

The Canadian Friendship Program (or Host Program) and Immigrant retention on Prince Edward Island

A research project conducted by Godfrey Baldacchino and Lisa Chilton
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Main findings of survey responses

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1. Survey period:

- May 26th, 2009 to July 4th, 2009.

2. Main facts of personal information section

A. Number of respondents & nationality distribution: Total 33 respondents

- 24 from Korea
- 3 from China
- 2 from Afghanistan
- 1 from Japan
- 1 from Peru
- 1 from Holland
- 1 from Taiwan

B. Age distribution

- a. 18-30-year-old: total 3 (none from Korea): Usually young people who have immigrated to PEI by themselves, without family members, as a skilled worker.
- b. 31-45-year-old: total 12 (8 from Korea, 4 from other country)
- c. 46-60-year-old: total 18 (16 from Korea, 2 from other country)

C. Gender distribution

- a. Male: total 17 (12 from Korea, 5 from other country)
- b. Female: total 16 (12 from Korea, 4 from other country)

D. Education level

- a. Secondary/High School: total 1 (from Korea, female)
- b. University/College: total 21 (15 from Korea, 6 from other country)
- c. University/Master/PhD: total 9 (8 from Korea, 1 from China)
- d. Currently attending university: total 2

E. Career (only among Korean interviewees)

- a. No career experience: total 7 among Korean females
- b. Former career was usually professional occupation, such as financial advisor, teachers, computer programmer, etc. Some Korean females were teachers, or worked at an education-related field since teacher is considered a very stable and good job for women in Korea. Among young people who have immigrated by themselves usually had a computer-related career, or had a knowledge in the computer-related field so they could get a job easier than other older immigrants.

3. Main findings

A. Why Decide to Migrate & Why PEI?

Almost every immigrant answered the most reason they chose PEI for immigration was because of PNP. Many of them said that they considered PNP would be the best, easiest, and faster way to immigrate to Canada, thus PNP certainly attracted many immigrants since the investment idea seemed very practical.

Many Korean people including Chinese interviewees said another main reason would be a better educational atmosphere and system in Canada. As it is well-known now, education level is one of the strongest key to success in Asian countries. Korean, Chinese, and Japanese parents are really dedicated to their children's education so that their children can achieve higher level of social status. During 1990s to early 2000s, Korean parents usually sent their children abroad alone, supporting them from Korea, but it brought about some social issues since it kept families apart. Also, some children who went to other countries alone at their teenage had many difficulties to adapt to a new place, new culture, and more, so some of them came back to Korea with no achievement, or worse results, such as drug addiction or gang-related issues. Those issues made many Korean people blame their parents as well as those youngsters, thus for a while, many Korean people were very much against studying abroad.

However, those issues did not stop many Korean people who wanted to go abroad, and they found a better way – that was a family immigration. Family immigration is related to three main reasons: economic crisis, education issue, and a quality of life. Economic crisis is a global phenomenon, and Korea is no exception. Although many Korean people have achieved a high level of education, they look forward to getting the same or higher level of career, and many people have had

difficulties to achieve what they desire because of economic crisis. This issue made many Korean people down and frustrated because they could not achieve anything they wanted even though they graduated from a top school in Korea or other country. Also, many Korean parents have realized that supporting their children for study abroad costs too much, and it is hard to get a great result when their children come back to Korea for their career. Since educating children in Korea demands a lot of money as well – it is certainly beyond imagination – Korean parents finally found a new way; family immigration. They convince themselves that family immigration will give them a lot of new opportunities, especially in terms of a better quality of life and a better education atmosphere for their children. Speaking of quality of life, many Korean people have said that prices go up over and over and their salary is still the same. They work harder, but they realize again they cannot change anything in a better way while they live in Korea speculating those intertwined social issues.

I think those social issues are almost the same in Japan. One Japanese interviewee said that he immigrated to PEI because he wanted to change his life style. When he worked in Tokyo, he said he worked six days, morning to night, and definitely no time to enjoy his life what so ever. He was absolutely stressed out, and finally he found that he should get out of Japan, which would be the best way to change his life. He has been staying in PEI around 4 years now, and he said he has been much happier here, and very satisfied with his choice of immigration.

