

# Millionaire Migrants: Trans-Pacific Life Lines

David Ley

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## Millionaire Migrants

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This edition first published 2010

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Blackwell Publishing was acquired by John Wiley & Sons in February 2007. Blackwell's publishing program has been merged with Wiley's global Scientific, Technical, and Medical business to form Wiley-Blackwell.

*Registered Office*

John Wiley & Sons Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, United Kingdom

*Editorial Offices*

350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA

9600 Garsington Road, Oxford, OX4 2DQ, UK

The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

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*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Ley, David.

Millionaire migrants: trans-Pacific life lines/David Ley.

p. cm. – (RBS-IBG book series)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4051-9291-0 (hardcover: alk. paper) – ISBN 978-1-4051-9292-7 (pbk.: alk.

paper) 1. East Asia—Emigration and immigration. 2. Canada—Emigration and immigration.

3. Elite (Social sciences)—East Asia. 4. Elite (Social sciences)—Canada. 5. International busi-

ness enterprises—East Asia. 6. International business enterprises—Canada. 7. Transnationalism.

I. Title.

JV8756.5.L49 2010

304.8095—dc22

2009036205

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Set in 10/12pt Plantin by SPi Publisher Services, Pondicherry, India

Printed in Malaysia

# Contents

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<i>List of Figures</i>	vi
<i>List of Tables</i>	viii
<i>Series Editors' Preface</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	x
1 Introduction: Trans-Pacific Mobility and the New Immigration Paradigm	1
2 Transition: From the Orient to the Pacific Rim	32
3 Calculating Agents: Millionaire Migrants Meet the Canadian State	66
4 Geography (still) Matters: <i>Homo Economicus</i> and the Business Immigration Programme	98
5 Embodied Real Estate: The Cultural Mobility of Property	126
6 Immigrant Reception: Contesting Globalization... or Resistant Racism?	162
7 Establishing Roots: From the Nuclear Family to Substantive Citizenship	196
8 Roots and Routes: The Myth of Return or Transnational Circulation?	225
9 Conclusion: Immigrants in Space	250
<i>Notes</i>	260
<i>References</i>	278
<i>Index</i>	309

# List of Figures

---

1.1	Pender Street, Chinatown, 2008	18
1.2	Concord Pacific Place (left to right), fronting Vancouver's downtown peninsula, 2008	18
2.1	Distribution of self-designated ethnic Chinese, City of Vancouver, 1971	36
2.2	Restoring Chinatown, 1970s	39
2.3	Exports from British Columbia, 1992–2006	43
2.4	Imports to British Columbia, 1992–2006	44
2.5	Air passenger traffic through YVR on selected routes, 1984–2000	45
2.6	Canadian economic indicators, 1961–95	47
3.1	Hong Kong, Taiwanese and South Korean landings in Canada, 1980–2001	74
3.2	Remembering Tiananmen Square: The Goddess of Democracy memorial in Vancouver	75
3.3	Hong Kong and Taiwanese landings in Greater Vancouver, 1980–2001	76
4.1	Homeownership in 1996 among 1986–96 landings of self-designated ethnic Chinese households, Vancouver CMA	116
4.2	Households below the poverty line in 1996 among 1986–1996 landings of self-designated ethnic Chinese households, Vancouver CMA	117
5.1	Selling the Palisades: marketing downtown Vancouver condominiums in Hong Kong, 1996	134
5.2	Major development projects and downtown neighbourhoods	137
5.3	Million dollar house listings for two agents, Westside Vancouver, 1996–98	141

5.4	Asian-themed malls in part of north-central Richmond	145
5.5	Distribution of self-designated ethnic Chinese, City of Vancouver, 1981	147
5.6	Distribution in 1996 of self-designated ethnic Chinese, landing in Canada 1986–96, Vancouver CMA	149
5.7	MLS real house prices in eight Canadian CMAs, 1971–96	151
5.8	House prices, immigration and domestic migration, Greater Vancouver, 1977–2002	153
6.1	Essential Shaughnessy	167
6.2	‘Style wars’: a large modern house in Westside Vancouver, built c 1990, comprehensively renovated to a traditional vernacular style, c 2000	182
6.3	Westside neighbourhoods and zoning interventions, early 1990s	184
6.4	The compromise landscape: a large new house with revival elements including gables, turret, cedar shakes, ornate brick chimney, wood mouldings and stone wall, marketed by Manyee Lui	193
7.1	Provincial ranks of Westside secondary schools, 2002–06	210
8.1	Chek Lap Kok airport, Hong Kong	227

# List of Tables

---

2.1	Immigrant landings in Canada by destination and class of entry, 1980–2001	60
2.2	Business class landings by type in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver, by country of last permanent address, 1980–2001	63
3.1	Reasons cited by business immigrants for migration to Canada/Vancouver	77
5.1	Correlates of annual nominal house prices in Vancouver, 1971–96	154
5.2	Selected correlates of changing dwelling values in Vancouver CMA by census tract, 1986–96	155
6.1	Resident preferences for downzoning changes, Westside neighbourhoods, 1992	186
8.1	Estimation of the loss of Hong Kong and Taiwanese immigrants from Canada	233
8.2	Contrasting attributes, among Hong Kong-born, of returnees to Hong Kong and, stayers in Canada	235

# Series Editors' Preface

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The RGS-IBG Book Series only publishes work of the highest international standing. Its emphasis is on distinctive new developments in human and physical geography, although it is also open to contributions from cognate disciplines whose interests overlap with those of geographers. The Series places strong emphasis on theoretically-informed and empirically-strong texts. Reflecting the vibrant and diverse theoretical and empirical agendas that characterize the contemporary discipline, contributions are expected to inform, challenge and stimulate the reader. Overall, the RGS-IBG Book Series seeks to promote scholarly publications that leave an intellectual mark and change the way readers think about particular issues, methods or theories.

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# Acknowledgements

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Whether authors are aware of it or not, book writing is a social project. The characters backstage do much more than act as a supporting cast to enable the front stage actions of the alternately inspired and anguished author. In ways that are never quite evident to anyone they provide the social environment in which projects are born and develop.

