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White Papers and Revelations¹

By: Golbon Moltaji



ABSTRACT Recruitment of international students theoretically prepares Canadian citizens, future ambassadors of Canadian trade, and political interests for the global marketplace; appropriately, international students are now becoming an integral part of Canada's immigration strategy. Contrary to the extensive options available to international students for permanent settlement in Canada, most of the programs in place are successful in attracting international students but not necessarily in retaining them.

Introduction

After the Advisory Panel on Canada's International Education (IE) Strategy announced the government's goal to double the number of international students by 2022, the Canadian higher education institutions added to their fervent for attracting foreign students². The Government of Canada seems to be in favor of retaining international students as immigrant applicants. Stakeholders of IE all agree that it is necessary to keep the international students informed about the immigration and relevant legal documentation procedures. The mentioned partners and the institutions are committed to the importance of providing integrated services for the international students, both academically and socially. However, despite a 50% initial intention of permanent settlement among international students, only less than 20% of these students pursue permanent residency. From the immigration strategy perspective, these statistics indicate a potential for better coordination between stakeholders of IE especially Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Development [DFATD] and Citizenship and Immigration Canada [CIC]. Government officials' discourse about international students' migration combined with the recent shift of the immigration discourse towards skilled immigration (Griffith, 2013, Pike, 2012, Ministry of Trade, 2012) leaves little doubt about a conclusive approach towards retaining international graduates³. Over the past few years the government has put forward efforts for

facilitating international students' settlement (CIC Fact Sheet, 2012, Lu, Zong & Schissel, 2009, Minister of Ontario Citizenship and Immigration, 2010) and several policy changes for facilitating international students' immigration and integration⁴. However, international students' experiences in Canada, ratify similarities to those historically recorded from other groups of immigrants (Kelly, 2012, Spiro, 2008, Belkhodja, 2006 etc.)⁵. On paper it is expected that their migratory experience should be relatively serene as international students are proficient in one of the official languages and acquire living experience while acquiring Canadian credentials⁶.

White Papers

This article discusses two legislative changes that affected IE sector indirectly and then provides insight for improving the fulfillment of IE goals in Canada. Bill C-24 was a highly expected reform to Canadian citizenship with the theme of protecting and strengthening the value of Canadian citizenship. It was prominently a response to the recent concerns about fraudulent immigrant and citizenship applications. The former citizenship requirements allowed counting each day spent in Canada on an authorized work or study permit as half day towards the residency requirements for citizenship applications. Overall, up to 365 out of the required 1095 days of residence could be gained under temporary residency status. Under the new bill, the time spent in Canada on temporary

study and work permits will no longer count for citizenship applications. This Bill raised mixed reactions⁷ during its legislative process.

Another example is Bill C-35 or the “Cracking Down on Crooked Consultants Act”. This bill initially oscillated the increasing concerns about immigration and refugees who were reportedly exploited by unethical and incompetent practice of illegal services and advisers. The bill restricts the immigration consultation support services only to those who are certified by a designated body and is applicable to the Canadian institutions and International Student Advisers (ISAs) inside the International Offices. Even though ISAs did not necessarily go beyond providing guidance on how to select application forms and immigration stream, etc. These support services were halted with the activation of an amendment to immigration. International students’ economic contributions reached \$8 billion only in 2010. The biggest portion of this fiscal engine comes from long-term international students. They are an excellent source of highly qualified and skilled work force alongside being a well-integrated portion of newcomers to Canada. While both of the introduced legislations are meant to make Canadian citizenship more valuable, they essentially make it less accessible to eligible candidates.

Students of Citizenry

Decision making for obtaining permanent residency is the stepping stone to citizenship (Spiro, 2008, Brubaker, 1989). Acquiring citizenship means that the new citizen builds a political relationship as a stakeholder in the political community of the nation state by which he or she fuses to the collective values. This contract is conceptually a meaningful membership and is bound with freedom and belonging (Anderson, 2013). In most liberal democracies that allow naturalization, the potential citizen eventually acquires membership of the national political community. The process of naturalization is inevitably

influenced by the structural role of policy. Citizenship in this sense is a means to an end and, already counters it to an acquisition more than a box-ticking bureaucratic exercise. One of the major drives behind the new Canadian citizenship legislative changes is that it prevents the procedure from becoming a bureaucratic agenda and authorizes only genuine immigration applicants.

Universal Students for Global Citizenship

Canada is amongst the biggest attractions for international students across the globe. The country has the opportunity to acquire favorability in the highly competitive IE sector by fostering greater social skills among international graduates. This entails educating them for positioning themselves for entering relevant occupational fields during their study period in Canada. In fact, vision 2022, perceives that IE develops a global perspective for the citizens of the world. In such discourse, citizenship is a means for accessing mobility and collective good (Anderson, 2013). Therefore pursuing regulated goals of IE requires implementation of policies that, not only foster the economic gains that Canada has prospected, but also helps in protecting the reputation of the country’s inclusive immigration system in relation to global citizenship. The links between student motilities and other motilities that are the driver for economic prosperity and social progress, (Alexander, 2013) make IE a wide life-course aspiration for students. Achieving the economic or social goals of IE and, immigration is possible only through spreading veridical information, and appropriate institutional protection (Kurstak, 2011). Fulfilling these goals calls for an approach that acknowledges the affirmative and pivotal role of constitution in crafting fundamental policies that provide for and secure individuals’ capabilities. Correspondingly, distribution and preservation of substantial provisions needs to become one of the direct responsibilities of a variety of

governmental agencies throughout the world (Kurstak, 2011). Successful conveyance of the forward-looking IE strategy for 2022 in combination with immigration of international students requires this section to monitor and overview the policy changes that indirectly impact international students.