There were more young immigrants who immigrated to PEI as skilled workers, but I did not have enough time to follow these up. However, it is very certain that those young immigrants are usually more satisfied with their life on PEI than other family immigrants. I think it is because their expectation is different from family immigrants. Usually young immigrants do not have a high expectation as much as family immigrants have. Family immigrants have very high expectations for their children as well as for themselves. Yet, young immigrants usually pursue only “a little bit better” life style, or they just want to live abroad. Also, young immigrants do not have any family members here, so they have more freedom to their life, or for what they want to do. Add to this, those young immigrants usually are skilled workers, usually in the computer-related field, so they do not have to worry about their career so much here as well. I would call those young skilled worker immigrants are a new type of group, which would be different from family immigrants group.

On the other hand, family immigrants are more likely to be frustrated easily if things are not going well after they immigrate to PEI because of their high expectations from immigration. Staying with children usually make Korean parents feel more pressure since Korean parents think that they always have to show their strong sides to their children. Older people’s faults, mistakes, or any weaknesses are hard to be understood to Korean people, especially to younger people. That’s why Korean parents are more likely to be stressed out if they are in a situation they cannot handle. This Korean people’s perspective should be considered deeply to find the main reason why many Korean immigrants complain to the PEI government about PNP-related issue, and why many of them decide to leave PEI.

As it is mentioned earlier, PNP certainly attracted many immigrants to PEI.

Many people said that PNP is a great idea, and one Chinese man said, “I really like the idea of investment because it is very practical.” However, many people also said that PNP has a lot of issues because the PEI government is not doing well with the initial idea of PNP. Many immigrants stated they like PEI, but they are very much against the PEI government since what the PEI government doing is putting many immigrants at a number of disadvantages financially and psychologically. One interviewee from Holland who has experienced a lot of issues related to his deposit-back from the government said, “I don’t trust the PEI government at all, and I think the PEI government doesn’t exist on PEI. If there was a government, this wouldn’t happen to me. I think, behind all the PNP issues, there are only lawyers who have enough knowledge of investment and are able to make no-deposit-back job legally without difficulties. They’re all involved, and they don’t care about how immigrants feel about that. They don’t care whether we’re leaving or not. All they want is just money. That’s all.” He said again that he does not want to recommend PEI to anyone for immigration, and he has already decided to leave at the end of July.

One female interviewee from Taiwan said, “If the PEI government doesn’t want to give the deposit back to the immigrants, they at least should invest that big money to make something better for immigrants here, such as making ESL class better for children, investing in a better school system, or developing job training programs for immigrants. Just not only for immigrants, they could use that money for PEI as well, such as for schools. As you know, a lot of schools closed here last few years. What the PEI government is doing for that? Education is very closely related to local economic development. If they really wanted to make PEI’s economic future better, I think they definitely were able to do it with the huge money from immigrants. However, still there are not enough jobs here so even many local people, especially young people, also want to leave to earn money outside of PEI. I have no idea what the PEI government is doing for dealing with those issues here.”

Obviously, the biggest issue is the overflowed mistrust of the PEI government, and the PNP issue provokes immigrants mainly related to no-deposit-back problem. Also, too many changes of the immigration policy by the PEI government has increased mistrust among immigrants. They said there are too many changes on the immigration policy here, so it is hard to rely on. There problem here is that immigrants are not sure if they could have benefited from the newly revised immigration policy, as they already have lost trust in the PEI government.

B. Job Opportunity Issues

One of the most mentioned reason that has made immigrants decide to leave PEI was that is a perception that there is no job opportunity for immigrants on PEI. Personally, I think job opportunity is a little bit arguable. Speaking of job in other country, immigrants need to speak English fluently, which maybe the most basic requirement for getting a regular job. However, most of immigrants who are at their age of 40 to 60 do not speak English well and they are still struggling with it. Therefore, I felt like what immigrants are asking of job opportunity without enough language ability does not make sense because they certainly knew that this country they chose to live in

would be an English-speaking country. Then, without speaking English, how can they get a job here? Yet, speculating immigrants' opinions upon lack of job opportunities on PEI, I think there are two main reasons why they want to get a job. First, immigrants have to stay on PEI for the required period until they meet the entire requirements that the PEI government ask, which means they have to stay on PEI at least some years. During that time, how are immigrants possibly support them without earning money here? This has brought another issue among some family; breadwinner, a father, still has to keep working in their own country to support their family who are staying here. And this separated family faces one more issue; if the initial applicant, usually the breadwinner, does not stay with his family on PEI during the required period, they never get the deposit back from the PEI government. Some female immigrants explained about that issue; "I think it doesn't make sense. We, of course, want to stay together here. But if we stay here for 2 or 3 years without earning money, do you think it is possible? We're not a rich, and we have our children to support. We immigrated to Canada for a better life, not for a worse situation. What the PEI government asking is just staying here together no matter what. Then, are they going to support us? No, they don't care. They also don't want to give the deposit back to us because my husband doesn't stay here with us. It is not because my husband doesn't want to stay here with us, but it is because my husband can't stay here with us!"

