</sup> and an additional applicant is applying through this category. Only one immigrant came through family sponsorship. The split between skilled and business immigrants may represent differences in wealth, with more recent immigrants being wealthier; however immigrants themselves often distinguished between these programs less on the basis of their wealth requirements than on the basis of English language requirements – i.e., those with greater mastery of English were more likely to enter as “skilled.” Nearly all immigrants had graduated from university, and most had obtained post-secondary degrees. In this sense, the highly selective aspects to Canada’s immigration programs work to reduce the variation in immigrant backgrounds. All immigrants applied or arrived with a spouse and/or children. Most landed immigrants were living in the near suburbs of Vancouver, with

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<sup>2</sup> This category may be further subdivided to include “investment, entrepreneur, and self-employed” immigrants.

Burnaby and Richmond leading the tally, but a substantial portion lived further out. In terms of housing, all applicants for immigration living in Beijing lived in apartments, as had nearly every successful immigrant before departing Beijing. By contrast, the housing situations of those living in and around Vancouver varied widely, from rented rooms and shared accommodations to apartments and townhouses to expensive owner-occupied houses.

In addition to their basic demographic data, immigrants were also asked a variety of questions about their feelings of home, their immigration experiences, and their everyday lives. In order to fully cue and capture the events of everyday life and gather a spatial sense for how they unfold, immigrants were asked to map out their most recent day. Landed immigrants were asked to retrospectively consider how their routines now differed from their routines in China. Well-established immigrants were similarly asked about how their routines now differed from when they first arrived. Prospective immigrants were asked how they thought their everyday lives would change. Participants were interviewed twice to get maps of at least two days' activities and some sense of the stability of their everyday lives. At our request, many also provided photos and diaries about what they consumed for their second interview. In this paper we focus on the descriptive data immigrants provided about their everyday lives and routines, both in the present, looking back, and looking forward.

## FINDINGS: ILLUSTRATIVE CASES

In the tables below, we provide basic information on twelve illustrative cases of immigrants and prospective immigrants, each interviewed at different points in their immigration trajectory. Participants are provided with pseudonyms, and ages and occupations may be slightly altered in order to preserve

confidentiality. Following the tables, we provide brief descriptions of the everyday lives and routines of each case, and discuss how they have changed through the immigration process.

#### ILLUSTRATIVE CASES: PRE- AND RECENT IMMIGRANTS

NAME	JULIE	TIM	ZADA	LAUREN	NA	TODD
Gender	F	M	F	F	F	M
Age	30	32	27	41	41	42
Arrival	Pre-	Pre-	2011	2011	2011	2011
Im Class	skilled	skilled	investment	skilled	Skilled	skilled
Work in Beijing	Engineer foreign company	Engineer foreign company	Family business	finance planning	No work	Manager listed company
Work in Vancouver	N.A.	N.A.	sales	sales	No work	No work
Household	Husband & Son	Wife	Husband	Husband & Daughter	Son here, Husband in China	Wife & Daughter

#### ILLUSTRATIVE CASES: MORE ESTABLISHED IMMIGRANTS

NAME	MAC	JUDY	LAM	CADMAN	XAN	SAMANTHA
Gender	M	F	M	M	M	F
Age	41	36	36	37	43	38
Arrival	2010	2008	2008	2006	2006	2005
Im Class	Skilled	skilled	skilled	skilled	skilled	Skilled
Work in Beijing	Regional Director for a car company	in an foreign company	Exchange broker	IT manager	IT engineer	transport design institution
Work in Vancouver	Restaurant, & Import-export business	No work	Self-employed Travel planning	IT tech	IT engineer	Self-employed Cleaning business
Household	Wife & Son	Two daughters, Husband in China	Wife	Divorced	Wife & Daughter	Husband, Daughter & Son

### *1. Prospective immigrants in Beijing*

**Julie** is a well-educated (MBA) professional woman in her early 30s living in Beijing. She applied for immigration in 2011, works in a foreign company, and owns an apartment near her workplace. She notes that she feels most at home watching movies, either at home or at the cinema, chatting with her husband, doing yoga, or playing ball.

On a normal day, Julie gets up, and then heads off to her workplace located about five minutes away by car. If she makes it on time, she take the shuttle to work, otherwise she drives her own car. She has breakfast at work, as well as lunch and dinner. She usually works until 5:30 or 6:00 pm and sometimes until after 7:00 pm. After work, she returns home, and her parents-in-law, husband, and son finish their dinner. She plays with her son, takes a shower, then puts her son to bed. Sometimes she falls asleep while putting him down for the night. Other times, after her son goes to sleep, she checks email or browses the internet. On weekends, she and her husband and son go out to climb mountains, shop, or visit the cinema.

