

The practice and experience of settlement and relocation among Canada's Aboriginal peoples: possible implications for ecological migration in China

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This paper's purpose is to look at Canada's historical and current practice and experience of the patterns of settlement and relocation of some of its Aboriginal populations. This will take the form of 1) a brief discussion defining Canada's Aboriginal population and some of its socio-economic problems, and 2) a short description of the settlement characteristics of two specific Aboriginal groups, the Inuit of the Eastern Arctic (particularly Nunavut and Nunavik) and the East Cree of the James Bay region. Although the reasons for Aboriginal migrations and relocation in Canada are many, there may be some parallels to be drawn between the Canadian experience and what is referred to in China as ecological migration, and so in the conclusion of this paper we will suggest very briefly some possible implications for the Chinese case.

Table 1 - Size and growth of the population by Aboriginal identity, Canada, 1996 and 2006
(see Annex 1 for a more detailed breakdown)

Aboriginal identity (Figure 1 for map)	2006	Percentage change from 1996 to 2006³
Total population	31,241,030	9
Aboriginal identity population	1,172,790	45
First Nations people ¹	698,025	29
Métis ¹	389,785	91
Inuit ¹	50,485	26
Multiple and other Aboriginal responses ²	34,500	34
Non-Aboriginal population	30,068,240	8

1. Includes persons who reported as First Nations, Métis or Inuit identity only.
2. Includes persons who reported more than one Aboriginal identity group (North American Indian, Métis or Inuit) and those who reported being a Registered Indian and/or Band member without reporting an Aboriginal identity.
3. Data have been adjusted to account for incompletely enumerated reserves in 1996 and 2006.

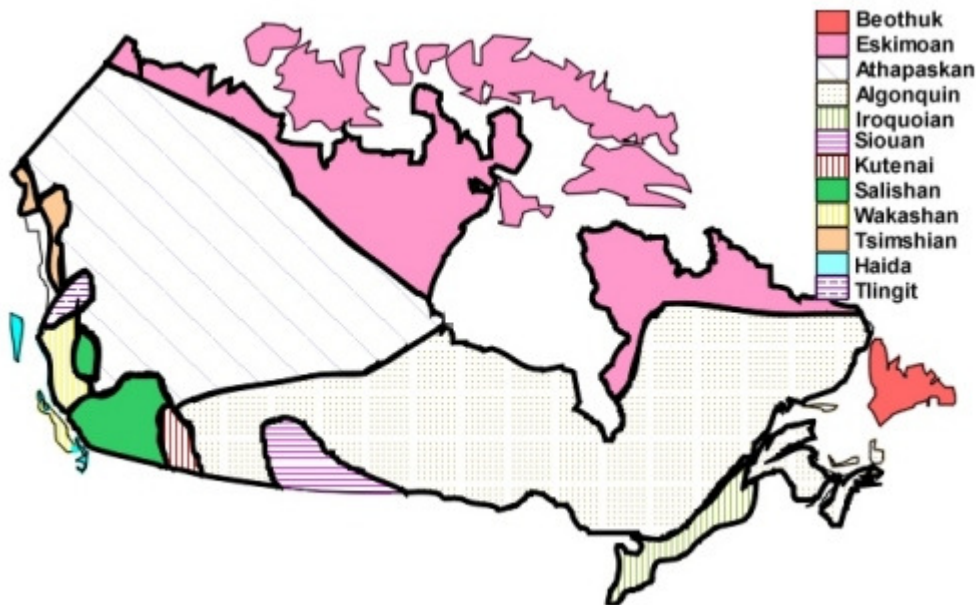
Source: StatCan (2008) *Aboriginal Peoples in Canada in 2006: Inuit, Métis and First Nations, 2006 Census: Findings*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

By way of introduction it might be helpful to give a picture of Canada's Aboriginal populations at the present time. In Canada's last census in 2006 (Table 1) the Aboriginal peoples of the country (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) constituted a higher proportion of the overall population than ever before (1.17 million) - 3.8 %, up from 3.3 % in 2001 and 2.8 % in 1996 (StatCan, 2008b). This extraordinary growth (45% in 5 years, nearly six times faster than the 8% rate of increase for the non-Aboriginal population) is primarily due to a much higher birth rate than among the rest of the population.