So I gladly acknowledge my colleagues in Geography at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. As a 'lifer' at UBC I have benefitted enormously from the high academic standards and collegial environment sustained by faculty – an all too rare combination – that provided the milieu from which this book emerged. Past and present graduate and post-doctoral students I have mentored in Geography within the field of immigration and urbanization have also made a huge contribution through their own thesis work, as research assistants, or as commentators on all or part of the manuscript. I gratefully acknowledge the diverse contributions of Kay Anderson, Lachlan Barber, Harald Bauder, Laura Beattie, Jon Clifton, Heather Frost, Will Harvey, Elaine Ho, Sarah Jackson, Pablo Mendez, Markus Moos, Alison Mountz, Nick Lynch, Kris Olds, John Rose, Lawrence Santiago, Heather Smith, Dan Swanton, Sin Yih Teo, Justin Tse, Judy Tutchener, Luna Vives, Jo Waters and Graham Webber. Priscilla Wei was an exemplary administrator and also a resourceful project manager and key informant.

At an institutional level the Metropolis Project has continuously funded this research through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. 'Metropolis' created a valuable network of researchers, community practitioners and government policy managers. In particular I wish to thank Don DeVoretz, my co-Director at the Vancouver Metropolis Centre from 1996–2003, Dan Hiebert, my able successor and long-time ally, and Meyer Burstein and Howard Duncan at Citizenship and Immigration Canada who created and shepherded the Metropolis experiment with insight and

broad-mindedness. Invaluable to my own work was the co-operation of SUCCESS and its impressive CEOs, Tung Chan and the late Lilian To, a leader who brought an extraordinary blend of professional energy and pastoral care to immigrant settlement. For fieldwork in Hong Kong I am grateful to George Lin at the University of Hong Kong for his generosity and direction, to John Ma (Hong Kong University of Science and Technology) for valuable exchanges both on and off the tennis court, and to Chung Him (Hong Kong Baptist University). In Taipei I enjoyed the hospitality and local knowledge of Nora Chiang and her students and colleagues at the National Taiwan University. Through presentations and conversations through the Metropolis international network and other venues I learned from a talented multidisciplinary crew including Dick Bedford, Jock Collins, Kevin Dunn, Dan Hiebert, Audrey Kobayashi, Wei Li, Katharyne Mitchell, Ceri Peach, Valerie Preston, Jan Rath, Paul Spoonley, Steve Vertovec and Brenda Yeoh, who held me accountable in a spirit of supportive criticism.

In the final stages of the project I am very grateful for Kevin Ward's careful stewardship as Editor of the valuable RGS-IBG research series, and for the publishing expertise of Jacqueline Scott, Liz Cremona and their teams at Wiley-Blackwell. Once again I acknowledge Eric Leinberger's skilled hand in cartography.

A book project is never left behind in the office or the field, and I thank my family - Sandy, Katy, Mike, Susie and Chris - for their own special contributions and for allowing too many intrusions on family time. Finally, I am deeply grateful to the creative migrants from East Asia who shared their stories with a cultural interloper and made this project not only possible but also rewarding. In addition, I acknowledge the remarkable city of Vancouver, the other half of the fusion of people and place, which has provided such a compelling laboratory for a study of transnational migration.

*David Ley, July 2009*



# Chapter One

## Introduction: Trans-Pacific Mobility and the New Immigration Paradigm

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*The Commission concludes that the old paradigm of permanent migrant settlement is giving way to temporary and circular migration*

Global Commission on International Migration 2005: 31

Following two years of consultation and analysis, the Global Commission on International Migration reported back to the Secretary-General of the United Nations in October 2005 (Martin and Martin 2006). Its report sought to organize and, through its own influence, disseminate to a governance and policy audience a new understanding of international migration that departed from an established paradigm. Conventional understanding, familiar to the administrators and theorists of new world settler societies, has spun a linear narrative of immigrant departure from the homeland, followed by the serial processes of arrival, settlement, citizenship and assimilation within the enveloping arms of a single nation state. But it has become apparent that this tidy arrangement has decreasing purchase in an era of unprecedented global mobility, labour flexibility and household dispersal. Transnationalism has become an umbrella term to describe the contemporary hyper-mobility of migrants across national borders, both those who are poor, sometimes undocumented, and merely tolerated or worse, and also those who are skilled or wealthy and eagerly solicited by nation states. Transnational migrants maintain connections in both their nations of origin and destination by e-mail, internet and telephone, through travel, economic ties and remittances, and in continuing social and cultural relationships. For a minority, political activity sustains contacts and commitments, especially when facilitated by the enfranchisement of dual citizenship.

Alternating periods of residence in origin and destination countries are variable, in some instances seasonal or short-term, while others again are part of a careful life plan of repeated movement that coincides with significant

status passages. The prospect of movement is always latent, ready to be triggered by a family decision or an external event. So migration as described in the UN Commission's text becomes more temporary, more circular, more flexible, than the conventional paradigm imagined. Mobility is not only shaped by immediate economic gradients, but also by other household projects that may well require the family itself to be globalized, dispersed among at least two nations, with periodic departures and reunions of family members. A fraught illustration of such transnationalism became evident during the war in Lebanon in the summer of 2006. As nations speedily assembled an armada to rescue their expatriates in Lebanon, transnational citizens of Canada and Australia proved unexpectedly numerous. Canada discovered 40–50,000 citizens living in Lebanon in July 2006, almost double the number of American nationals, while Australia, with 25,000, enumerated more citizens in this formerly francophone nation than France (Saunders et al. 2006). Both states had small missions in Lebanon and were surprised and administratively overwhelmed by the scale of their populations. In appeals for a speedy registration prior to evacuation, and in a context of difficult communications, close to 40,000 Lebanese residents contacted the Canadian embassy in Beirut claiming citizenship. Some were on holiday with family members, but others were living more continuously in Lebanon and many were employed there. The Canadian state discovered an unanticipated transnational colony that it had obligations to rescue in precarious war conditions.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile in Hong Kong there are repeated estimates of more than 200,000 Canadian citizens among the former colony's population of some seven million.<sup>2</sup> They have travelled to Canada, lived temporarily, and have chosen to return, at least for now, but have not eliminated the prospect of a further trans-Pacific move in the future.<sup>3</sup> Returnees are primarily middle-class and upper middle-class; some are affluent business people, or less commonly, professionals. Their numbers include well-educated 1.5-generation<sup>4</sup> and second-generation young adults from Canada who have re-located to Hong Kong to begin their working careers. Hong Kong returnees share their transnational behaviour with similar if less numerous elites in Taiwan and smaller groups from South Korea. This cohort, some of them wealthy millionaire migrants who live, for now, either in Canada or East Asia, are the subject of this book and exemplify to a tee the new paradigm of temporary and circular migration.