Julie expects life in Canada will be less busy, with less pressure, more spare time, and more time with her family. She sees her future settlement as a process, especially linked to establishing housing and work, noting:

I imagine that I will go through many stages after I first arrive. I will rent a place to live in the beginning. Later I will buy housing: two-bedroom at least, 70 or 80 square meters. Finally I will probably get my own house. I will get settled gradually. But I have to figure out what job I can get first, what I can do. Shall I get more schooling first? Or try to look for a job? I am not sure. I will see.

**Tim** is also professionally educated, with an MBA, and in his early 30s. He rents an apartment in a rural part of Beijing and works in an engineering

company. He applied for immigration in 2011. He notes that he feels most at home climbing mountains, watching movies at home, soaking his feet, and browsing the web for information about Canada.

On a normal day for Tim, he wakes up and has breakfast prepared by his wife who stays at home. Then he takes a shuttle bus to work, about forty minutes away. He works, until around 5:30, with a break for lunch. He returns home for dinner, and then does dishes. After dinner, he reads books or browses the internet while soaking his feet. He and his wife buy groceries on weekends. They often shop online. He used to jog on the street in the morning, but stopped jogging because of the polluted air. He and his wife enjoy having a rural life.

Tim expects to relax after immigration, have more activities on weekends, work less, and have fewer pressures on his life. He described expecting life to be safer, more reliable, more fair, and transparent in Canada:

I checked on internet forums, and the fees and tips for services in Canada are expensive, but other things are cheaper compared to China. For example, the price of pork is cheaper, and it is safer. In terms of life, I expect things will get done more smoothly. Just go through the process, and it will be clear and fair. If you have to wait then just wait, you will get there finally. But in China, you never know whether you will get there or not while waiting. You need to figure out where to do this, then, when, it takes several times to get just one thing done, they don't tell you how to move on and what is the procedure for the next step.

## *2. Recent immigrants*

In her mid-twenties, **Zada** is the youngest immigrant profiled here. She is also the only one arriving through the "investor" class program. Before landing in Vancouver, she lived in a house in Guangzhou and an apartment

in Beijing. In China she worked for her family business. After arriving in Vancouver, she first took a part-time job as sales staff, and then got a full-time job as a travel agent. For now she lives with her husband in the room of a house in Richmond. She notes that she feels at home cooking for her husband. She likes the natural environment and friendly people in Canada. She dislikes her transportation options.

On a normal work day, Zada wakes up and takes the bus to work without having breakfast. She works from 10:00 am to 5:00 pm at a mall. She returns by bus and cooks dinner in the evening. Then she watches TV with her husband in the bedroom. She works less than she did in China, where her family business kept her busy seven days a week. Nevertheless, her schedule was more flexible there. She also used to have a nanny at home to help with cooking and household chores. Zada often hung out with friends in the evening, singing Karaoke and playing cards until very late. Now she expects to buy a house within a year, and have children while establishing a business in the future.

Zada notes:

I felt my settlement process was pretty smooth. When I first came, I took the ELSA program in which they showed us around. For example, we visited the Vancouver aquarium and a lot of other places for free. I bought a car, found a family doctor and got a checkup.

**Lauren** is in her early 40s. She worked in financial planning in China, but after landing in Canada took up work as a part-time salesperson at a mobile phone company. She owns a townhouse in Richmond. Her husband also works part-time as an electrical technician. Lauren notes she feels most at home watching TV in the evening

On a normal day, Lauren wakes up in the morning, cooks breakfast, and packs up a lunch box. Then she takes her daughter to school. From there, she heads off to her English class and a work placement program. After class, she goes to her part-time job on those days she has been called in to work. If she hasn't been called in, she shops for groceries and then starts preparing dinner at home. After dinner, she cleans up, then, after her husband and daughter go to bed, she uses her laptop to do her homework and browse the internet. Finally she goes to bed too.

Lauren notes that when she was in China, she didn't cook that much. She also didn't have to spend much time looking after her daughter, since her parents helped her out. After work, she used to be able to simply return home and spend time watching her favorite TV shows online in the bedroom. She expects that in a few years, her life will get better after she gets a good job. She will be more relaxed and start watching TV series in the evening again. This will make her feel at home, but she feels that she is not there yet. She noted:

The key difference is that I don't have a decent job here. I had a decent job in China. I never considered price differences when I was shopping in China. I didn't think about price too much. But here, I compare prices at different stores. Here is cheaper, there is more expensive. I am sick of shopping - just because I haven't found a good job yet.

**Na** is also in her early 40s, but is far less focused on work than Lauren. She was a stay-at-home housewife before coming to Vancouver. She owns a two-bedroom apartment in an expensive suburban municipality south of the Fraser River, where she lives with her son. Her husband continues to work in China.

