

**STATISTICAL PROFILE OF IMMIGRANTS OF VIETNAMESE ORIGIN IN
QUEBEC AND IN CANADA:
COMPARISON OF 1991, 1996 AND 2001 DATA¹**

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Following the numerous political and socio-economic upheavals affecting Southeast Asia at the close of the Vietnam War in 1975, more than one million Vietnamese left their homeland to find refuge and security abroad. For its part, Canada as a receiving country opened its doors to tens of thousands of these refugees. Of this exodus the greatest number was Vietnamese. Indeed from 1979 to 1980 nearly 44,000 Vietnamese-born took residence in Canada, some 17 per cent of the arrivals to Canada during that period. Correspondingly, from 1984 to 1985, Vietnamese counted for some eleven per cent of new arrivals. In contrast, during the 1990s, fewer than five per cent of all arrivals were of Vietnamese origin. For example, in 1994, about 6,400 Vietnamese, or some three per cent of the total immigration that year, immigrated to Canada. Later, from 1996 through 2001, only 11,000 Vietnamese arrived as permanent residents. These latter newcomers arrived principally within the framework of family reunification programs. It can thus be determined that a certain number of immigrants of Vietnamese origin are recent arrivals. As a matter of fact, almost 22 per cent of those living in Canada at the time of the 2001 national census had arrived in 1991-2001. Some 31 per cent arrived between 1981 and 1990, and nearly 17 per cent between 1971 and 1980. Less than one per cent arrived before 1971. Finally, more than 28 per cent of all persons of Vietnamese origin were born in Canada.

The migration flow of Vietnamese to Canada, and more particularly Quebec, falls into four distinct categories. The first was principally composed of a few score of mainly male students, recipients of financial aid from the Catholic Church or from the Colombo plan. These first immigrants arrived during the 1950s and 1960s². A large number of these graduates remained in Canada to complete their studies in order to assume posts such as professors, engineers or public servants. At the end of 1974, Canada counted some 1,500 persons of Vietnamese origin (Dorais 2000: 94), three quarters of whom lived in Quebec (Dorais 1996b: 44).

The numbers of residents of Vietnamese origin living in Canada grew considerably in 1975-76. This period constitutes the second immigration wave, attributable to the arrival of the first groups of refugees composed of professionals, civil servants and businesspersons coming mainly from the urban upper-middle class. These first refugees joined children, brothers or sisters already established in Canada. At the end of 1978, after the arrival of 7,000 refugees belonging to this second wave, Canada counted some 9,000 residents of Vietnamese origin, 6,000 of whom lived in Quebec.

The third immigration wave (1979-1982) was constituted of refugee groups clearly different from the former wave with respect both to ethnic origin as well as socio-

economic characteristics. Refugees from this wave (Boat People), whose odyssey and stays in transit camps (Thailand, Malaysia, China, Philippines, Indonesia) had been very difficult and often traumatizing, represent nearly 59,000 persons throughout the whole of Canada (Dorais, 1996a: 18). Sponsored equally by the Canadian government and by private groups, few of these refugees could claim relatives already settled in Quebec. This wave included in its number many young men with low educational levels, and at certain moments a majority of Chinese origin.

Finally, a fourth immigration wave was composed principally of persons arriving as part of family reunification programs. After 1982, Canada, wishing to encourage family reunification, following the example of other countries, received Vietnamese in increasingly greater number³. For example, more than half the Vietnamese arriving in Canada between 1983 and 1986 came to rejoin close relatives. This current continued throughout the 1990s with both Canadian and Quebec immigration policies considerably favouring family reunification. In the narrative to follow, we shall examine and compare several sets of demographic, social and economic statistical data on Vietnamese in Canada and more particularly in Quebec. These data derive from the three most recent Censuses – 1991, 1996 and 2001.