Firstly, IE should be perceived as a social phenomenon and a human mobilization strategy with extensive ties to global economy and labor market (Findlay et al. 2011). Recognizing shortcomings in the process through which international graduates' transit to immigrants and citizens has induced government funded programs projected to fulfill the global demand for training their university graduates (Gribble & Blackmore, 2012). Similar perspectives that have helped in other actors of IE could similarly be exercised in the Canadian context. This requires providing training that underlines enabling international graduates as capable global (Canadian) citizens and not solely objects of work. Academic institutions can facilitate international graduates' migratory affairs and, introduce programs that prospect international students' life trajectory outside of academics programs.

The stakeholders of IE could negotiate the possibility of a specific designation for international students in immigration laws; in a broader context it is argued that education sector is radically different other from sectors that are subject to immigration and citizenship controls (Humphries, 2013). A plausible provision is introducing a new class of immigration for international students that provide credit for the time of residency (as practiced by Australia, New Zealand, Sweden, Germany, France, Italy). Over all, IE in Canada should be accompanied by legislation that potentially moves the system in favor of international graduates so that immigration no more bars the harbinger of IE to achieve its farfetched goals from flourishing.

Notes

1. Inspired by musical album by Muse; Black Holes and Revelations, released on June.08.2008

2. Canada's IE Strategy should seek to double the number of full-time international students, from 239,131 in 2011 to more than 450,000 by 2022 (DFATD, 2012).

3. Mr. Ed Fast, the international trade minister, said in January 2014 that the government recognizes that IE is a key driver of jobs and prosperity in every region of Canada. [T]his strategy will also help us advance Canada's commercial interests in priority markets around the world and ensure that we maximize the people-to-people ties that help Canadian workers, businesses and world-class educational institutions achieve real success in the largest, most dynamic and fastest-growing economies in the world.

Karen McBride, Chair of CCIE and the president and CEO of the Canadian Bureau for IE (CBIE) endorsed Vision 2022 and said since it identifies intentional education as a key driver in Canada's future prosperity it is a milestone for IE. Minister Finley opened a longer than before postgraduate work permit for international graduates to encourage choosing Canada as their living destination (CIC, 2008).

Minister Kenny clarified he has a similar point of view (CIC, 2012) "Immigrants with Canadian study and/or work experience and who have good language skills integrate into the Canadian labour market more successfully than immigrants without such characteristics". Ontario immigration minister Dr. Eric Hoskins echoed the rhetoric of country's international and foreign students; the best and the brightest immigrants (Pike, 2012, Ministry of Trade, 2012, Lu, Zong & Schissel, 2009, Cudmore, 2005) as he announced the inclusion of international students graduating from Master's programs in the Provincial Nominee Program.

Parliamentary Secretary to the minister of citizenship and immigration, Dr. Wong announced the expansion of the postgraduate work permit in February 2011. He emphasized on the government's commitment to steadfast retention strategies through introducing more inclusionary programs that makes it easier for this international graduates to immigrate to the country.

In a heartfelt post in CBIE's blog, Minister Alexander (2013) drew on his own experience as an international student to treasure an economic future that is tied to academic mobility and those in pursuit of education and exciting new careers. In the latest improvement that indicates to the country's philosophy of becoming a pole of attraction and a model of stability in the world, effective from June 1st, 2014, international students will be able to work off campus without requiring to obtain an off campus work permit (CIC, 2014).

4. These changes include; introducing the on and off campus work permits (CIC, 2009 & 2011), post graduate work permit (CIC, 2012), including the international students in the Foreign Skilled Workers Program (CIC, 2011) as well as the Provincial Nominee Programs (CIC, 2009).

5. Precarious employment and dead end jobs and absence of recognition by desired employers following graduation and during transitioning to immigrants are among the issues depicted literature.

6. Unlike other immigrant applicants, international students do not go through the same sequential processing continuum of immigration (Selection, language instruction, becoming citizens). Rather, they are selected after they have passed the language proficiency requirements for entering the country.

7. A petition written on behalf of international students and foreign workers that was posted publicly to refute the mentioned Bill

has gained more than 6000 signatures. With an emphasis on the residency of Canadian Experience Class applicants or Provincial Nominees who live and work in Canada for several years before becoming eligible for obtaining citizenship the mentioned petition perceives the right to permanent residency as "earned" through living and integrating to the Canadian society. The bill was opposed by both NDP and the Liberal party of Canada, and was observed by representatives of the above mentioned petition during its proceedings. Many of those who spoke against the bill, including Ted Hsu, Member of Parliament for Kingston and the Island, described that the bill discourages citizenship and contrary to its intentions, makes new comers less loyal to Canada.

8. As Bill C-35 and its empirical indications unfolded, CBIE expressed a necessity of distinction between the role of ISAs and that of private consultants (UA, 2013). Confusion and deprivation from genuine advice over the course of temporary residency hereafter will agonize Canada's immigration strategy. (Humphries, 2013).

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