

Immigration, Ethnicity and Multiculturalism Revisiting Chinese

Community Organization in Canada

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Canada is an immigrant society. Immigration has played an important role in transforming Canada into an ethnoculturally diverse and economically prosperous nation. The 2006 Census of Canada (Statistics Canada, 2007) reveals that 19.8% of the total population were born outside the country, and that 16.2% identified themselves as visible minorities. Also according to the 2006 census, the Chinese have become one of the largest visible minority groups in Canada, exceeding a total of one million people. At the provincial level, Chinese residents comprised the largest proportion of the visible minority populations in British Columbia (44%), Alberta (30%), and Saskatchewan (29%).

Despite our rich history in immigration and the strategic role it plays in our future, the issue of immigrant settlement and adaptation is still prominent. We are constantly debating the role of ethnic community organizations. Very often ethno-specific organizations are criticized for threatening national unity, diluting Canadian identity, and promoting ghettoization and separatism. Drawing from two case studies, this article examines the role of Chinese ethnic organizations in responding to changing community needs in Edmonton and Calgary. The study reveals that ethno-specific organizations can be an effective alternative in providing accessible and equitable social services for immigrants because they were more closely connected with and responsive to ethnic community needs. The study reveals the salience of ethnicity as an important resource as well as a liability. On the one hand, ethnicity was utilized by the state as a way to mobilize ethnic political support to serve an ethnic-specific community; on the other hand, the same ethnicity also became a device for the state to legitimize its political agenda in multiculturalizing ethno-specific organizations with an ultimate goal of assimilation. To build an inclusive society, it is imperative to treat ethno-specific organizations as an integral part of Canadian society and to adopt minority rights that recognize and accommodate the distinctive identities and needs of ethno-cultural groups and their ethnic communities.