## **Geographies of Transnational Migration**

The literature on transnational migration is now large, interdisciplinary, and becoming global,<sup>5</sup> as migration itself links ever more national origins in the global south with primarily metropolitan destinations in the global

north, creating what Steven Vertovec (2006) calls a condition of 'superdiversity' in the gateway cities of Europe, North America and Australasia.<sup>6</sup> The earliest research, by anthropologists, identified repeated international movement and frequent communication by Mexican and Caribbean migrants between their home countries and the United States (Rouse 1992; Glick Schiller et al. 1992; Basch et al. 1994). Cross-border social networks were also economic channels as significant flows of remittances from savings were sent home by migrants to their families, priming local economic development; contacts might also become political networks as Caribbean and Central American politicians carried their election campaigns to expatriate populations in American cities.

These social networks, projected onto space, shape the important concept of a transnational social field, where 'migrants, through their life ways and daily practices, reconfigure space so that their lives are lived simultaneously within two or more nation-states' (Basch et al. 1994: 28). The porosity of national borders and the repeated mobility of migrants passing through them, documented and undocumented, give rise to a sense of a changing spatiality: nations have become 'unbound', migrants 'deterritorialized' and 'ungrounded', citizenship itself is conditional and flexibly incorporated into migrant biographies. The coherent profile of a world (and subjective identities) tightly organized around nation states as containers of national citizens seems to be unravelling. Some argue that this is nothing new; the great European migration to the 'new world' between 1880 and 1930 had also included much coming and going, with a significant fraction of immigrants returning to their homeland (Foner 2000). But this interpretation, while respected, has not prevailed; the scale of cross-border transactions permitted by cheap travel and electronic communications together with various innovations (including the status of dual citizenship) define a substantially novel phenomenon.

Early ethnographic interpretations of transnationalism were challenged in a damaging criticism for including a sampling bias (Portes et al. 2002). By highlighting only observations of transnational behaviour from small samples, and disregarding migrant cases where such linkages were not sustained, researchers were 'sampling on the dependent variable', thereby inflating the scale of transnational activity. In contrast, Portes suggested, and implemented, standardized measurement across large samples, to demonstrate the extent of transnationalism and permit comparative surveys across world regions. With these stringent requirements, transnationalism remained a significant feature, though the incidence of political and economic activities was shown to be less extensive than social transactions. This literature demonstrates the advantage of both extensive and intensive methods, adding the discipline of large samples that ease validity concerns to the interpretive depth of ethnographic study, a model that I will attempt to follow in my own mixed-methods approach.

In contrast to transnational corporate capitalism, migrant transnationalism is regarded as 'transnationalism from below' (Portes et al. 1999), a term disclosing two emphases. First, it implies a level of active agency among migrants, in contrast to the economic language of labour flows that has prevailed in the globalisation and world cities literature (Smith 2001). Second, there is also a sense of migrants as transgressors, undercutting the authority of the state in their movements and flexible use of citizenship (Ong 1999), or their participation in cross-border non-governmental organisations that operate as transnational advocacy groups (Smith 2001). Indeed some cultural theorists have romanticized the hybrid identities of migrants for providing a cosmopolitan in-betweenness with a superior position for adapting to a globalizing world, though Mitchell (1997a) has deflated some of the excess from this discourse on hybridity.

While transnationalism presents a fundamentally geographical imagination of here, there, across, and between, the use of spatial terms, such as social field or social space, transnational circuits or cross-border spatialities, has often been metaphorical and loosely defined. An important theoretical objective of this book is to carry forward the beginnings made by geographers in burrowing more fully into the concrete places and imagined spaces of transnationalism.<sup>7</sup> This specificity is all the more necessary because globalization theory, in presenting an alternate 'transnationalism from above', commonly evokes abstract spaces of flows and networks that comprise 'a system of variable geometry and dematerialized geography' (Castells 1996: 359). Such abstract spaces, in Castells' influential thinking, have prevailed over the empirical 'spaces of places' that include particular nations, cities and neighbourhoods (Murray 2006). Transnationalism from above alludes to electronic communications and dramatic real decreases in transportation costs that have achieved time-space compression in a shrinking world, minimizing it seems the effects of distance and the play of geography for global economic actors. The footloose transnational corporation has also benefited from the growth of free trade and the reduction of national protectionism to rove globally. The transgression of borders means the weakening of the nation state, encouraging a post-national argument wishing 'to make a decisive break with state-centrism' (Sklair 2001:16).

All of this leads to a distinctive conceptual geography. As Michelle Huang (2004: 2) has observed, 'The utopia of globalization is a flexible, fluid and mobile space, an open space that knows no boundaries.' She cites Henri Lefebvre's (1979: 293) characterization of space under capitalism: 'Capitalist and neocapitalist space is a space of quantification and growing homogeneity, a merchandized space where all the elements are exchangeable and thus interchangeable... Economic space and political space thus converge toward the elimination of all differences.' In this scenario we approach political economy's international level playing field, the 'flat world' thesis popularized

by Thomas Friedman (2005). This strong view of globalization sees the growing homogeneity of global culture and the rising substitutability of locations in the undifferentiated sameness of global economic space. The global has become a surface of sameness, while it is the local that contains some residual differentiation (Appadurai 1996; Abu-Lughod 1999: 417–8).

In contrast to this line of thinking, my interpretation will emphasize the continuing importance of geography in transnational migration in several important respects. First, the social field stretching from East Asia to Canada is not a uniform surface of sameness but acutely differentiated. Indeed geographical variation becomes a significant problem for immigrants to address. *Contra* Lefebvre's space 'of growing homogeneity', distinctive political regimes, varying economic regulation and diverse cultural traditions among national jurisdictions create challenging spatial differentiation. Moreover the separate Canadian and East Asian staging posts in the social field offer variable attractions at distinct stages in the life cycle encouraging the circulation of households at well-defined status passages, including the phase of career development, the period of children's education, and the time of approaching retirement. The characteristics of the two shores of the social field also impact family members in separate ways, for while men tend to follow a gravitational pull back to Asia, women prefer the opportunities available in Canada, and young adults may differentiate the field according to the gradient of fast and slow, often preferring the buzz of Hong Kong to the 'laid back' character of Vancouver. While the social field is unified by movement and purpose, it is a unity of dissimilar parts, expressed in a slogan circulating among the Chinese-Canadian population of Vancouver in the 1990s, 'Hong Kong for making money, Canada for quality of life'.