On a normal day, Na wakes up and heads off to English class. She returns after class, has lunch at home, rests, cleans up, and then starts to prepare dinner. She notes that she doesn't have to drop off and pick up her son from school because the school is just ten minutes walking distance from home. After dinner she turns on the computer, logs in to QQ (a popular online gateway and messaging centre), and sets up video chats with her parents, or messages friends living in the U.S. Then she goes to bed.

When Na lived in China, she had to get up earlier to drop her son off at school around 7:30 a.m. Then she returned home, cleaned up rooms, and checked her stocks. She had help with the household chores from a nanny. She used QQ in China as well, though not as frequently. Then she went outside to do exercises or take a walk until 1:00 p.m. After returning home for a rest, she would head off to pick up her son from school around 3:30 pm. If they didn't want to eat out, she prepared dinner before she left. If they ate out, which they did frequently, then they returned home after dinner. Her husband was always wining and dining in the evenings and seldom at home. If he did come back for dinner, she had to cook more. She could shop for fresh groceries every day in China, unlike in Vancouver, where the grocery store is too far away. Na notes that she likes staying at home and living a quiet life. She feels this aspect of her life won't be much different in the future, at least until her son goes to university, or her husband comes over to join them.

**Todd** used to work as vice president of a listed company in China, but for now he remains without work after moving to Vancouver. He owns a house on the North Shore, where he lives with his wife. He notes that he feels most at home napping in the afternoon, browsing the internet, and reading.

On a normal day, Todd wakes up and cooks breakfast and prepares lunch boxes for his daughter and his wife. Then he takes his daughter to school. After dropping her off, he heads to English class. His wife is enrolled in an information management program at a college. After class, he returns home for lunch and watches TV to help with his English. Then he takes a nap. He works on his garden and cleans up the yard in good weather. Then he picks up his daughter and takes her to an afterschool program. They return for dinner. He plays with his daughter. After his daughter goes to sleep, he watches TV, and then goes to bed.

Todd notes that his new routine is different from how he and his wife lived in China. They didn't cook in China, and they hired a nanny to help with household chores. He and his wife walked to work, and worked in the same company, returning home for lunch. Todd often worked overtime, entertained colleagues over dinner and drinks on many evenings, and took a lot of business trips. He wasn't home a lot. When home, he mostly just relaxed on the sofa. On the weekends, he took his daughter to music class. His parents and his in-laws took turns visiting and helping them out. In the future, after his English has improved, Todd will begin to make some new plans. His wife doesn't want to see him take a job involving manual labor, and he's not yet sure what he'll be able to do.

Todd notes:

I miss Chinese traditional medicine. It is really good. I treasure it.. [otherwise] Canada is like paradise, a paradise without all the tiresome and decadent pleasures [associated with Todd's life before].

### *3. More Established Immigrants*

**Mac** is in his early 40s, and earned an MBA in China before immigrating to Canada. In some ways, Mac is a recent immigrant. He only landed in Canada in 2010. However, this was his second landing, after an initial pass through Canada in 2007 before he returned to China to work as regional manager for a car company. In this sense, Mac bridges the categories of recent and more established immigrants. He now rents a house in Burnaby, and is looking to start a restaurant in Langley as well as an import-export business. He feels most at home cooking and chatting with his family.

On a normal day Mac wakes up and cooks breakfast. Then he takes a walk with his wife to drop their son off at school. He returns home, makes tea, browses the internet, and makes calls to talk about business. Then he picks up his son and takes him to skating and swimming classes. They return for dinner. Then Mac watches his son play piano or do homework with his wife.

When he worked in China, Mac made a lot of business trips. Half of the month he spent on the road, checking up on branches in eleven cities outside of Beijing. The only other activity he engaged in was the occasional football match. After arriving in Canada, he stayed at home more, and spent more time with his family. He started learning how to cook and took up more of the household chores when his wife recently became pregnant with their second child. On weekends, he goes out crab fishing. He says he enjoys the new lifestyle:

I passed the stage where I was young and struggled for many things. I wanted to have more time with my family. The only thing I worry about is the possibility of break-ins happening, like [I've heard about] in Surrey. I expect life will be different after I set up my business, but not too busy.

**Judy** is in her late 30s. She landed in 2008, with her two daughters, but her husband continues to work in China. Judy had already developed international experience in Japan, and worked at a Japanese company in China before immigrating to Canada.

On a normal day, Judy wakes up, cooks breakfast, prepares lunch boxes for her daughters then heads out to take them to school. She then often attends an English class and returns home after class. On days she doesn't have class, she shops for groceries, exercises, or goes swimming. After returning home, she prepares dinner through the afternoon, and then picks up her daughters around 3:00 p.m. She brings them to after school lessons until around 5:30 p.m., and they all return home by 6:00 p.m. The afternoon lessons provide routines for her children: swimming class on Monday and Wednesday, skating class on Tuesday and Thursday, violin class on Friday, and language class on Saturday. In the evening, her older daughter plays violin, while the younger one plays with her toys. Then, after reading time, she puts them to bed around 9:00 pm.