Second, some immigrants are not even confident with their language ability; they just want to try to work while they stay here. Living without doing nothing for 2 or 3 years would be hard to them since almost every immigrant had a long career. At this point, Asian people's work ethic should be considered. Asian people are usually hard workers; especially Asian men, as they have a very big responsibility for their family as well as their job. They are proud of themselves for what they are doing, which constructs their identity and the status of their family members and society. Particularly to older Asian men, becoming a stay-at-home daddy is a big shame even though they are now in a different situation because of immigration. They are afraid of being useless, having nothing to do, and finally being neglected at home and in society. That is why they need something to do because it is their work ethic and their norms based on their Asian background.

Some male interviewees suggested job-related ideas. Some people said the PEI government should hire immigrants so that they can work for immigrants themselves. What they said is that, even though there are a lot of immigrants who achieved a high level of education and great careers, the PEI government has wasted all those great human resources who might have contributed to PEI in many positive ways. One Chinese interviewee said, "PEI is certainly a poor place, so PEI needs two things to make things better; one is capital, and the other is human resources. I think now PEI has both thanks to immigrants, but they just don't know how to use both great chances but wasting them." The other Korean man said, "I think the PEI government has to develop a kind of immigrants' market on PEI. It's like the China town in other cities. Every worker should be an immigrant there, only immigrants can work there, but the business can be done with anyone for selling, buying, or any dealing related to their business. I think that kind of immigrants' market may contribute to immigrants'

finances as well as the PEI economy.”

C. Host Program & PEI-ANC

Many people said that if they can get a job, they will consider settling down here, but without any job opportunity, they do not want to stay here longer. Related to the Host Program, some people said they wish they could learn something about job opportunity from the volunteers, but only few people said they got a little job information, and almost every immigrant said they did not learn any job-related information from the volunteers. Some people said that those volunteers who matched up with them through the Host Program were usually good people, yet it seemed to be hard to meet the right volunteers that immigrants wanted to be matched with based on their expectations. Add to that, some interviewees said those volunteers did not have a great sense of understanding about immigrants, so there were not many immigrants who were very satisfied with the Host Program. Many said that those volunteers need to be educated for learning what they are doing with immigrants, and also PEI-ANC should keep an eye on both parties to figure out what goes on between them. I think that opinion is the same that I suggested as a panel at the presentation in May; “after-care system” should be set up to make the Host Program better.

Some immigrants also pointed out that PEI-ANC should deal with immigrants and refugees as different categories, not as belonging to the same category. I was actually surprised that PEI-ANC put PNP immigrants and refugees in the same category for the Host Program, or English tutor program. PNP Immigrants and refugees are definitely different groups. Thus, their expectations, situations, perspectives plus many things about them are absolutely unlike. Since I met only two refugees, I did not know how other refugees felt about the Host Program; but those two refugees were very satisfied with the Host Program and the volunteers they got matched up with. Many immigrants said that the level of satisfaction related to PEI-ANC’s service or offered programs would be much higher among refugees than immigrants, as PEI-ANC is more likely to care about refugees. Considering their status as a refugee, it is right PEI-ANC tries to take care of them more than immigrants; however, the underlying issue is how immigrants feel about that. Refugees would appreciate many things they got offered by PEI-ANC and they might think PEI saved their lives opening many new doors for a new life in Canada. One female interviewee said, “This Island gave me a lot of opportunities so that I could change my life.” However, immigrants came here investing their big money, therefore, they would consider their immigration like a deal between the PEI government and themselves. A good deal should make a good balance between two parties, and the deal cannot be considered a good deal if a good balance does not exist between them. Many immigrants already have got upset with the PNP issues, and even they feel they have not been treated well enough by PEI-ANC, this agency remains the only group on PEI that can deal with come-from-aways. Immigrants cannot go anywhere to discuss their problems if PEI-ANC does not help them with well-established programs for immigrants.