First, who qualifies as an 'aboriginal person' in Canada? For census purposes, the definition is given as follows: "The Aboriginal identity [...] refers to individuals who said they were North American Indian, Métis or Inuit, and/or were a Treaty Indian or Registered Indian as defined by the *Indian Act*, and/or were members of an Indian band or First Nation" (StatCan, 2008a, p.1). With regard to an international comparison, although China has close to 9 % of its population who are classified as belonging to the 55 official minority nationalities, among western nations, Canada's Aboriginal population (almost 4 % in 2006) ranks second after New Zealand (where the Maori account for 15%), and is followed by the proportions of indigenous people in Australia and the United States, both approximately 2 %.

What is meant by the term, First Nations? It is in many respects an expression of solidarity that seems to have arisen particularly in Canada, uniting in various ways basically all the Aboriginal peoples of Canada. Even the Inuit populations are subsumed

Figure 1 – Language groups comprising the First Nations of Canada



Source: Canada's First Nations / University of Calgary / Red Deer College,
The Applied History Research Group, Copyright © 2000.

under the linguistic category ‘Eskimoan’ (Figure 1), as part of the First Nations. In general, however, the third census group for Aboriginal peoples in Canada, the Métis (Table 1), who are overwhelmingly urban, is usually viewed as a separate broad indigenous category. In fact, “[l]anguage is at the root of every First Nation’s culture [...] First Nations languages within what is now Canada are classified into twelve separate groups [together covering] approximately fifty languages” (AHRG, 2000). The Applied History Research Group (AHRG) of the University of Calgary has illustrated this by the preceding map (Figure 1). It should be noted that “as a result of European encroachment, slaughter and diseases to which they had no natural resistance, the Beothuk [who lived in what is now the province of Newfoundland, see Figure 1] diminished rapidly following contact” (Tuck, 2001). The last known surviving Beothuk died in 1829 (see Figure 2). The sad story of the Beothuk (Tuck, 2001) is nevertheless very instructive, and can serve as a cautionary tale of what *can* happen.

Figure 2 – One of the last of the Beothuk



Demasduwit (Mary March)
 While trying to flee her captors, Demasduwit's husband and newborn baby were killed, and she eventually died of tuberculosis in 1820. She was one of the last surviving members of the now-extinct Beothuk tribe of Newfoundland (courtesy National Archives of Canada/C-87698).

Source: James Tuck (2001) The Beothuk, *The Canadian Encyclopedia*.

Between 1981 and 2001 there was more than a doubling of the Aboriginal people living in the cities of Canada, due primarily to three factors: high birth rates, lower mortality rates and migration (i.e., relocation) (StatCan, 2005). In absolute numbers, the city with the largest First Nation population growth was Winnipeg (Manitoba) where Aboriginal people more than tripled in number over this 20-year period. The second largest Aboriginal urban growth centre was Edmonton (see Figure 3). Even though the total numbers were smaller than the aforementioned western cities, the most dramatic change of all was the increase seen in Saskatoon (Saskatchewan) where the numbers of Aboriginal urban residents went from around 4000 to more than 20,000 over the same period. However, it must be added that infant mortality rates, as well as many other indicators, were three times as high as national rates for the whole population (Figure 4).

Figure 3 – Some cities of Canada



Source: <http://www.cpiln.org/i/Map2.jpg>

Among Aboriginal people aged 25 to 54, the largest gains in employment rates occurred in Winnipeg and Edmonton (Figure 3). However, although there has been some incremental improvement in some cities, unemployment rates for Aboriginal residents of Canadian cities are alarmingly high. For example, while in Winnipeg and Edmonton unemployment went down somewhat, it actually increased in the case of Regina (Saskatchewan) where it went from 41 % to 45 %. This is approximately (for that period) four times the national average unemployment rate, and gives an idea of the gap that still exists between the socio-economic levels of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal city-dwellers (StatCan, 2005).

