

British Columbia's Changing Ethnic Mosaic

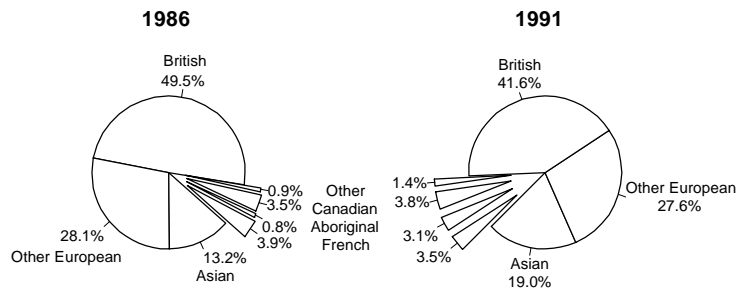
by Dan Schrier and Frank Ip ¹

Ethnic origin refers to the ethnic or cultural group(s) to which an individual's ancestors belonged. It pertains to the ancestral roots or origins of the population and not to place of birth, citizenship or nationality. According to the 1991 Census, 6 out of every 10 British Columbians belong to a single ethnic origin, and 4 out of 10 belong to more than one ethnic origin (multiple origins).

British Columbia's ethnic mosaic has been shifting over the last decade. In 1991, of those British Columbians who reported a single ethnic origin, almost 42 per cent were of British origin. This is down from the 1986 level of almost 50 per cent. One of the reasons for this may be that many who reported themselves as British in 1986 subsequently reported Canadian as their ethnic origin in 1991. Almost 46,000 more people reported Canadian as their ethnic origin in the 1991 Census relative to the 1986 Census. This was an increase from one half of a per cent of the total population of British Columbia to almost two per cent.

The main reason for the drop in the percentage of people of British origin in British Columbia, however, is the increase in numbers of other ethnic groups, especially those with Asian origins. The number of British Columbians who belonged to a single Asian origin increased from 233,130 in 1986 to 370,835 in 1991. This represented an increase in share from 8.2 per cent of the provincial population to 11.4 per cent.

Figure 1
Ethnic Origins, Single Origin Only, British Columbia
1986 Census vs. 1991 Census



BC STATS

Source: Statistics Canada

¹ The views expressed are those of the authors and are not necessarily shared by the government of British Columbia.

This shift in the ethnic mosaic of British Columbians is primarily due to the recent change in the source countries of immigrants to British Columbia. Europe is still the source of almost half the existing immigrant population in British Columbia, but currently most immigrants arriving in British Columbia originate from Asia; in particular, Hong Kong, China, Philippines, India, and Taiwan. From 1981 to 1991, the source countries of immigrants (regardless of period of immigration) have shifted significantly away from European origins and toward Asian origins. The 1981 Census reported almost 62 per cent of the British Columbia immigrant population was from European countries, while in 1991, just under 50 per cent was from Europe. In contrast, Asian countries were the source of just over 21 per cent of the immigrant population in 1981, but were the source of almost 34 per cent in 1991.

While the proportion of the immigrant population in the overall British Columbia population has been relatively constant in the last two decades, the proportion of ethnic Chinese has increased from 3.9 per cent in 1986, to 5.6 per cent in 1991. Chinese has eclipsed German as the second largest ethnic group in British Columbia.

**Top 10 Single Response Ethnic Origins for B.C.
1991 vs. 1986 Census**

Rank	Response - 1991 Census			Response - 1986 Census		
		Number	%		Number	%
1	British	812,470	25.0	British	871,075	30.6
2	Chinese	181,185	5.6	German	148,280	5.2
3	German	156,635	4.8	Chinese	112,605	4.0
4	East Indian	89,265	2.7	French	68,965	2.4
5	Aboriginal	74,420	2.3	Dutch	62,945	2.2
6	French	68,795	2.1	Aboriginal	61,125	2.1
7	Dutch	66,525	2.0	East Indian	60,045	2.1
8	Canadian	60,320	1.9	Ukrainian	48,195	1.7
9	Ukrainian	52,760	1.6	Italian	46,755	1.6
10	Italian	49,265	1.5	Norwegian	20,065	0.7
	Total Single	1,952,855	60.1	Total Single	1,759,810	61.8
	Total Population	3,247,505	100.0	Total Population	2,849,585	100.0

Regional Variation

Despite being the second largest ethnic group after British, the ethnic Chinese are concentrated mostly in one area. Over 92 per cent of ethnic Chinese in British Columbia live in the Vancouver Census Metropolitan Area (CMA). Close to 4 per cent live in the Victoria CMA, which means these two areas account for about 96 per cent of all ethnic Chinese in British Columbia. This is not entirely surprising, since more than 80 per cent of recent immigrants reported the Vancouver area as their intended destination.