A. Sociodemographic situation

Persons of Vietnamese origin have settled throughout Canada. For the most part, however, they are distributed in the four provinces that are the most important from a demographic and the most dynamic from an economic viewpoint (Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec). It is noteworthy that in 2001, 90.8 per cent of all 151,410 persons of Vietnamese origin living in Canada were Canadian citizens. Table 1 shows the distribution of persons of Vietnamese origin by Canadian province and territory for the last three national censuses.

It may be observed that nearly all Vietnamese in Canada live in one of the four larger provinces. In 2001, nearly 45 per cent lived in Ontario, 19 per cent in Quebec, 18 per cent in British Columbia and 14 per cent in Alberta. Thus these four provinces comprehend some 95 per cent of all Vietnamese living in Canada. These proportions are similar to those in previous censuses. In 1991, British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario and Quebec accounted for some 94 per cent of all Vietnamese in Canada; and in 1996, the corresponding proportion was 95 per cent. A slight tendency may also be observed among Vietnamese to choose to settle in the West, especially in British Columbia, but also in Ontario. A notable increase in Vietnamese communities in these two provinces may be found at the expense of Quebec from 1991 to 2001. The Vietnamese population is also strongly concentrated in urban centres. Indeed, for the three census periods under consideration, nearly 95 per cent of those from Vietnam live in CMAs (Census Metropolitan Areas). Moreover, as demonstrated in Table 2, nearly 75 per cent of these persons live in the cities of Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Toronto and Montreal. Toronto and Vancouver have seen the most significant increases between 1996 and 2001

with some 3,370 and 5,995 more residents of Vietnamese origin. For Vancouver, that represents a rise of over 35 per cent in a five-year period.

For Quebec, it is important to note that the great majority of the Vietnamese population resides in the Montreal CMA. Indeed, according to the 2001 census, some 90 per cent of all Vietnamese in Quebec live there. The corresponding proportions for 1991 and 1996 were 93 and 91 per cent, respectively. Thus the great majority of Vietnamese in Quebec live in Montreal, Quebec's most diversified ethnocultural region (see Table 3).

Although one may encounter Vietnamese throughout the whole of Montreal Island as well as in the suburbs along the north and south shores, Vietnamese families concentrate especially in the districts of Côte-des-Neiges, where live 30 per cent of the Montreal Vietnamese population (Sanguin 1996: 415), Rosemont, Notre Dame de Grâce, Ville Saint-Laurent, Anjou, Laval and Brossard⁴.

The Canadian and Quebec Vietnamese populations, compared with the Canadian population as a whole, are relatively young. In 1991, 46 per cent of Vietnamese living in Canada were less than 25 years (see Table 4). This proportion is clearly lower for Quebec with 41 per cent (see Table 5). In subsequent censuses, 1996 and 2001, these proportions dropped. In 2001, those under 25 years of age represented 41 and 36 per cent for Canada and Quebec, respectively. Moreover, the proportion of persons of Vietnamese origin age 44 and above is clearly higher in Quebec than in Canada as a whole. Those proportions in Quebec are 20, 22 and 30 per cent for 1991, 1996 and 2001, respectively. The corresponding proportions for Canada are 13, 16 and 21 per cent.

The particular situation for Quebec may be explained in part by the presence of francophone universities (especially Université de Montreal and Université Laval in Quebec) where men and women from South Vietnam came for study in the 1950s and 1960s. Despite the presence during that era of some Vietnamese students in Toronto (Van Esterik and Van Esterik 1988) as well as in the national capital region (Le and Nguyen 1988), three quarters resided in Quebec (Dorais 1996a). The Quebec Vietnamese population is doubtless aging. This is one of the principal preoccupations among Vietnamese community leaders in Montreal, who wish to establish a centre for the Vietnamese elderly⁵.

It may also be noted that women outnumber men. In 2001, for Canada, there were 76,585 women of Vietnamese origin compared with 74,825 men, for a sex ratio (men to women) of 0.98. The 1996 census was the first in which women outnumbered men. For example, in 1991 the corresponding sex ratio was 1.09. This imbalance was principally attributable to the men leaving Vietnam without their families, arriving alone in Canada (Dorais 1996b: 46). Subsequent births as well as immigration flow balanced the ratio. Indeed the sex ratio by 1996 averaged 0.82 (men to women).