To conclude this overview on the place of Aboriginal people in Canada we cite some of Anderson's (2003) points as he summarizes the situation for the Canadian Council on Social Development:

- 49% of the Aboriginal population lived in urban areas, up from 47% in 1996.
- One-quarter of the [total] Aboriginal population lived in 10 metropolitan areas.
- In *order*, the cities [see Figure 3] with the largest aboriginal populations are Winnipeg, Edmonton, Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto, Saskatoon, Regina, Ottawa-Hull (now known as Ottawa-Gatineau), Montréal and Victoria. [...There is] evidence from 1996 Census data that Aboriginal peoples in urban areas were more than twice as likely to live in poverty as non-Aboriginal people.
- On average, [about half] of Aboriginal families living in Canadian cities were below the poverty line (i.e., in 2001, family income of \$35,455 or less), compared to 4.8% in 2004 (1 in 20) for the Canadian population as a whole (Sarlo, 2006).
- In cities like Regina where there is a large Aboriginal population [relative to its size], Aboriginal people accounted for 24% of the poor. This was more than three times

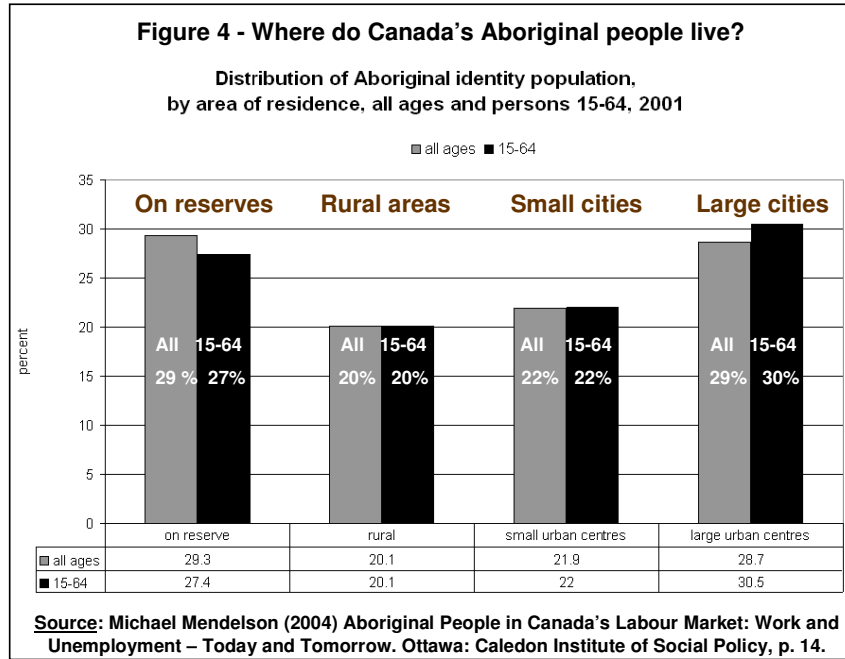
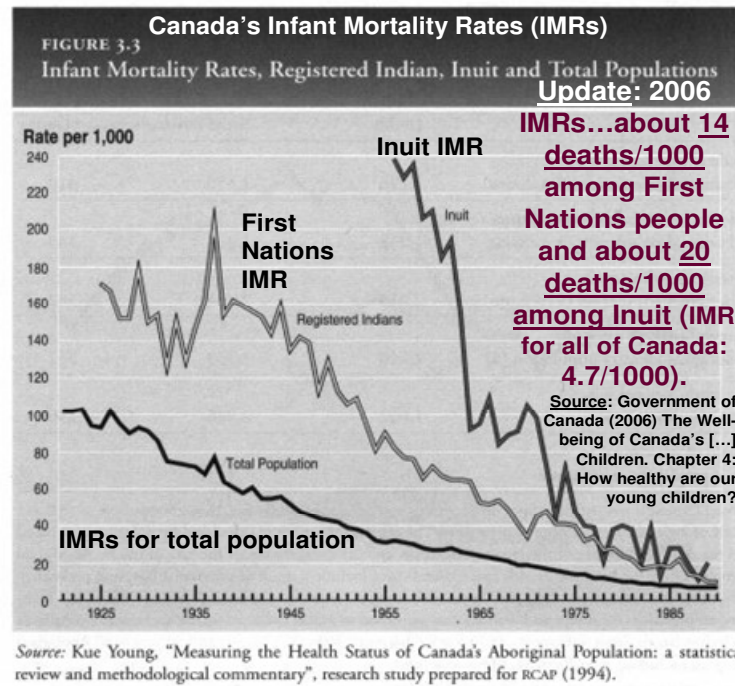


Figure 5 – Overall Infant Mortality Rates of Canada's Aboriginal peoples.
http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ch/rcap/sg/si13_e.html



Source of chart: Indian and Northern Affairs Volume 3 *Gathering Strength* Chapter 3 - Health and Healing (http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ch/rcap/sg/si13_e.html).

their actual proportion of the total population in that city. Several factors can explain this high incidence of poverty among Aboriginal people, including significant barriers in education and employment opportunities.