Judy notes that in China, work was her routine. She met friends frequently and often dined out. She felt privileged in China, and life seems more dull here. But she didn't used to do some of things she does now, like visiting the park, or practicing Tai Chi. In the future she expects to find some way to re-unite with her husband, while keeping her children in Canada, where she wants them to be educated. She doesn't think her husband will be able to find a good job here like he has in China, and she's not sure she will be able to find the kind of decent work that would enable her to support her children here. She thinks maybe some sort of exchange program might be set up with her husband's work to bring him over. Without that possibility, and after more than three years of residence in Canada, she isn't sure whether she will stay in Vancouver or return to China. She continues to try and sort this out:

The key point is money: whether I can find a good job. I have to make a decision about going back to China or staying here. I need to settle my children down. It is not good for children to live here for two years, there for two years. They will not know who they are, where they belong. It is tough! But I need to make a decision.

**Lam**, now in his mid-thirties, used to work as an exchange broker in China. After moving to Vancouver in 2008, he tried a lot of different part-time jobs. Recently he started his own travel planning business in the area. He lives with his wife in his sister-in-law's house in Richmond. He feels most at home drinking beer, chatting, and eating out with friends, listening to music, browsing, taking pictures, and watching movies at home. He enjoys local culture, like music festivals, and the outdoor activities Vancouver offers.

On a normal day, Lam gets up and takes a shower. If there is a call-in job (usually four or five times a month) or travel business, such as showing new comers around, he works until the afternoon. If there isn't any work to do, he goes to the library. He returns home for dinner, and usually takes a walk along the beach afterward. On weekends, he and his wife often head outdoors: fishing, hiking, or camping.

When Lam first came, he tried hard to look for a job that was similar to what he did before. Instead, he ended up in part-time jobs, working in painting and construction. He also volunteered. He thought it was easy for him to feel settled because both he and his wife traveled a lot, and had experience living abroad. But he notes that settling into work, and especially starting his own business, is a different thing. He expects in a few years he will get busy and make more money. Once that happens, he wants to take time to backpack around the world with his family.

When he lived in China, Lam seldom cooked at home. He ate dinner out, and visited his parents every week. He misses the convenience and ease of communication in China, but he dislikes the boring work and lifestyle, as well as maintaining his complicated social network there. He finds Canada much better suited to his outdoor lifestyle, and contrasts its fresh air and clean environment with conditions in China. Of the mountains here, he notes:

I enjoy the beautiful view on the mountaintops. And it is free of charge for me to climb [unlike mountains in China where one must often pay an administrative fee in order to climb].

**Cadman**, now in his late thirties, recently divorced his wife after living in Canada for five years. They did not have children, and he left her the house they used to share. Now he lives in an apartment in Richmond. Before leaving China Cadman worked as a manager for an IT company, but since coming to Canada he has only managed to find work as a service technician. He believes it will not be hard to keep this job, but sees little room for advancement. Now, he feels most at home browsing the internet, watching movies, and going out whenever the weather is nice.

Cadman's daily routine depends on which work shift he is assigned as a technician: the morning shift or the evening shift. On a normal morning shift day, Cadman gets up, turns on the music in his living room, cleans up, browses the Internet, and then goes to work. He receives work tickets directing him to solve customers' technical problems or transfer them to other departments. If he works the evening shift, he stays very late and gets up at noon the next day. On those days, he goes out in good weather, returns for dinner, and then goes to bed, but he stays at home all day if it rains. He cooks, does dishes, browses the internet, and watches movies at home. Cadman maintains a stricter set of spatial boundaries around his routines than most people, noting:

I just don't mess things up. I sleep in the bedroom, and work in the office. A lot of people browse the internet or watch TV in their bedrooms. I don't do that. I watch TV in the living room. I go to bed, I just sleep.

Cadman's routine is now quite different from when he lived in China. He notes that life in China was more convenient, and he could solve most problems with a phone call. He used to see friends more, and he had more of a social life he engaged in after work. When he first came to Canada, he tried to settle in by finding housing, hiking a lot, and playing ball. But he still thinks of himself as an outsider in Canada.

He notes:

People are cold. They are biased against foreigners. I was born and grew up in Beijing. All my network, my friends are there. I have nothing here. I was often hanging out with my friends before. There are a lot of differences between China and Canada: culture, diet, network. Big differences. I want to go back. I have some Western friends, we hang out, but we're not really close. It is not a language problem, but a culture problem. So I have only a limited social network here.