Second, time-space compression has not exhausted the role of distance even for the typically well-heeled migrants we shall be meeting. If distance measured in time or cost is less of a barrier than it once was, there are new metrics where separation exerts significant costs. The transnational family is often the fragmented family, with members dispersed on opposite sides of the Pacific Ocean. In its purest form, the astronaut family<sup>8</sup> includes a husband and father working in East Asia while his wife and children are living in Vancouver, Toronto, San Francisco or Sydney. Visits occur, two to four times a year for a few weeks on each visit, but the abiding relationship is long-distance. The emotional distance of separation becomes a major bone of contention, and often triggers a crisis point in family life. Women are left as single parents in an unfamiliar environment, children are freed from patriarchal direction, and men face the loneliness and temptations of isolation in East Asia. The meaning of distance moves to a new register, and one that is vital for family well-being.

Third, place matters as migrants embody the cultural traits of their regions of origin in moving across the social field. Regional or national

attributes and dispositions are embedded in migrant lives and carried with them to new settings. Besides such obvious cultural traits as language or food, there are others that are borne from East Asia to Canada. Important in the story of millionaire migrants will be the fundamental significance of the meaning of property and property relations. The over-determined centrality of real estate in capital accumulation in Hong Kong in particular would become a major – and conflictual – part of the meeting of newcomers and long-established residents in Vancouver. A distinctive feature of the cultural geography of East Asian immigration has been the fashioning of a distinctive urban landscape reflecting an Asian modernity, sometimes conflicting with nostalgic white settler preferences for Euro-Canadian heritage. Landscape interpretation is a sophisticated part of the geographer's art (Duncan and Duncan 2004) and landscape would become a significant source of friction between new arrivals and the long-settled.

These three themes underscore some of the pervasive and substantial geographical dimensions of transnationalism that we shall frequently encounter in the following pages. Far from a mere metaphorical presence, geography is an abiding – and not always welcome – constituent member of any transnational social field.

## **The Globalizing State, the Business Migrant and the Neo-Liberal Stage**

Two principal players will occupy the transnational spatial stage in this account, the nation state and the enterprising migrant. The stage itself has been significantly re-set by national and international neo-liberal policy regimes since the 1980s. Neo-liberalism has been defined as 'a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade' (Harvey 2005: 2). The institutional framework of neo-liberalism has been assembled by nation states that are either willing directors of a globalizing enterprise policy or else believe that there is no alternative to its imperatives. Such an ideology lauds individual entrepreneurial skills and we will see that in immigration policy this fixation has extolled that imagined mover and shaker, *homo economicus* or rational economic man (sic),<sup>9</sup> incarnate as the business immigrant, an exemplary figure with a long and successful résumé played out in various global settings. Policy in many states has steadily moved toward prioritizing economic migrants, and Canada has refined its talent hunt not only for skilled workers but also business people with entrepreneurial skills and discretionary financial capital.

By and large globalization theory has not been kind to the nation state. The state's fixed borders appear as limitations, an indication of immobility on a mobile globe, arbitrary barriers in a world that strives to be barrier-free. The current neo-liberal regime with its elevation of free markets is often portrayed as requiring a general rolling back of the power and reach of the state. In migration research, as elsewhere, the nation state focus has come under attack at a time when transnationalism has made every geographic border and many legal impediments disputable (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002). Yet the nation state shows itself to be more enterprising than it is often given credit for, and one of the theoretical aims of the study is to challenge its eviscerated condition in much globalization theory. Its reach extends beyond national borders, while rapidly evolving policy tries to engage the gyrations of global economic and social processes. The state's active participation in controversial trade liberalization or social policy restructuring facilitated the globalization project from the start. Its sponsorship of neo-liberal policies in the 1980s reinforced market disciplines, weakened national borders, and consolidated a system of valuation emphasising the price mechanism (Harvey 2005). As the welfare state withdrew its universal safety nets, so it prioritized the self-sufficient citizen who can go it alone. In a market-saturated governance regime, consumption becomes the major citizenship virtue, the act reproducing the system; the 2007–09 credit crisis provided a devastating lesson of how the loss of purchasing *power* can drive the system into recession and dysfunction.

Neo-liberalism is an abiding conceptual and empirical presence in the account that follows, a force field in which subjects act (Peck and Tickell 2002; Mitchell 2004; Harvey 2005; Peck 2006). It is no accident that transnationalism across the Pacific has arisen during the neo-liberal period that has so powerfully directed Canada's Asia-Pacific strategy over the past quarter-century. A transparent economism shaped the official construction of the Pacific Rim in the North American imagination, naked boosterism characterized government trade missions there in the 1980s and 1990s, increasingly preferential treatment was offered immigrants with class advantage and citizenship itself was commodified – all confirming the power of the market as the unit of understanding and practice, and therefore as an important component of the conceptual scaffolding of this study. But as the literature on the governmentality of the modern state reveals, neo-liberalism up close is as much an ambition as an achievement, and its policies and procedures may have discursive cohesion in political declarations and bureaucratic manuals but are far murkier and corrupted when it comes to daily implementation. The calculations of the state are both more contingent and less transparent than their pronouncements proclaim.

So the state while ultimately preoccupied by what lies within its borders, is fully capable to reach beyond its borders and play if imperfectly the

globalization game. For in its attempts to recruit millionaire migrants, the state has acted as if the world is borderless. It has assumed the end of geography, that Thomas Friedman's (2005) 'flat world' is an adequate description of global space. But as geographers know from the earlier adventures of spatial analysis with its own level playing field, the idealized isotropic plain with its substitutability of locations is only a theoretical assumption, not an empirical actuality. So when the state assumes the existence of capitalists *sans frontières*, that skill sets are perfectly portable, allowing a successful businessman in Hong Kong or Taiwan to become *ipso facto* a successful businessman in Canada, it is overlooking geographical differentiation, the fundamental spatial breaks in culture, politics and society that intervene and provide barriers, most obviously in the disabling complexity of different languages.

Neo-liberal ideology has worked its way into all policy fields, including immigration (Arat-Koc 1999; Ong 2003). In an era of dwindling birth rates, and with the spectre of a declining labour force, immigration bureaucracies are pro-actively recruiting migrants who can be self-sufficient and require little in return from the state. The rapid escalation of temporary migration in Australia, Canada and other countries represents a flexible response to seasonal and short-term labour needs. The nation state bears minimal responsibility for those who toil transiently within its borders, limiting the citizenship rights of temporary workers (Bauder 2006). While the intake of permanent residents landing in Canada has been relatively stable at 200,000–250,000 for over a decade, temporary migration is rising rapidly and in 2007 for the first time temporary foreign workers plus foreign students exceeded the numbers of new permanent residents (CIC 2008). Temporary migration is part of the UN's new immigration paradigm, and as we shall see later, a number of business immigrants landing as permanent residents in fact hold much shorter time horizons for their Canadian sojourn.