Table 2 – Total unemployment rates for the Aboriginal population of Canada (1991-2001)

Aboriginal and total unemployment rates, 1991-2001			
	Aboriginal unemployment rate (%)	total unemployment rate (%)	relative unemployment rate
1991	24.5	10.2	240
1996	24.0	10.1	238
2001	19.1	7.4	258

Source: Mendelson (2004) *Aboriginal People in Canada’s Labour Market: Work and Unemployment – Today and Tomorrow*. Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy, p. 23.

N.B. Urban Aboriginal unemployment rates are generally twice as high.

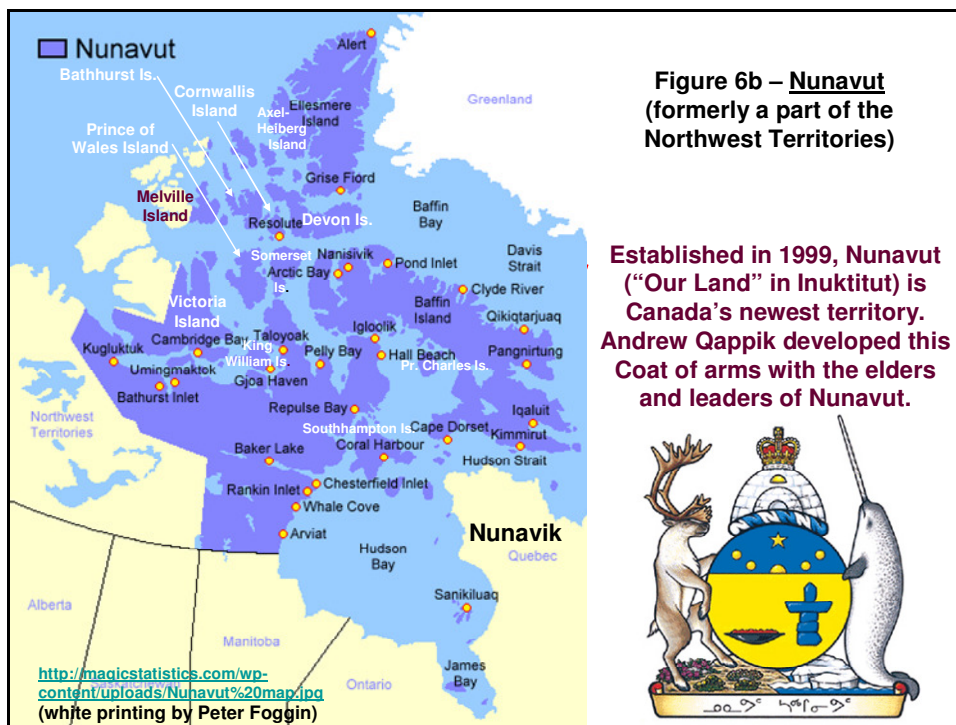
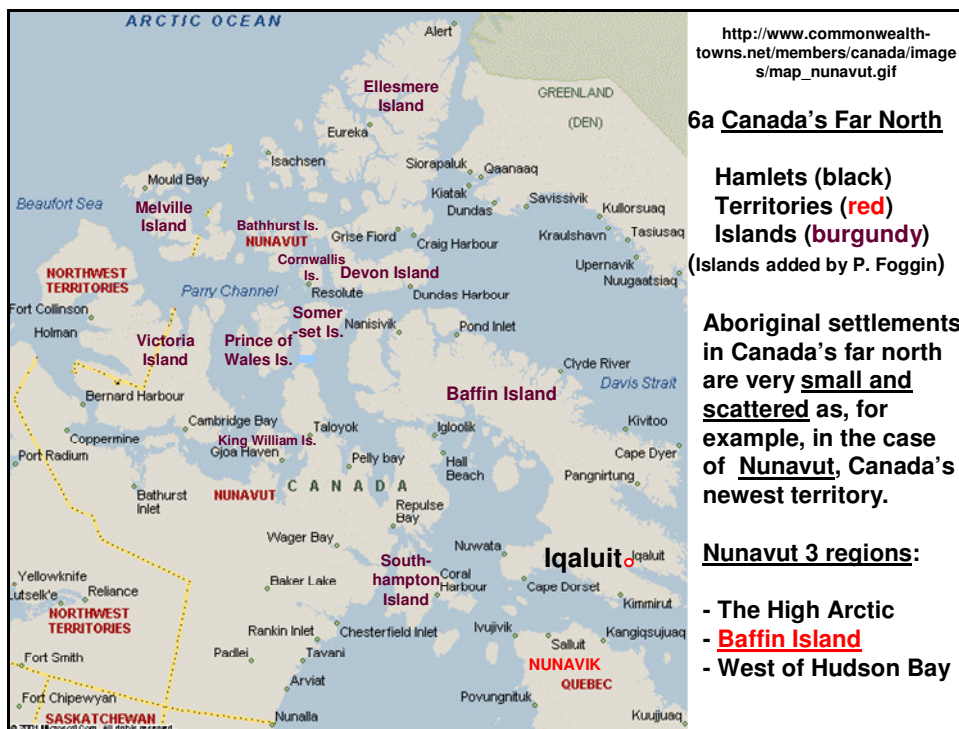
Geographic distribution and relocation of the Inuit of Canada