The top ten ethnic origins in Vancouver are almost the same as those of the province as a whole, except there is a greater concentration of people from Asian origins, particularly Chinese and East Indian. After British, Chinese and East Indian are the second and third most common ethnic origins respectively in Vancouver.

Figure 2
Place of Birth of the British Columbia Immigrant Population
1981 Census vs. 1991 Census

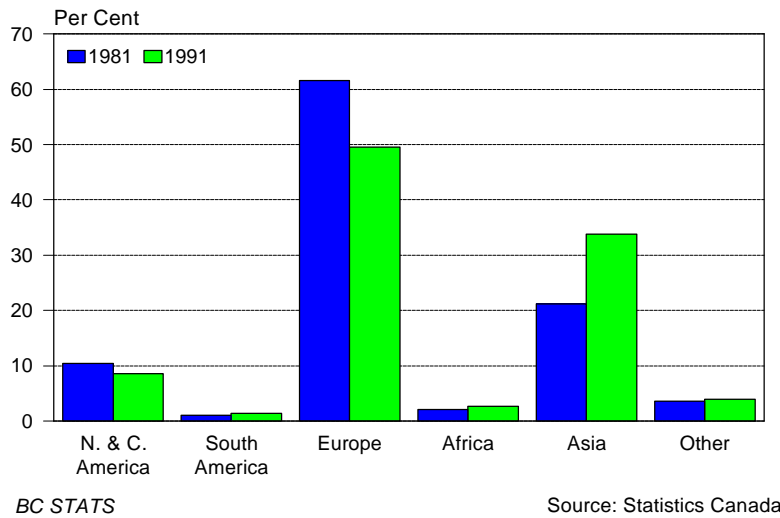
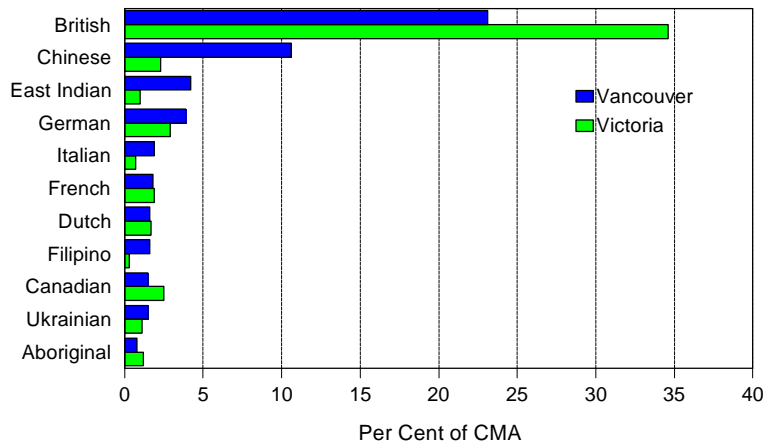


Figure 3
Major Ethnic Origins, Single Origin Only, 1991
Vancouver and Victoria



BC STATS

Source: Statistics Canada

Victoria is still predominantly British, with almost 35 per cent of Victorians claiming British as their ethnic origin, compared to only 25 per cent for British Columbia as a whole. There was also a higher proportion of people reporting themselves as having an ethnic origin of Canadian. All the other ethnic groups in the top ten were under the provincial average.

Aboriginal Origins

Aboriginal ethnic groups are more likely to reside in rural areas in British Columbia. Vancouver, which represents about one half the population of British Columbia, has only 17 per cent of its Aboriginal population. Victoria is similarly under represented with respect to Aboriginal groups.