In another sign of the growing preference for self-sufficient citizens, Canada's tripartite commitment to humanitarian protection, family reunion, and labour force replenishment in immigration selection has moved steadily toward economic migrants (Arat-Koc 1999). The share of all immigrants and refugees landing in Canada through the economic streams rose from 39 percent in the 1980s to 58 percent in 2000–06, while proportions in the family and humanitarian categories fell. Careful selection processes screen out economic migrants unless they are well educated and adaptive skilled workers, for assessments confirm that skilled migrants speedily make net economic contributions to their 'host' societies.<sup>10</sup> Canada is part of a competitive global marketplace for skilled workers (Wong 2003), or as they are disarmingly called in Singapore, 'foreign talent' (Yeoh 2006). While immigrant-receiving countries like Canada, Australia and the United States have historically been successful in recruiting skilled workers, other competitors are now making their pitch (Mahroum 2000; Salt and Millar 2006). The European Union promises to harmonize its recruitment of skilled workers

through a ‘blue card’ programme that will position it more advantageously in ‘the global war for talent’ (Collett 2008), while India and China are leading other Asian countries in repatriating their skilled workers from North America and Europe (Iredale et al. 2002).

Even closer to the core of neo-liberal ideology than the talent hunt for skilled workers is the recruitment of business immigrants, those who not only have human capital derived from successful entrepreneurial experience, but also abundant financial capital to replicate their successes elsewhere. Some 30 nations around the world have business immigration programmes, intending to entice footloose entrepreneurs and investors to re-locate their transformative energies to a new national project of economic development (Tseng 2000).<sup>11</sup> The carrot inducing their migration is the promise of citizenship and the enhanced quality of life of advanced societies, assets that may well be inaccessible for these migrants through other immigration entry classes. The neo-liberal commodification of citizenship implied by Canada’s business immigration programme (BIP) has not escaped attention (Harrison 1996), achieving one version of the contemporary ‘capitalization of citizenship’ (Rose 1999). With abundant capital, personal funds of more than a million dollars, as well as a history of successful entrepreneurial activity in their homelands, the business immigrant as *homo economicus* is a trophy acquisition in a neo-liberal policy regime, top prize in the skilled immigrant stakes (Ley 2003). Not merely self-supporting, the business immigrant has both the skill and the wealth to add value, to create jobs for others, and provide tax revenues for the state.

The extravagant economic development in turn of Japan, the four tiger economies, and China has focussed attention on Asia Pacific as the primary contemporary incubator of *homo economicus*. Largely unregulated regional economies have seen dramatic rates of growth, and spectacular examples of entrepreneurial success. Acumen in capital accumulation has been associated with the ‘bamboo networks’ of overseas Chinese business families. These families are globally networked (Yeung and Olds 2000), cosmopolitan capitalists (Hamilton 1999), territorially ungrounded (Ong and Nonini 1997). Among Canada’s business immigrants from 1980 to 2001, 30.6 percent originated in Hong Kong and 14.4 percent in Taiwan – with a far higher share of both groups in Vancouver.<sup>12</sup> The encounter of the overseas Chinese business immigrant and the neo-liberal immigrant-receiving state is seemingly a meeting of minds and interests, with prospects for spiralling mutual advantage.

## Conceptual Themes and Variations

There are other theoretical fields besides the neo-liberal stage and its two principal players that contextualize the spatiality of state and immigrant projects. Precisely because the homunculus of *homo economicus* presents an

all too partial sense of the complex identities of millionaire migrants, we have to engage other conceptual categories. Inevitably in the broad canvas of this narrative, such conceptual fields as the global city, cosmopolitanism, citizenship and multiculturalism appear, but other than summary statements I resist the temptation to move down the alluring view corridors to engage them fully; in part I have done so elsewhere, and do not want to pursue undue diversions from the principal narrative. Other fields cannot be sidelined. Family embeddedness is an additional key quality of identity, and it is important to disentangle the differential status of husband, wife and child in transnational space (Waters 2002). Geographic separation introduces strains on the family unit as the astronaut husband in East Asia and the 'left behind' family members in Canada are significantly uncoupled, with their occasional meetings bearing the weight of lives lived in different places. Moreover, even when the family remains intact in a single place, de-skilled males feel the dislocation accompanying migration differentially, and more painfully.

Nor do immigrant families ever arrive in an empty land. Canada is still widely regarded as a European settler society even if that description is less quantitatively accurate with each passing census. Migrants from Asia encounter not only a geography but also a history, and up to the 1940s Canada's history was that of a colonial plural society with a racialized hierarchy and separation between its constituent units. The Chinese in particular suffered virulent racist marginalization, containment and exclusion (Anderson 1991). Some authors fail to see significant breaks between past and present, and the dimension of race and the literature of critical race studies is an important area of theoretical engagement in the discussion that follows, particularly in Chapter 6.

So insights from theories of the globalising neo-liberal state and its exemplary actor, *homo economicus*, gender and family studies, and critical race studies are each part of the scaffolding upon which this interpretation of transnational relations across an expansive geography will unfold. Perhaps framing is a better metaphor, for while scaffolding is removed from a completed building, the frame remains though it is concealed beneath the final construction. So too in this narrative the theoretical and conceptual armature, while shaping the account, will serve as backdrop, guiding the discussion but not dominating it.

## **China Moves**

If the twenty-first century is indeed to be the Chinese century,<sup>13</sup> then the awakening of the ancient empire is emblemized by the dynamic of people on the move, people remaking the human geography of the national territory

(Fan 2007). Internal migration in the People's Republic of China represents the largest flow of households in the contemporary world. The extraordinary pace of urbanization in major cities like Shanghai, surely the poster child of present mega-city growth in the developing world (Olds 2001), is matched by the creation, from almost nothing, of new urban centres in the special economic zones along the coast. Shenzhen in the Pearl River Delta of Guangdong Province, adjacent to Hong Kong, was a small town in the 1980s but by 2005 claimed to be the centre of an urbanizing region of 10 million people. Over four million had been resident for less than a year while over eight million did not have a *hukou*, or household residency permit, a legal definition of residential rootedness (Shenzhen Data Communication Bureau 2005; also Lin 1997; Wang and Meng 2004). Travelling in urbanizing China, one can understand Aihwa Ong's awed reaction that visiting these explosive cities was 'like being caught up in the eye of the greatest typhoon in the history of capitalism' (Ong 1999: 43).