In a different domain, language, language courses offered by governments and by ethnic associations⁶ have effectively played a role, as indicated in Table 6. Indeed, the great majority of Vietnamese living in Canada speaks at least one of the country's two official languages. In 2001, 88 per cent (as against 85% in 1996) indicated their ability to hold a

conversation in French or English: 14 per cent of them spoke French and English, while 68 per cent spoke English and six per cent could hold a conversation in French. Still, some 12 per cent among them spoke neither French nor English. The proportion of non-speakers of official languages was higher in Ontario (12 per cent) and British Columbia (15%), but lower in Quebec (10%).

For Quebec, the capability of speaking in both languages is somewhat similar, with the important exception that nearly 80 per cent of Quebec Vietnamese has mastered French. This fact is true especially among the youngest. As a matter of fact, most studies concerning youth of immigrant Vietnamese origin (Meintel, 1992, Methot 1995, Richard 2000) indicate that youth are more and more becoming trilingual. This doubtless brings a certain distinctiveness and richness to Quebec Vietnamese compared with their counterparts in other provinces of Canada.

1. Level of education

Impressive disparities between Quebec Vietnamese compared with the whole of Canada may also be observed with respect to level of education attained by those age 15 and above. Tables 7 and 8 show in detail that Quebec Vietnamese are much better schooled than their counterparts elsewhere in Canada.

In 2001, it is noted that nearly 42 per cent of Quebec Vietnamese had commenced or completed university studies; the comparable Canada-wide figure indicates only 25 per cent. Also the proportion with less than nine years of completed education is lower in Quebec. The higher average educational level among Quebec Vietnamese may be explained in the first instance by the group of students arriving in Quebec before 1975 to complete their higher education. Secondly, the first wave of refugees was composed of professionals and intellectuals coming from privileged urban milieux and themselves already highly educated. More than 60 per cent of the refugee wave received in Canada between 1975 and 1977 arrived in Quebec for the most part to join relatives already established there.

Notable disparities also appear between the level of education of men and women. In 1996 (comparable gender-sensible data are unavailable for 2001), women were indeed less well educated than men, particularly so in Quebec. Both for Canada as a whole and for Quebec, women attended university less frequently, and finished fewer than nine years of education in greater number. However, this lower level of educational attainment among women tends to regress among younger second-generation Vietnamese girls (born in Canada) whose education comes more to resemble the higher level of boys.

2. Employment and professions

The level of educational achievement among Vietnamese is inevitably reflected in the type of employment they occupy. Table 9 shows the active workforce age 15 and above according to the industrial classifications for Canada and Quebec in 1996. Let us note in any event that educational attainment is not the only explanatory factor in difficulties

with accessing the Canadian labour market. Indeed, numerous hazards from resettlement, ethnocultural differences and the sad reality of discrimination and exclusion have also played an important role.

It may be noted that 57 per cent of the Vietnamese in Canada work in industrial sectors that require little formal training (primary sector, manufacturing, construction, transport and storage, food and lodging). The corresponding proportion for the Quebec workforce is only 46 per cent. It is important to underscore that the age groups 25-44 are over-represented in the aforementioned employment domains. Those age groups represent, for example, two-thirds of the active Vietnamese population and some 61 percent in Quebec, but they represent 75 per cent and 65 per cent, respectively of Vietnamese workers in the manufacturing sector. For their part, those aged 15-24 are over-represented in the commerce and food sectors (sectors in which they may work while continuing their studies). That age group is also represented in governmental services, instructional, social services and health sectors.