The roughly 50,000 Inuit in Canada (see Table 1), although historically a nomadic hunting and fishing people, are now almost all settled in the 46 northern communities of the *Inuit nunaat* (lands of the Inuit), where they constitute the overwhelming majority (90% or more), plus 8 towns where they form an important minority. The geographic distribution of these 54 settlements reveals that 33 are in the Northwest Territories (NWT) and Nunavut (formerly the eastern part of the NWT). The other 15 are in Arctic Québec (now usually called Nunavik) and 6 in Labrador (Innuvialuit) (see the Eskimoan category of Figure 1). Dorais points out that “[n]o more than 10% of Canada’s Inuit reside outside *Inuit nunaat*, many of these emigrants being students or individuals holding a temporary job at the Ottawa, Montreal, or Yellowknife headquarters of a northern organization” (2002, p. 132).

Historically, the goal of the Canadian government concerning the Inuit was to enable them to be ‘self-sufficient’ by keeping them on the land. However, isolated as they were, the Great Depression of the 1930s even affected them, through the collapse of the international fur market (in this case, particularly of the Arctic white fox, which fell from \$25 per pelt to just over \$3). For instance, in Nunavut, one of the three territories of the Eastern Arctic (now made up of three territories, see Table 3 and Figure 6), this and the need to cut relief expenses led to the implementing of what came to be called the ‘first official Eskimo relocation project’ – the whole scale transferring of the Baffin Island Inuit to Devon Island in the Canadian Arctic (see maps, Figure 6) which took place over a period of thirteen years (1934-1947). These people were told they could return home in two years, but for many varied reasons this never happened. This is but one early example of the turbulent history of

Figure 6 – The location of Canada’s Arctic territories

Source: (http://www.commonwealth-towns.net/members/canada/images/map_nunavut.gif)



Source: <http://magicstatistics.com/wp-content/uploads/Nunavut%20map.jpg>

the relations between the non-native population of Canada and its Aboriginal peoples (Frideres and Krosenbrink-Gelissen, 1998). Indeed, the federal government ministry in charge of 'Indian and northern affairs' has recognized the problem in recent years, by saying: "After some 500 years of a relationship that has swung from partnership to domination, from mutual respect and co-operation to paternalism and attempted assimilation, Canada [needs to develop] fair and lasting terms of co-existence with Aboriginal people" (INAC, 2004).