The rapid modernization of China and its growing ambitions have created opportunities but also anxieties in nearby satellite territories. Capitalists and the rising middle class in Hong Kong and Taiwan, while huge investors in the Mainland (Hsing 1998; Olds 2001), have also been apprehensive of the scale of Chinese aspirations. A resolution to the middle-class dilemma of simultaneous eagerness and wariness in engaging China commercially has been to seek safe havens around the Pacific Rim, should circumstances require a sudden strategic retreat. Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand and Singapore, amongst others, have provided accessible sanctuaries through student visas and immigration programmes welcoming skilled workers and business people, while a portion of the Hong Kong middle-class was permitted to take advantage of ex-colonial linkages to Britain. Some of these trans-Pacific migrants were temporary movers from the start: Mak (1997) writes of some Hong Kong employers holding positions open for valued staff during the two year residency in Australia required for citizenship eligibility. But other migrants drawn by quality of life, educational assets, and personal freedoms in the West are prepared to move beyond the sojourner model with plans for permanent residence... perhaps.

The Mainland itself has also become a source of trans-Pacific migrants with the onset of liberalizing tendencies leading to the 1985 emigration law. Canada has benefited from these reforms with the arrival of large numbers of skilled Chinese engineers and IT workers, though many have experienced difficulty in securing appropriate employment and some are considering return migration (Teo 2007). As well as these regular movements, unknown numbers of undocumented migrants have departed Fujian Province in particular for hazardous journeys to the United States, the famed 'Beautiful Country' (Chin 1999), or even Europe (Pieke et al. 2004).

Occasionally, smugglers' itineraries are routed through Canada. In summer 1999, four decrepit vessels landed 599 bemused migrants on the remote British Columbia coast (Mountz 2004). Twenty years earlier, equally impoverished arrivals, Vietnamese boat people, many of them ethnic Chinese, completed a publicly-funded journey from refugee camps by air to Canada after their own desperate escapes on the South China Sea (Beiser 1999).

These distinctions among ethnic Chinese are complemented by a huge range of past experiences and future life plans, so that any view of a unitary Chinese diaspora as either an objective phenomenon (Wang 1999) or an internalized source of identity (Ang 2001) is compromised by deep ambivalence. Aihwa Ong (1999:111) adds, 'Sometimes we forget we are talking about one-quarter of the world's population', while Wang Gungwu (1999:123) writes that place and practice introduce so many variations that 'being Chinese is not simple'. Among overseas Chinese, local conditions will create many regional traditions of 'Chineseness', and great uncertainty whether these could be trumped by an over-arching diasporic identity. Instead, Ien Ang proposes a more hybrid position, an identity shaped both by here and there, past and present, in effect 'an unsettling of identities' (Ang 2001: 16). Ethnic essentialism – not merely specifying authentic or unvarying cultural tropes, but also homogenizing (including mapping) populations on the basis of language or place of birth – is always contingent, a classificatory act that is both demonstrable fact and convenient fiction.

Consequently the self-designated Chinese-Canadian population of 1.22 million enumerated in 2006,<sup>14</sup> some 3.9 percent of all Canadians, is highly diverse in length of residence, in immigrant or Canadian-born status, in country of origin, in socio-economic status, immigrant class, capacity to speak English or French and homeland experience. The total is perhaps modest in a global diaspora recently estimated at 33 million, but significant as part of the seven million listed outside Asia (Ma 2003). The varied national backgrounds of ethnic Chinese in Toronto in 2001, over 80 percent of them foreign-born, include 43 percent born in Hong Kong, 34 percent in China, 7.5 percent in Vietnam and 4 percent in Taiwan, with the remainder coming from all corners of the world (Lo 2006). Hong Kongers and Taiwanese are more suburbanized, with modest spatial overlap, while Vietnamese- and Mainland-born (some of the latter former residents of Hong Kong) are more heavily located in Toronto's central city. Among the immigrants who claim Chinese ethnicity and moved to Canada between 1980 and 2001, the distribution of schooling is bi-modal; 39 percent had nine years of education or less, while 43 percent had post-secondary education. Their citizenship was diverse. Over 70 percent originated in China, Hong Kong or Taiwan, but in all they 'were citizens of 132 countries from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe' (Guo and DeVoretz 2006: 283).

So to speak of a Chinese-Canadian population – let alone community – is to speak conventionally, engaging in a practice that is as much purposeful as it is true. It is in this sense that we employ official statistics, that tell us a good deal, but less than we may infer. Census data disclose considerable spatial concentration in the residential pattern of Chinese-Canadians; in 2001, 73 percent lived in the census metropolitan areas (CMAs) of Toronto (410,000) and Vancouver (343,000) that housed in contrast just 22 percent of all Canadians.<sup>15</sup> Split almost equally between the two CMAs, more than 280,000 members of this population comprised Chinese-speaking immigrants who landed during the 1990s (Statistics Canada 2003). These recent arrivals were even more spatially concentrated, with Toronto and Vancouver assembling 82 percent of the national total. Imputing intentionality, it is perhaps understandable for a mobile transnational population to be highly clustered in Canada's two most cosmopolitan cities, with excellent air connections to East Asia.

This book is about the encounter of people and place, wealthy overseas Chinese, originating mainly in Hong Kong and Taiwan, and transnational residents or sojourners in Canada's two major gateway cities. While noting events in Toronto, the primary focus is Vancouver, the preferred destination of wealthy migrants. However, with their diffuse diasporic identity, both here and there, our attention cannot be confined to static statistical and cartographic displays of two cities, for this is a story about life lines, a broader pan-Pacific field including not only East Asia, but also similar places in Australia, New Zealand and the United States that will be referenced comparatively throughout. We now move to four vignettes that introduce and distil some of the themes to be developed in greater complexity in the following chapters. The first episode confirmed the strength of transnational linkages between distant sites, displaying, in this case brutally, the effective geographical proximity of two world cities, Toronto and Hong Kong, within a pan-Pacific socio-spatial field.