Quebec Vietnamese also work in the liberal professions more than do their counterparts in Canada as a whole. Indeed, the sector of finance, insurance and real estate, that of business services, governmental services, teaching as well as the health and services sectors engage some 30 per cent of the active Quebec Vietnamese population in comparison with only 18 per cent of their counterparts in the whole of Canada. A small proportion (10 per cent) are also self-employed, owners of commercial or small businesses. Vietnamese entrepreneurs are found in a variety of domains: restaurants, groceries, jewellery, beauty salons, florists, pharmacy, real estate, insurance, auto mechanics, etc.

3. Economic characteristics

According to Statistics Canada (SCIC 1996) and a special statistical compilation conducted by Immigration Canada and the city of Montreal from 1991 census data, cited by La Tour (2000), the unemployment rate among the Canadian and Quebec Vietnamese population is rather high. The Statistics Canada document calculates the unemployment rate among Vietnamese in Canada, after standardization for age, at 17.5 per cent in 1991. Data cited by La Tour determined a similar calculation for Vietnamese settled in Quebec. For these persons, the unemployment rate stood at 17 per cent. For 2001, the situation has neatly improved, as indicated in Table 10.

It may be observed that for the whole of Canada, active Vietnamese women are the most affected by unemployment. By contrast, for Quebec, it is men who are slightly more affected. Moreover, the unemployment rate for Vietnamese in Quebec lies above the national mean for those of Vietnamese origin. In addition, as in the case of the whole of the Canadian population, it is the young adult category (age 15-24, particularly males) that is most severely affected by unemployment among those of Vietnamese origin (see Table 11).

The unemployment and educational attainment characteristics are likewise evident in income. Indeed, mean individual income for persons of Vietnamese origin living in Canada falls below that of the national mean. Table 12 presents mean income classified by gender for the Vietnamese population in Canada and for Quebec in 1996 and 2001.

Moreover, as in the case of other groups, males of Vietnamese origin show income levels higher than for their female counterparts. For 1996 (comparable figures are not available for 2001), that holds in each age group for Canada and for Quebec with the exception of young (age 15-24) Vietnamese Quebec females, whose incomes are higher than those of their male counterparts. The most remarkable disparity by gender is found among Quebec Vietnamese aged 45-64 years; income for men is greater than for women by 113 per cent. It may also be noted that income levels for Quebec Vietnamese are higher than for their compatriots in the whole of Canada.

On the other hand, let us underscore that the proportion of income of Vietnamese deriving from governmental transfer payments compares with that observed for the Canadian population as a whole. For Vietnamese, in 1996, 80 per cent of the overall income derived from employment (for men and women, 84 and 73 per cent, respectively). Governmental transfers accounted for some 17 per cent (for men and women, 13 and 23 per cent, respectively) of total income. The situation was much the same for Quebec Vietnamese. In 2001, gender-sensitive statistics are not available. Let us note, though, that 85 per cent of the overall income for Vietnamese Canadians derived from employment: 84 per cent in Quebec, 87 per cent in Ontario and 78 per cent in British Columbia. Governmental transfers accounted for 12 per cent of total income for Vietnamese Canadians: 11 per cent in Quebec and in Ontario, and 19 per cent in British Columbia.

B. Conclusion

This statistical survey allows us to establish certain points with respect to the Vietnamese community in Canada. First, Canadian Vietnamese seem to prefer to settle in the large urban centres of the country where economic activity is more dynamic and the ethnocultural diversity the richest. Additionally, Vietnamese households are disproportionately settling in Toronto and Vancouver. In spite of the proclivity to collect in large Canadian cities and within certain districts or localities (Mississauga in Toronto, Richmond in Vancouver, Côte-des-Neiges and Brossard in Montreal) Canada has never witnessed a ghettoization of its Vietnamese communities along the scale of “Little Saigon” in Orange County, California, for example.

We may also establish that the Canadian Vietnamese comprise a rather young population compared with the Canadian population as a whole. A good number of Vietnamese (more than 40 per cent) are under age 25 and many of them born in Canada.