As for the Inuit of Québec province Arnaert and Schaack remind us that "[t]oday about 10,000 [9,565 in 2006] Inuit live in [15] communities of Nunavik [Figure 5], a vast Inuit territory situated in the north Quebec. Each year [...] around 1500 Inuit are airlifted to a referring hospital in Montreal. Many do not speak English or French and are unaccompanied by family" (2006, 97). These are the people with whom we worked in a study on health status and risk factors in the 1980s (Foggin & Aurillon, 1989). In Nunavik, while the numbers of Inuit who have relocated to the city are small (for example, they make up only 15% of some 50,000 Aboriginals in the Montreal area), there is also a very strong link between Nunavik and the urban south, particularly in the health sector. With regard to Nunavut (Figure 4): "The 2006 Census enumerated 24,635 [24,640 given in Table 3] Inuit in this territory, which has both the largest area [about 2 million sq. km., almost 20% of Canada's landmass] and the biggest Inuit population in Canada" (49% of the total) (StatCan 2008b). It is a dynamic population, as can be seen in the significant population increase of Nunavut's Inuit between 1996 and 2006 (20%).

Gradually a new policy evolved during the 1950s whereby there were three possibilities for the Inuit: 1) maintain the basic way of life where natural resources would allow this, 2) go to areas of White settlement where the Inuit would be expected to adapt, and 3) in areas which could not support the native population, efforts would be made to relocate the Inuit to areas with better economic potential (Marcus, 1996). In Baffin Island (Figure 4) in the 1950s and '60s, they were "relocated from numerous seasonal camps to 13 permanent hamlets. The official rationale for these moves was the government's concern about the perceived inability of the Inuit to sustain themselves on the land" (INAC, 2004) and the clearly stated wish to extend and centralize government services to the Inuit. Following this relocation, the Baffin Island Inuit had numerous problems, including a huge change in their lives. Having lost their livelihood, many became largely dependent on social welfare. Today, Iqaluit (formerly Frobisher Bay) with a population of 6184 (2006 census) is Baffin Island's only urban centre. It can be seen in this northern town to what extent the Inuit have gravitated away from their traditional lifestyle on the land.

In 1956 relocation to the south was planned as an experiment and within a year those in charge considered this both "feasible and desirable". It was to be a major relocation to urban areas of southern Canada. A number of cities were considered, but eventually the town of Selkirk (near Winnipeg, Figure 3) in Manitoba was selected as the chosen destination. However, at that time nothing really happened, simply because the Inuit refused to go along with the plan. However, over the years an increasing number of Inuit have migrated to southern cities, but in terms of socio-economic levels, they still remain, along with non-urban Inuit a seriously disadvantaged population group, particularly with regard to the quality of their housing. In this regard, Table 3 shows the latest census figures (2006) contrasted with

comparable figures from a previous census (1996). It can be seen that there has been some improvement in terms of residential crowding, the percentage of those living in crowded dwellings having decreased from 36% to 31%. This still compares very unfavourably with the 3% for non-Aboriginal population of Canada. Regionally, the worst situation is found in Nunavik (of northern Quebec, Figure 7) with the astounding figure of 49%, 2% higher than ten years before (1996). The Inuit region having made the best progress in this area is Inuvialuit (Labrador) where the figure fell from 31% to 19% between 1996 and 2006.

Figure 7 – Nunavik in northern Québec (plus the location of Iqaluit on Baffin Island)
 Source: <http://www.kunoki.com/kunoki/images/map-nunavik.jpg>



Non-Inuit Aboriginal Settlement Patterns

In Canada, there is a relatively clear distinction between non-Inuit First Nation peoples who live on reserves, lands set aside for Indians and held in trust by Ottawa, and those that do not (see Figure 4). There are over 2000 reserves in Canada, and those that are located within a radius of 50 km of a city or town are considered urban. They vary in size from, in certain cases, only several hectares (in British Columbia) to 900 square kilometres (in Alberta). “Approximately 2284 parcels of reserve land make up a little less than 3 million hectares [30,000 sq. km.] of land” (Frideres, 1998, p. 133), roughly 0.3% of Canada’s land mass. However, this does not include the areas of major land settlements that have been concluded in recent years. The total area of actual reserve land per capita has been decreasing over the last 30 years. This obviously reflects the high population growth that these settlements have experienced during this period without a corresponding change in the size (areas) of reserves. Most of those that leave the reserves relocate in metropolitan areas of over 100,000 people. The two reasons that Frideres gives for this trend is that unskilled

Table 3
Percentage of the Inuit and non-Aboriginal populations living in crowded dwellings, Canada and regions, 1996 and 2006

Regions	Inuit population		Non-Aboriginal population	
	1996	2006	1996	2006
	Percentage living in crowded dwellings ¹			
Canada	36	31	3	3
Total - Inuit Nunaat	43	38	6	5
Nunatsiavut	37	13	12	0
Nunavik	47	49	6	7
Nunavut	43	39	5	5
Inuvialuit region	31	19	6	4
Total - Outside Inuit Nunaat	6	5	3	3

Note:

1. 'Crowding' is defined as more than one person per room. Not counted are bathrooms, halls, vestibules and rooms solely used for business purposes.