## **SARS: Toronto Goes Global**

In large cities today a number of candidates present themselves for iconic status as harbinger of globalization. Not for want of trying, Toronto has never snagged one of the global spectacles, the Olympics or a World's Fair, events that provide a defining moment in the evolution of a metropolitan identity, a breaking out from the regional and national to universal visibility. Instead, salient events for Toronto might include the proliferation of international banks arriving in the 1980s, the escalating world-wide immigration the same decade, or in popular culture perhaps the success of the Toronto Blue Jays as baseball's 'World Series' champions in 1992 and

again in 1993. More sombre, but for my purposes more pertinent, was the highly contagious outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) that immobilized the city for several months in 2003 and brought it unwelcome global attention (Ali and Keil 2006, 2007; Duffin and Sweetman 2006). Transmitted by a Toronto victim who returned from a visit to Hong Kong in February that year, SARS caused 44 deaths and between 375 and 438 infections over the next several months (Naylor 2003). Estimated losses to the city of close to \$1 billion ensued, principally from impeded travel. Like never before, Toronto became captive to global scrutiny, subject to travel advisories and effective quarantine from the World Health Organization, and stigmatized as the North American epicentre of the disease in widely disseminated media and global internet maps. It took a sensational event supplying an equivalently loud world signal, a vast benefit concert at the end of July headlined by global masters of spin, the Rolling Stones, to declare the all clear and bring back Toronto from its pariah status into the network of hyperlinked world cities.

A medical doctor introduced SARS, a virulently infectious disease, to the Metropole Hotel in Hong Kong on a family visit from nearby Guangdong Province in February 2003 (Leung et al. 2004). Highly contagious, the disease was transmitted to 12 other hotel residents who acted as carriers during the next few days in travel to Vietnam, Singapore, Ireland, Germany and Canada. The returnee to Toronto, an elderly woman, became ill and died just over a week later. By then family members were contaminated and the infection circulated among patients and health care staff, many of them immigrants, at Scarborough's Grace Hospital in suburban Toronto. An infected cluster formed around a diasporic Filipino religious community in Toronto; earlier a nurse's aid carried the virus in a family visit to the Philippines. A second outbreak erupted at North York General Hospital, as Toronto's north and northeastern suburbs, home to Canadians originating in East and Southeast Asia, formed the regional epicentre of the disease.

The SARS outbreak highlighted several important themes in the redefinition of time and place in the global city. The first is the expansion of experienced space for many to a unified social field that transcends national political borders. Guangdong, Hong Kong and Toronto became effectively next-door neighbours, with medical professionals anxiously seeking the interactions among the three places that shaped the incidence of SARS infections. Cross-border routes joining scattered hubs, as well as sedentary place-based roots, define the social geography of the world city (Clifford 1992, 1997). So the fixed and sometimes segregated maps of urban ethnic groups are only the first approximation of life-worlds equally characterized by movement and discontinuity, by loyalties and materialities commonly in flux, by identities lived there as well as here. A transnational household

continually re-values the advantages of home and away, not just in memory but also in ongoing planning; it is constantly connected.

Second, accompanying the expansion of networked space is the compression of time through the instantaneous electronic transmission of information and capital between nodes across this interlocking field. Virtual simultaneity in the movement of goods and people by air travel (Dodge and Kitchin 2004) permitted SARS to travel from East Asia to central Canada in less than a day. The proximity of places has been enhanced by greater transportation affordability as well as by savings in time. The large reduction in transaction costs, lowering the barrier of distance, has extended mobility to larger numbers of travellers, while thickening the network connectivity of formerly isolated places (Kasper 2000). Among a sample of some 1500 immigrants in Vancouver, most from Asia, over 40 percent maintain contact with their country of origin at least weekly, primarily by telephone and e-mail, a quarter fly home once a year or more often, over one-fifth own a home or other property in their native land (Hiebert and Ley 2006).

Third, in contrast to the frequently celebratory discussion of the networked globe, SARS was a reminder that to be globally connected means exposure not only to life lines but also to less welcome networks, including disease, drug cartels, and terrorist cells.

Fourth, new spaces are being incorporated into the networked globe. The Toronto SARS outbreaks were concentrated in suburban hospitals, the metropolitan setting of growing proportions of recent immigrants. The older model of inner city sites of arrival and residence, adjacent to the downtown railway station or the docks, is being bypassed. Today many immigrants enter and leave a city repeatedly by air, and for some of them proximity to the suburban airport is desirable. But the suburbs have other assets. Downtown and inner city neighbourhoods in gateway cities have been increasingly claimed as the employment and housing markets of global rangers engaged in private and public corporate activity, so that poorer immigrants are commonly displaced to the housing stock of cheaper suburbs, the new location of industry, warehousing and routine service activities that have themselves re-located from the expensive post-industrial core. Middle-class migrants also find advantages in suburban homeownership, so that in many gateway cities, including Toronto and Vancouver as well as Los Angeles, New York and Washington, the *ethnoburb*, a district of concentrated immigrant settlement, has become a new feature of suburban life (Li 2006).

Finally, SARS implicated issues of spatial scale and shifting jurisdictions. The disease was presented in the Naylor report (2003) as typical of contemporary 'Viruses without borders'. Invoking Marshall McLuhan, the report expressed the inevitability of contact in a global village where time-space

compression facilitated the fast transmission of disease as well as information. Explicit here is a global scale of interaction that overrides local places. But a global innovation never lands in empty space. The arrival of SARS in Toronto was challenged, resisted and eventually overcome by the co-ordination of medical professionals working for public agencies and three levels of government.<sup>16</sup> There were false starts as the disease, difficult to diagnose, was initially mistaken for flu or tuberculosis; the certified cause of death of the first victim was misdiagnosed as heart failure. Misrecognized, the disease was also initially underestimated, with less than adequate precautions drawn up to protect health workers and the at-risk public. But after a turbulent spring SARS was vanquished, and the Rolling Stones came to town.

SARS was a global threat, locally resisted, and the terms of engagement were themselves geographically variable. Two SARS carriers from the infection at Hong Kong's Metropole Hotel also landed in Vancouver, scarcely surprising as the city is Canada's principal gateway to Asia, receiving four times as many air passengers daily from Hong Kong and China as Toronto (Skowronski et al. 2006). But disease outcomes were very different. A highly infectious 'super-spreader' did not aggravate Vancouver's outbreak, while public health professionals, more familiar with contagious diseases from East Asia, made a faster assessment of the gravity of the outbreak and contained it. There were only five cases, four of them carried directly from Hong Kong, and no deaths. The uneven geographies of SARS in Toronto and Vancouver exemplify variable scale effects contributing to quite different outcomes. Local contingencies still matter.