PEI-ANC should remember that what immigrants want is different from what refugees need, and what immigrants want should not be neglected based on their better

finances or social status. Being neglected by the PEI government as well as by the PEI-ANC does affect immigrants psychologically developing much worse feelings toward the entire image of PEI. In the long term, it may harm the image of Canada as well. One of the male interviewees said that his perspective upon Canada has changed in a bad way because of his terrible experiences on PEI, and now he even does not believe any themes of Canada, such as multiculturalism and diversity, which has become fake images of Canada to him. Many immigrants also said that they do not wish to recommend PEI as an immigration destination to their friends or family. This could be the first step in the reduction of the number of immigrants to PEI in the future. It is true that there has been a lot of capital influx to PEI thanks to the increased number of immigrants here in the last few years. Yet, many immigrants already have decided to leave PEI in the near future, and the investor stream PNP regulations have now been changed and made more stringent for potential immigrant investors. If all those immigrants leave PEI in some years, I think there will be economic changes on PEI, and I do not think about it positively even though PEI may be fine for some years, thanks to the huge amounts of money that many immigrants have brought in.

D. Another Strong Factor of Decision-Making: Education for Children

Many immigrants pointed out that one of the main reasons of immigration is for their children: for a better education atmosphere and system. Education fever is absolutely high in Korea, and in most of Asian countries. Also, many other immigrants who are not from Korea said they really care about their children's education. Some Korean immigrants said that they have not decided to leave PEI to go to other city or not because their children are still attending a school here. However, they also said that they would stay on PEI for some years until their children finish their school, and they would move to somewhere depending on their children's further education, such as entering a university in a bigger city.

Speaking of PEI schools, not many people said the educational system is very well-established even though their children are doing well in their schools. For instance, UPEI has lost a lot of international students last few years even though I have no idea if UPEI has recognized it. Many international students, especially Chinese students, have left UPEI to transfer to another university. I personally considered transferring to another school as well, and one Korean guy student who immigrated here last year told me that he decided to transfer to a bigger university in 2 years. He even made up his mind after only one semester studying at UPEI. Also, some Chinese students at UPEI already have been working on process for transferring to another school for last few months so they will leave UPEI next year. Of course, there will be a lot of new international students at UPEI since UPEI is trying to promote more international students these days. However, at the same time, UPEI will lose many bright international students every year. To me, this phenomenon seems like to be the relation between immigrants and the PEI government: UPEI is not interested in what they are losing, as like the PEI government.

How to influence immigrants' decision-making? I would say that invest more money in educational institutions on PEI, make UPEI a better university, and try to care

about international students more. Many immigrants have their children who are attending a high school now, so they will make a decision whether they leave PEI or not in a few years when their children finish their schools. At the decision-making moment, would UPEI be considered? How many immigrant students would decide to study at UPEI for their degree? How many international students would finally finish their degree at UPEI?

4. My reaction

The main reason why many immigrants were not much interested in participating in this survey was because many of them had already decided to leave PEI. So, it was like, “none of my business now” attitude. Also, they were a little bit concerned about their privacy since we all know that this is a very small town where everyone knows everyone. Above all, except for a few, many of them did not believe that this research project would impact positively on their problem-solving needs. I think that was one of the biggest factors as to why many immigrants were not interested in the survey.

Admittedly, before I started my interviews, I did not think immigrants would have a lot of difficulties while they stayed here. To me, immigrants were people who have enough finances because they migrated to PEI through the PNP investing their capital, which means that they should not have financial difficulties as much as I got through myself. It was like the same perspective from Islanders upon international students at UPEI. I heard that many Islanders consider international students rich since they would be paying double tuition rates compared to Canadian students. I considered immigrants in the same light, but based on financial status. However, I found that my perspective upon immigrants was narrow and limited, without due regard for many intertwined issues, until I started to meet immigrants in person.

I think that a better relationship needs to be developed between immigrants and the PEI government, so that immigrants can trust the government more. Trust is a basic social norm that many Asian people still strongly believe in. Considering that the main group of recent immigrants to PEI is from Asian countries, trust cannot be a neglected issue at all. Therefore, I think building trust between immigrants and the PEI government is a significant issue.

Speaking of PEI-ANC, I think PEI-ANC should develop more various and practical programs for immigrants, such as career or financial counseling programs. Add to that, it is better to hire more people who can speak immigrants’ own language, as some immigrants said. Many immigrants still do not speak English well; so some of them are just afraid of visiting PEI-ANC because they have to talk to native speakers there. Also, if PEI-ANC hires more people who are from the immigrants’ country, it will be a great opportunity to understand easier what immigrants want.

I wish I could interview more immigrants from more various countries, but I was pleased that I could learn many things through all the interviews, which helped me expand my own perspective. I really hope that this research project can contribute to making a better immigration policy for PEI.