**Xan**, now in his early forties, first arrived in Canada with his wife about the same time as Cadman. Xan followed his parents here. Then his wife stayed here while he went back to China for a year to finish working, returning in 2007. He has remained in Canada since then. Xan lives in a one-bedroom apartment in Burnaby with his wife and young daughter. His parents live downtown. In China Xan worked as an engineer, and he has found similar work with a company in downtown Vancouver.

On a normal day, Xan wakes up and takes the Skytrain from Burnaby to downtown. He starts work at 7:00 a.m., and has breakfast and lunch at work, before finishing around 3:30pm. Afterwards he often visits his parents.

Otherwise he returns home for dinner. He usually cooks a lot of food, so that half is eaten for dinner, while the other half is reserved for lunch boxes the next day. He makes tea, and eats snacks while watching TV or browsing the Internet in the evening.

Before moving to Canada, Xan lived with his parents in Beijing. Overall, he thought of himself as adaptable, and he didn't think his everyday life had changed all that much with the move. In contrast with Cadman, Xan didn't think of himself as being too social when he lived in China, "not always hanging out," and he feels that he has enough friends here in Vancouver now too:

Some people always say that there is such a big difference between life in China and life in Canada. I don't think it is true. In fact, you just assume that you lived in a different way in China, but you actually forgot how you lived in China. I won't say the transition from China to Canada is smooth. But I think I live the way in which I lived in China. In other words, days in China were neither too good nor too bad.

When he first arrived, Xan took English class, attended events, and got involved in many organizations, including his hometown fellow association. He tried working at the different jobs he could find, and eventually settled in. The main thing keeping him from feeling fully settled seems to be his diet. He misses the food in China:

There are so many kinds of vegetables and ingredients in China, such as soybean curd jelly, dried bean curd. You don't eat them every day. But you can always buy them anywhere when you want. Here, not many things are available. Veggies and fruits are the same in four different seasons. If you shop for groceries on June 1<sup>st</sup>, you get the same things as you get shopping on December 1<sup>st</sup> -- exactly the same things from Southern to Northern Canada in all seasons. No variation in seasonal produce.

While immigration didn't leave Xan feeling especially unsettled (except for the food), the arrival of his daughter a year and a half ago seemed to leave more of an impact. He expects his life will get more complicated as his daughter grows up, and says, "We change as she changes. We will probably get bigger housing, or maybe go back to China for a while."

**Samantha**, now in her late 30s, landed the earliest in Canada of the immigrants profiled here. Before leaving China, she worked at a prestigious institute for transportation design. Now she has her own house cleaning business here in Vancouver. She shares a rented apartment in Burnaby with her husband, her older daughter, in middle school, and her young, preschool-age son. She suggests she feels most at home cleaning things up and shopping.

On a normal day, Samantha gets up, cooks breakfast, and then drops her son off at school. The rest of her day is dependent upon whether or not she has any business. If she does, she heads off to her customers' homes after dropping off her son and frequently works until he finishes school. If not, she returns home, considers what shopping might need to be done, checks her e-mail and makes calls through the afternoon until it is time to pick up her son. In the evening, she watches TV while her husband cooks. Then she plays with the kids after dinner. She checks email and checks information on websites. She sometimes takes her son and daughter to different classes and community programs.

When she lived in China, Samantha worked in the office, and then went to her parents' home for dinner before returning to her own home. Her parents helped her take care of her daughter. Her husband went to his parents' home for dinner before returning home as well. Samantha found life in Canada more reliable and predictable, noting:

I think it is easy to make a living here in Canada. You find a job, whatever it is, you can survive, you can get by, very easy. But in China, I dared not spend the money I had earned. The housing wasn't a problem. But there was no way to save. I had enough! Here the environment is good. I drive every day. I obtained my driver's license here. But I would never drive in Beijing. If I want to change lanes here, someone will wait for me. But I wouldn't be able to make it in China! So I like here. The only pity is that I don't have time to enjoy the outdoors.

When she first moved to Canada, Samantha took a job in a prominent Chinese grocery chain. She quit this job after her son was born. Now, while she has lived in Canada the longest, Samantha is still looking forward to getting more established in her business as a means of feeling more settled and secure:

I think if I have more business, and contract out some jobs, my life will be much better. That will make life different. I will save more and have more time to enjoy life.