Sources: Statistics Canada, censuses of population, 1996 and 2006.

Source: StatCan (2008b) *Aboriginal Peoples in Canada in 2006: Inuit, Métis and First Nations, 2006 Census: Findings*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada, Table 9.

1 - Crowding is defined as more than one person per room. Not counted are bathrooms, halls, vestibules and rooms solely used for business purposes.

employment is more available in large cities than in small towns, and also that Aboriginal spatial segregation has developed in a number of Canadian cities (1998, p. 132).

As an example, we now look at one First Nation with regard to the topic of this paper. Feit has written: "The James Bay Cree region lies to the east and southeast of James Bay [Figure 8a]. [The Eastern] Cree have lived there since the glaciers left about 9,000 years ago. They now number some 13,000 people and live in nine settlements from which they hunt [and trap over] approximately 375,000 square kilometres of land" (2004a, p. 101). Like the Inuit to the north, the James Bay Cree have been struggling to cope with major dislocations of their traditional hunting and trapping areas through massive government-sponsored hydroelectric development (Figure 8b) over the past 30 years.

The James Bay Cree live in the sub-arctic region of Canada (Figure 8a). Waldram, in his article on settlement patterns in the Canadian sub-arctic, has pointed out that “[t]he relocation and consolidation of sub-arctic native populations into settlement patterns designed according to southern, urban models has often resulted in cultural confusion and an increase in interpersonal tension, alcohol abuse, and violence” (1987, p. 117). The James Bay Region of the Québec Cree is a clear example of this pattern. A major economic driving force and, at the same time, source of conflict for the James Bay Cree is the massive development of hydroelectricity over the last three decades (Figure 8b).

Figure 8a – Cree map of the James Bay region

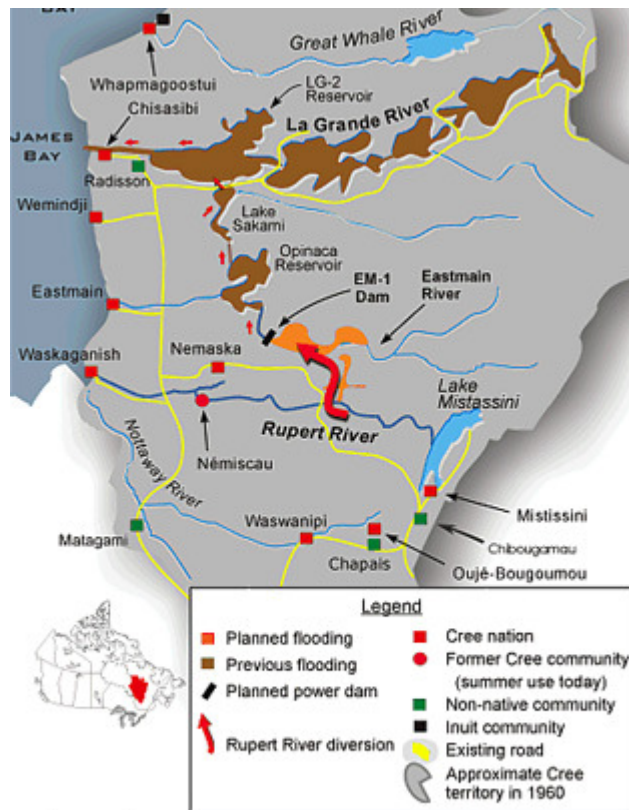


Source: http://www.creeculture.ca/e/land_people/map.htm

Note: Iiyiyuuschii

“Iiyiyuuschii is the traditional territory and homeland of the Cree of northern Quebec.[...] This term means "the land of the Iiyiyuu (people)". Iiyiyuuschii is two thirds the size of France, and includes the lakes and rivers that drain into eastern James Bay and southeastern Hudson Bay. Although often described as "boreal forest," Iiyiyuuschii embraces a wide range of environments, from the salt marshes and islands of the coastal zone to the upland areas far inland, and from the dense coniferous forests in the southern areas, to the sparsely treed forest-tundra in the north” See topic, ‘Eastern Cree’ Johnson and Hook (2007) *Encyclopedia of Native Tribes of North America*. (http://www.creeculture.ca/e/land_people/land.html)