## Re-directing Orientalism

In contrast to the hypermobility within transnational fields illustrated by the diffusion of SARS is the seemingly exaggerated stasis of ethnic settlement, fixed on the map, rooted in the urban landscape. Vancouver's Chinatown is among the oldest in North America (Lai 1988). Scarcely ever welcome before 1950, tolerated only at the margins of society, controlled through an invidious Head Tax from 1885, and excluded altogether by the Chinese Immigration Act from 1923 to 1947, the story of the Chinese in Canada has followed a well-told new world genre of racialized outcasts in a white settler society (Ward 1978; Anderson 1991; Li 1998; Roy 2003). Such a narrative has provided an almost ideal type for critical race studies, for Chinatown and the Chinese formed a seamless and mutually constitutive fusion of a marginalized place and a crudely stigmatized identity. The Vancouver enclave endured two white riots in 1887 and 1907, the second from a mob who poured out of a meeting of the Asiatic Exclusion League (*sic*), smashing property and roughing up residents. Chinatown the place consolidated,

sharpened and reproduced the representation of a people apart, a people of minimal entitlement in Kay Anderson's (1991) aptly chosen words. Chinese-Canadian literature has also pursued this spatial genre (Khoo 2003), in autobiographical and historical novels like *Jade Peony* (Choy 1995) in which a Chinese life-world, though vibrant, is internalized and contained in a claustrophobic space of a few blocks.<sup>17</sup> While some authors have properly challenged the sense of disempowerment and victim status often evident in these representations, few have broken loose of the magnetic, rooted and static allure of Chinatown itself.

And yet... walk today down Pender Street, the spine of Vancouver's Old Chinatown, past buildings like the home of the Chinese Benevolent Association (1909), the long-time workshop of the now-departed *Chinese Times* (1902), and its neighbour, the Chinese Freemasons' Building (1901), temporary home of Dr. Sun Yat-sen (Figure 1.1). Moving beneath the self-conscious new Chinatown Gate, we pass the Dr. Dorothy Lam Building, a legacy to a remarkable family, and head office of the resourceful immigrant settlement agency, SUCCESS. The Lam Building fronts the site of a one-time warren of former shacks and bunk houses in Canton and Shanghai Alleys, on land originally scavenged from False Creek's tidal marshes. Pender Street today is an outdoor museum, meticulously oriented by a well-meaning multiculturalism where design, colour and landscape texture are prescribed by a planner's rule-book.

But suddenly critical race studies confront the material and seemingly colour-blind articulation of global capitalism.<sup>18</sup> Continuing a short distance west on Pender, leaving behind the mummified landscape of Old Chinatown, we observe an altogether different district, the confident new build of condominiums in International Village – España was branded and marketed in the most recent buildings on offer. We are on the edge of the vast Concord Pacific Place (Figure 1.2), orchestrated by Hong Kong's billionaire Li family, a fleet of high rise towers lying at anchor on the two-kilometre long waterfront site of the former world's fair, Expo 86, and more recently joined by a younger and smaller Toronto sibling, Concord CityPlace, under construction on former downtown railway lands.<sup>19</sup> Pacific Place is a popular landing strip for empty nesters, professional singles and a new cohort of wealthy East Asian immigrants.

The landscape contrasts of this district and its other are profoundly ironic. Behind us, to the east, in a Chinatown landscape of slowly decaying ethnic stuff, some might identify the last gesture of Orientalism, sustained and promoted by three levels of government in the designated Chinatown Historic Area. Ahead of us to the west the massive economic power of contemporary East Asia takes its cues if not from a concocted Occidentalism, then from an alternate Asian modernity (Ong 1999). International Village strikes exactly the right chord: the horizon here is expansive not claustrophobic, the mobile

## Old Chinatown



**Figure 1.1** Pender Street, Chinatown, 2008

Image not available in this electronic edition

**Figure 1.2** Part of Concord Pacific Place (left to right), fronting Vancouver's downtown peninsula, 2008  
(Photo by Mark van Manen, reproduced by permission of the *Vancouver Sun*)

liberal internationalism that is at the heart of modernity, the market, even democracy itself. The juxtaposition with the contained parish of Old Chinatown is striking, for Concord Pacific Place – note the peaceful hands across the Pacific allusions in its name – is fully cosmopolitan, outward looking, the world its investment oyster, its very first towers in the early 1990s advertising high-speed internet linkages as a prominent sales feature. For such capitalists *sans frontières* routes seemingly trump roots. They, perhaps more than anyone else, live out in their daily lives a ‘new mobilities paradigm’ (Sheller and Urry 2006). The oppressed victims of critical race studies meet freewheeling *homo economicus*, agent of a globalizing Chinese modernity.

As old Chinatown expresses Canada’s exclusionary past and essentializing multicultural present, Pacific Place and CityPlace manifest one face of the nation’s future. Concord Pacific and the Li family are here by invitation, as part of Canada’s own aspiration to be a full partner of the Pacific Rim economy. Recently arrived Chinese-Canadians cannot convincingly repeat the post-colonial aphorism that ‘we are here because you were there’. Their entitlement is even stronger: ‘we are here because you invited us’. They are not merely tolerated by the state, but welcomed, valued as the harbingers of global enterprise (Ong 2006).

As early as the 1960s, British Columbia politicians were casting an eye to the economic potential of the Pacific Rim nations. Federally, the liberal internationalism of the Pearson and Trudeau years assembled the legislative and diplomatic infrastructure to establish a trans-Pacific network. Subsequent trade missions by municipal, provincial and federal delegations to East and Southeast Asia, hopped between Singapore, Hong Kong, Taipei, Shanghai, Beijing, Seoul and Tokyo, putting out the message that Canada, and especially its Pacific province of British Columbia, were open for business. Meanwhile, an ideologically driven British Columbia government assembled an investment-friendly environment, provoking tough labour struggles through the recessionary years of the early 1980s. A familiar ingredient in this neo-liberal economic agenda was Expo 86, a six-month long world fair sponsored by the provincial government with federal and corporate aid. Expo was a transparent and successful culmination of an extended foray into the Pacific arena, an appetizer to entice trade, investment, tourists and potential settlers (Ley and Olds 1988). Sale of the entire property by the provincial government to the billionaire Li family at the close of the fair, in preference to a local bidder, was a logical conclusion to a decade of courting East Asian capital. The *entente cordiale* across the Pacific was further cemented by the appointment of David Lam (husband of Dorothy Lam), an early immigrant from Hong Kong in 1967 and subsequently a successful real estate millionaire and generous philanthropist, as Lieutenant-Governor of British Columbia, the Queen’s official representative in the province.<sup>20</sup> The same year, 1988, Li Ka-shing purchased the Expo site.