## SETTLEMENT AS A PROCESS

The sketches provided above, of daily routines and their change through time, remain quite preliminary. Nevertheless, they reveal a number of interesting things about how settlement unfolds. To start with, two big and interconnected caveats about the possibilities for better understanding immigrant settlement as a process rapidly emerge from examining the data. First, apart from immigration itself, other events in the life course have quite an influence on settlement. For instance, Xan felt like he quickly settled into life in Vancouver after immigrating, but the birth of his daughter was already disrupting old routines, and he expected this to continue as she aged. Similarly, events like Mac's wife's second pregnancy, Cadman's divorce, or the impending departure of Na's son for university, seem to loom as large in terms of disrup-

tions to everyday life as immigration. Second, and likely related, settlement after immigration is quite heterogeneous as a process. Although we looked for ways to simplify the sketches above into a smaller set of illustrative patterns speaking to and categorizing the full range of immigrant experiences, we felt we were unable to do so without losing many of the experiences involved. Indeed, even in selecting twelve vignettes, we sacrifice describing the nineteen others we collected, which would have further expanded the diversity of experiences. Immigrants' experiences with settlement are quite diverse, reflecting, in part, the different life events, often only marginally connected to immigration, that happen to them through the settlement process.

Despite these caveats, which in many ways apply broadly to any study of how people settle down into routines throughout their lives, a number of interesting features of how immigrants come to organize their routines may be discerned. In particular, the establishment of routines seems connected to broader institutional roles and affiliations (e.g., with work, school, etc.), everyday tasks of household maintenance (e.g., food, housework, childcare, etc.), and leisure activities (e.g., watching TV, playing sports, wining and dining, etc.). Each of these spheres of activity presents its own set of possible bases and barriers for settlement as a process. The routines of everyday life, as expressed through these activities, also have differing propensities for stabilizing into self-sustaining patterns. For instance, developing daily routines that do not involve work would eventually leave many people bereft of the resources to support their routines. We discuss each sphere of activities below.

## INSTITUTIONAL ROLES AND AFFILIATIONS

Before leaving Beijing for Vancouver, nearly every immigrant experienced work as a major stabilizing force in terms of his or her everyday routines. Indeed, in many cases, work structured so much of their everyday lives that immigrants found themselves enjoying the chance to do something else upon arriving in Canada. Nevertheless, immigrants like Zada often quickly attempted to get back to work as part of settling in Canada. Unfortunately, many of the jobs they settled into came with their own, built-in forms of everyday instability. Lauren, for instance, is called into work on a part-time basis. Cadman works both morning and evening shifts as a technician, wreaking havoc on his ability to establish a single daily routine. Even so, Cadman's work at least seems to provide a guaranteed source of income. In this sense, if Cadman can manage to get used to his shift work, he can set up the rest of his life's routines in a stable and sustainable manner. But he struggles with whether he has "settled for less" by taking the job. This struggle against "settling for less" is also part of Judy's considerations. She works to find a decent job that would support their other routines and provide for a sustainable future. Samantha evokes a different, but related set of concerns about her previous life in China, where she felt unable to save for the future, even though she tried. She suggests the lack of a sense of sustainability in China was part of what drove her immigration to Canada.

In Canada, Samantha, Lam, and Mac have each gambled on opening up their own businesses. In the long run, such work may hold out the possibility for stabilizing into a routine and providing a sustainable source of income, but neither of these outcomes is certain, and in the short run they may actually conflict with one another as these three participants work to expand

their operations. While immigration programs often seem to encourage such entrepreneurialism, it is far from clear how well opening new businesses fits with the idea of settling down in Canada as a process of routine-building and coming to feel at home.

School provides a different institutional context for the organization of everyday life. Due to the educational requirements for immigration to Canada, immigrants all had extensive experience growing up bound to school routines. Perhaps not surprisingly, school returned as a large part of the everyday life of newer immigrants, including Lauren, Na, and Todd, as they enrolled in English language and work placement programs. These sorts of classes can continue for awhile through settlement. For instance, well after moving to Canada, Judy was still attending English classes on a regular basis and Todd's wife enrolled herself into a long-run collegiate professional program in Canada. However, in the long run schooling for adult immigrants seems more likely to promote settlement into alternative routines, as with Xan's English classes upon first arrival, than to constitute a sustainable routine in its own right.

The schooling of children provides, for most immigrants, far longer lasting sets of institutional routines. Todd, Mac, Judy, and Samantha each indicate spending large proportions of their days shuttling their children to school and to various after school programs. Indeed, the rhythm of their days often seems determined by school bells and extracurricular classes. This produces something of a paradox of settlement. As Xan indicates, uncertainly looking forward to how his daughters' future will disrupt his everyday life, children are fundamentally disruptive forces. Nevertheless, parents often cradle their children in quite rigid routines, supplementing the structure provided by school with further scheduling during their non-school hours. Parents actively work to settle their (often disruptive) children into stable routines, and in so doing,

they also settle themselves. Both schools and after school programs become enlisted as major allies in this endeavour. Enlisting these allies, especially insuring a catchment area with good quality schools and after school programs, both takes time and costs money to sustain. If anything, the monetary costs and time involved tend to be lessened in Canada relative to China – Na, in particular, notes the relief of having her child within walking distance of school. However, for many parents, this is balanced against a loss of extended family and paid support for looking after children. This means that organizing children's lives becomes a major new source of routine for parents in Canada. Many parents enjoyed feeling closer to their children as a result. Nevertheless, losing the support of their extended families in providing time and childcare upon moving to Canada creates the possibility of new and unanticipated work-family conflicts between organizing their children's lives and working to support their children.