Interest and motivation for learning the official languages, French and English, seem rather high. Most Vietnamese consider learning one of these languages to be an important factor in their integration into the labour market. Young Vietnamese age 25 or

less, in addition to the language of their parents master at least one of the two official languages. Those younger persons residing in Quebec are becoming more and more trilingual.

Again, it must be stated that Canadian Vietnamese have low levels of educational attainment. The level of attainment for half among them lies below 13 years of completed education. This inevitably leads to Vietnamese working in types of activity that require low levels of education and qualifications. Half of the Canadian Vietnamese labour force works in manufacturing and food service domains. The largest number of workers in these sectors comes from the age categories 25-44 years. Corresponding to their educational attainment and domains of employment, Canadian Vietnamese have income levels below those of the national average. They have also been importantly affected by unemployment, particularly so among young males aged 15-24 years. It should be noted, though, that these conditions are gradually improving.

Moreover, it may be recalled that Quebec Vietnamese have fared much better than their counterparts in the whole of Canada – particularly those living in Ontario and British Columbia, where large Vietnamese communities are found – principally in economic matters. Vietnamese from the province of Quebec have much higher levels of educational attainment than those of the whole of Canada. They are less frequently found working in domains that require little education or qualifications, and they more frequently exercise liberal professions. They also have higher mean income levels than do Vietnamese in the whole of the country.

On the other hand, let us note that there remain important disparities between Vietnamese men and women in all provinces. Many more women than men have mastered neither of the two official languages. They also have lower levels of educational attainment than do men, and they have clearly lower levels of income. Moreover, they do not participate in the labour market as much as average Canadian women do. We can establish in light of these statistical data that Vietnamese women are more susceptible to situations of isolation, solitude and exclusion, in which the lack of social and financial resources can figure importantly and be a determining negative factor in their participation and their incorporation into Canadian society.

Finally, let us not forget that the massive intake of Vietnamese to Canada has been fairly recent. With unalterable determination, sustained work and in spite of few resources, however, diverse Vietnamese associations and organizations as well as their protagonists have put in place a gamut of resources that can come to the aid of community members. Throughout the years families and individuals have elaborated upon these local, national and transnational resources where they may seek solace, assistance and aid. We can also imagine that numerous socio-economic changes may be foreseen with the emergence of the new generation who have been encouraged to undertake long periods of higher education, and of whom their parents are justly proud. This new generation, highly appreciative of the sacrifices of their parents in order to offer the freedom and every opportunity for a better future, will be much more disposed to participate fully in

Canadian political, cultural and economic life while jealously retaining Vietnamese traditions and values as well as the principles inculcated by their parents.

Notes

¹ Statistical data found throughout this paper are drawn from compilations done by Dorais (1996a), Richard (2000) and Statistics Canada (SCCIC 1996), as well as from census data for 2001 available on the Statistics Canada website, and from a special target group profile prepared by Statistics Canada during summer 2003 for the Department of Anthropology, Université Laval (product # CO-0669), thanks to funds from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada ("Social Cohesion and International Migration" project). Heartfelt thanks to Professor C. Michael Lanphier, head of the project, who translated into English the major part of the paper.

² In 1954, following the establishment of a Communist government in North Vietnam, some 20 Carmelite nuns from Hanoi became refugees to Canada and resettled at a convent in the Lac-Saint-Jean region, Quebec (Dorais 1996a: 17).

³ According to a document published by Quebec's Department of Education (ME 1985), this wave included a high number of educated people released from reeducation camps.

⁴ Using the 2002-2003 telephone directory for the south shore of Montreal, we found that more than 60 per cent of all households bearing one of 142 Vietnamese surnames had their address in the Brossard district of the city of Longueuil.

⁵ This was suggested by the president of Montreal's Vietnamese Community, Dr. Phung Van Hanh, during his opening speech on the occasion of *Tet 2003*, the celebration of the Vietnamese New Year.

⁶ Every Saturday and Sunday Montreal's Vietnamese Community offers free French classes to more than 70 Vietnamese from the Montreal area.

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