Figure 8b – Hydroelectric development of the James Bay region



Source: Ottertooth
<http://www.ottertooth.net/Reports/Rupert/News/Inap-divert.htm>

<http://northernwaterways.com/blog/images/2006/rupert.jpg>

Conclusion

By way of conclusion to this paper, we would like to suggest some highlights that may have resonance for the situation in China. Here are two significant characteristics that can partially describe the Canadian experience of the location, relocation and settlement patterns of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada.

- 1) Taking formerly nomadic Aboriginal peoples ‘off the land’ and making them sedentary by relocating them in small settlements, has had both positive and negative results. For example, life expectancy has significantly increased (and infant mortality decreased). However, these social indicators have not kept pace with health status improvements witnessed for the Canadian population as a whole. In fact there seems to be an almost insurmountable barrier to overcome to gain socio-economic and health levels among the Aboriginal population that are even close to national levels. An example of this point can be seen in the unacceptably high suicide rates among young people (age-group: 15-24) in Aboriginal communities in Canada (Table 4). Among the James Bay Cree, the suicide rate among the young is 3 times the national

average, whereas *among the Inuit of northern Québec, the rate is approximately 20 times the national rate* (NAHO, 2006; Hicks, 2005).

Table 4 – Suicide rates among Aboriginal youth (15-24) compared to national rate
(Williams, 1999; Hicks, 2005; Kouri, 2005; NAHO, 2006)

ABORIGINAL YOUTH (AGE 15-24) SUICIDE RATES <small>Suicide Rates: Aboriginal Youth (age:15-24) (Deaths per 100,000 per year)</small> (SUICIDE DEATHS PER 100,000 PER YEAR)	<u>One form of cultural confusion and violence... Suicide by the young:</u>
In all of Canada (2003: WHO calculation of rate) China (estimates: WHO 2003; China Daily 2007)	1987-91 15 (2003: 13) (2003: 14) (2007: 25)
Registered Indians (First Nations people)	1987-91 72
Northwest Territory + Nunavut (Inuit)	1986-88 180
James Bay Cree	1982-92 43 (82-86: 11 ; 87-92: 69)
Quebec Inuit	1987-94 330

Source: Lylee Williams (1999) Our most precious gift – Child health in Aboriginal communities.
(<http://www.niichro.com/2004/pdf/INtouch/in-touch-vol-12.pdf>)

- 2) When Aboriginal people have settled in hamlets (such as today’s numerous northern communities) and in cities or urban areas (in the south of the country) there is often great difficulty in the area of unemployment and poverty levels, of which housing conditions can be an indicator. For example, as a Statistics Canada report states, “[In 2006] First Nations people were *five times* more likely than non-Aboriginal people to live in crowded homes. The [2006] census found that *15% of First Nations people in Canada lived in such a dwelling, compared with just 3% of the non-Aboriginal population*. (Crowding is defined as more than one person per room.)” (StatCan, 2008b). Furthermore, when the *Inuit* are looked at apart from other Aboriginal populations the comparable figure is *31% who live in crowded homes*, about 10 times the non-Aboriginal crowded housing figure of 3% (see Table 3). Clearly, the sedentarization of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, whether in rural or urban areas, is very problematic.

What are the implications for China? Of course there clearly are issues of health, education and employment that must be considered, but not only these, we also must remember the struggles that people will have to cope with major dislocations; and equally the likely emergence of "cultural confusion" that may lead to new social tensions and problems including alcohol abuse and violence. We can pretty safely say that, based on the Canadian experience, relocating nomadic peoples into settlements such as villages or hamlets, or into

or near urban areas, may solve *some* issues, but will definitely create major socio-economic problems.

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