## HOUSEHOLD MAINTENANCE

As mentioned above, parents tend to have less support looking after their children in Canada than in China. In particular, grandparents are frequently left behind. Just as strikingly, parents (as well as non-parents) often mention how they could afford to hire nannies and other domestic workers in China. In Canada, few feel such assistance is within their means now. As a result, household chores of all sorts, including childcare, tend to become more important as a source of routine. For instance, many mentioned cleaning (e.g., Mac, Cadman, Todd, Na, Lauren, and Samantha) as a more regular addition to their daily routines. In Mac's case, he took up such work after his wife's second pregnancy – once again highlighting the way events aside from immi-

gration influence settlement. Samantha even described cleaning as making her feel at home, which is why she started her own house cleaning business.

Food was a much stronger source of daily routine and ritual than cleaning. It also constituted a major source of change in routine for most immigrants. Most of the participants we interviewed felt like they rarely cooked back in China. Either others cooked for them, or they ate out most of the time. Upon moving to Canada, cooking became a much stronger part of their routines. Lauren, Na, Todd, Judy, Cadman, and Samantha all integrated cooking into the descriptions of their everyday lives. For Zada and Mac, cooking became so integrated with their routine that they suggested it was a key way they made themselves feel at home.

Ironically, while cooking became a more enjoyable source of routine for most participants, grocery shopping often felt less convenient, and as a result became less a part of some participants' everyday lives. Na and Xan each lamented the loss of the convenience they experienced in China. These concerns were perhaps best highlighted by a study participant (not otherwise profiled above) who moved to one of Vancouver's more dispersed suburban municipalities, where she noted: "It is very inconvenient. You have to drive even go shopping groceries, to supermarket or mall, for at least 15 minutes. In Beijing, there are grocery stores everywhere."

Na and Xan also felt like the foods on offer in Canada were lacking in key respects, and failed to vary with the seasons in a disturbing fashion. For Lauren, her main concern was price, and the feeling that she had to be more careful shopping in Canada in a way she never dealt with before in China. For others, like Samantha, shopping made her feel at home. Tim, still living in China, though in a more rural location where he only shopped once a week

anyway, was looking forward to better shopping in Canada. He anticipated both cheaper and safer food. The focus on safety was again echoed by comments another participant (not profiled above) made:

I buy organic foods at Save On Foods, Whole Foods. I seldom buy things at T&T [an Asian grocery chain]. I think things imported from China might not be safe. But sometime I go there to get Japanese snacks for my kids. They like that.

In this sense, many immigrants found the food safety issues associated with shopping in China to be fundamentally unsettling. As a result, the shopping in Vancouver seemed far less troublesome. Vancouver's more dispersed urban form, especially for those living in the suburbs, meant that many immigrants felt shopping was simply less convenient. Similarly, the food offerings seemed more limited, and less seasonally variable. However, for those concerned with food safety, Vancouver provided far more security, and hence more potential as a good place to settle.

A similar, if less often evoked split was apparent between how people felt about Vancouver as a place to get things done, both in terms of communicating and getting around. Both Cadman and Lam expressed nostalgia for the convenience they experienced in China – especially as it related to their ability to easily communicate or solve problems with a phone call. Zada, a new immigrant who was used to the easy public transit system of Beijing, found the Vancouver area's transit system far less hospitable. By contrast, Samantha, a more established immigrant, contrasted Vancouver's easy driving with her fear of driving in Beijing. Both shopping and transportation point to the way urban form becomes implicated in the settlement process. Even Vancouver, known within North America as having a decent transit system, mixed use planning, and relatively contained sprawl, is experienced by immigrants from

Beijing as lacking in grocery shopping and transit options – especially in the suburbs. Drivers find it easier to get around, but for many, this involves developing a whole new skill set.

## LEISURE

Overall, for most immigrants, it seems that the degree to which they structured their everyday lives around work lessened after moving to Canada. By contrast, their routines came to center more around their immediate families and the tasks of household maintenance. The shifting balance still left most people with at least a little bit of leisure time – and many immigrants gained a lot of leisure time. Leisure activities would seem to provide another option for developing routines and settling in to life in Vancouver.

Given the possibility for leisure activities to provide routine, a few things are striking about the patterns we observed. First, leisure activities tended to shift for most participants, from more widely social activities in China to more individual and family-oriented activities in Vancouver. Second, and related, many leisure activities seemed less routine in Canada than in China. Third, for some, their preferred leisure activities in China became easier to pursue in Canada – mostly due to Vancouver's cleaner and more easily accessible environment.

Many immigrants spent much of their time in China wining and dining in the evenings, regularly eating out and more generally hanging out (playing cards, going to karaoke, etc.) with friends. Others were part of organized sports clubs. These activities got people out and socializing. Upon arriving in Canada, most immigrants turned to less widely social pursuits like watching TV, internet browsing, going to movies, hiking, crab fishing, tai chi, and gardening. These activities probably fail to draw immigrants together with other

locals on a regular basis. For some, like Na, their primary leisure activities are actually oriented toward erasing her relationship to place in favor of maintaining her social ties abroad. All of these individual and family-oriented leisure activities may or may not become part of everyday routines, and are easy to drop. As a result, it is unclear what part leisure activities play in settlement. It is possible that providing more of a leisure-oriented means of regular socializing (e.g., sports leagues) to immigrants might assist in the settlement process, but this is uncertain. It may also be the case that immigrants turn away from broadly social forms of leisure because of their inward turn toward family-oriented activities after arriving in Canada. Or they might increasingly look to relax, during their leisure time, in ways that allow them to avoid having to deal with all the strangers in Vancouver's strange land. Hanging out with other Chinese immigrants presents its own set of problems, as noted by one respondent:

It is this sort of contradiction. You want to be close, but you're afraid to be close. Especially in terms of having your children learn the language. They need to stay away from places with a lot of Chinese. But they feel lonely then.

## PRELIMINARY SUMMARY

We entered the project with the idea that settlement represents a process rather than simply a way of assigning immigrants to locations. We sought out data on immigrants' everyday routines, with the goal of better understanding how they changed through the immigration process. Our preliminary exploration of the data provides convincing evidence that important aspects of immigrant settlement can be understood by investigating everyday routines. Different spheres of activity provide different bases for developing routines,

and these shift in heterogeneous, but nevertheless patterned ways through the immigration process.

The everyday routines immigrants develop after arrival differ from those prior to departure, as well as from those developed after immigrants spend more time establishing themselves. In particular, recent immigrants from Beijing to Vancouver tend to move from work-dominated routines to routines dominated by school and household maintenance. Notably, this differs quite a bit from the understanding of settlement laid out by Piore (1979), reflecting the marked differences in process between Chinese immigration to Canada and Mexican immigration to the United States. In the Canadian context, this means Chinese immigrants often spend more time with their immediate families – especially their children – shortly after arrival. Over time, work may or may not return as a routine stabilizing the character of everyday life. Work can even be a destabilizing force, though the income it brings may be important for insuring other routines are sustainable. Leisure activities tend to alter as part of settlement, especially moving toward more individual and family-oriented activities and away from more broadly social routines.

The role of settlement within immigration remains a complicated one in our analysis. Immigration is often thought of as fundamentally disruptive – a barrier to settling down. But immigration may also be viewed as a fundamental part of settling down. As a disruption, immigration involves shifting an entire set of routines, developed within one place, to a whole new set of routines, developed in another. Immigration is fundamentally unsettling in this regard. It is true that in the case of skilled immigrants to Canada, immigration is typically chosen and planned for well in advance. At the same time, the decision to apply for immigration is made well before acceptance

or landing in Canada. Within our sample, applications for immigration were, on average, submitted three to four years prior to landing. In some cases, five to six years passed between application and arrival. A lot of other life events can happen during the immigration process itself, including marriage, divorce, childbearing, job advancement, etc. Some of these might lead to further settling in to life in China. But other events might lead people to feel fundamentally unsettled in China – even everyday events. Many immigrants expressed feeling like Canada provided a more reliable, predictable, and safe environment than China. Corruption and pollution loomed large as threats to the kinds of everyday routine people wished to establish in China, both for themselves and their children. In this sense, Canada was viewed by many as a good place for settling down more than a disruption to their existing settlement patterns.

This returns us to our other major findings: 1) immigration should be considered only one of many major unsettling events in the life course, each with its own potential to shape and reshape everyday routines, and 2) the variety of life events people encounter, as well as forces as diverse as peoples' resources, family situations, and individual personalities, interact with immigration in such a way as to produce a great deal of heterogeneity concerning the experience of settlement.

Here we wish to open the field by reconsidering settlement as a process. Many important questions remain to be taken up and studied within the settlement literature. A key question we will continue to explore as we follow the immigrants within our sample is how the fundamental stability and sustainability of routines might be better measured and understood. Similarly, how might routines provide a resource for people – a sense of belonging and of being at home – but also sometimes produce boredom and a desire for es-

cape, as when people feel stuck in routines. This will help resolve how immigration might work to provide both adventure and stability to immigrants. Further down the line, the study of settlement may also help promote better understandings of immigrant integration and adaptation.

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