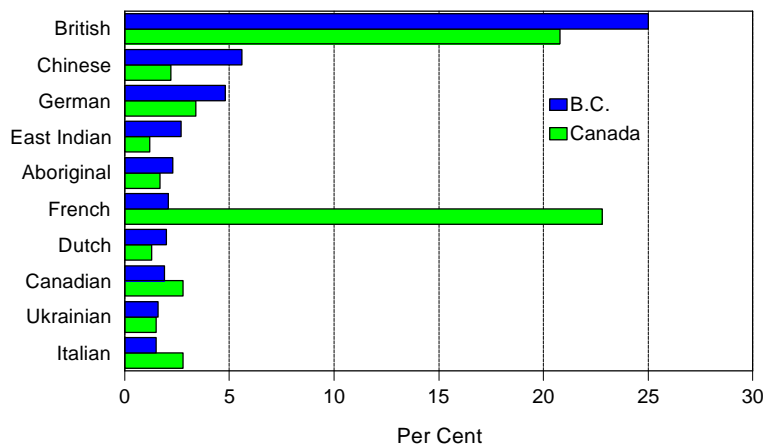
Overall, the proportion of the population that belongs to an Aboriginal ethnic group (both single and multiple origins) has increased from 4.5 per cent in 1986 to 5.3 per cent in 1991. From 1986 to 1991 the number of people reporting a single Aboriginal origin increased by 21.8 per cent, and the number reporting multiple Aboriginal origins increased by 39.2 per cent. These increases may not reflect the true population growth for Aboriginals as a result of two factors. The first is that there were more incompletely enumerated Indian reserves in the 1986 Census than in the 1991 Census. This would have created a relatively higher number of unenumerated Aboriginals in the 1986 Census, particularly for those in the single ethnic response category. Secondly, just as more British Columbians identified themselves as being Canadians in the 1991 Census, it is possible that more British Columbians acknowledged their Aboriginal ancestry.

Hence the 1986 Census count of the single and multiple origin Aboriginal population may be artificially low.

Comparison with Canada

There are some striking differences when comparing British Columbia ethnic origins with those for Canada as a whole. The most obvious, of course, is the predominance of French as an ethnic origin for Canada, relative to British Columbia. In the 1991 Census, French represented the largest ethnic group in Canada with 22.8 per cent of the population, overtaking British, with only 20.8 per cent of the population. (Again, the large increase in the number of people reporting Canadian as their ethnic origin was probably the main reason for the fall in the number of people reporting British.) By contrast, in British Columbia, French represented only 2.1 per cent of the population, and British was 25.0 per cent. The Asian origins characterized a larger proportion of the British Columbia population than that of Canada.

Figure 4
Top 10 Single Response Ethnic Origins
British Columbia vs. Canada



BC STATS

Source: Statistics Canada

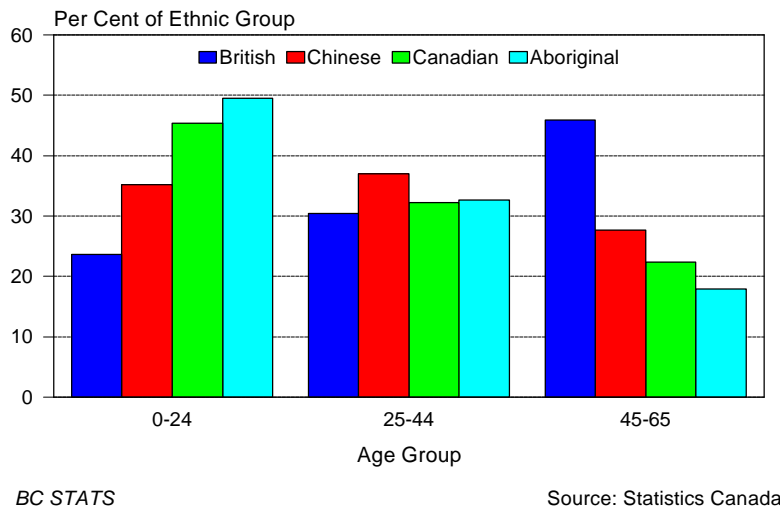
Age Structure of Ethnic Groups

A comparison of ethnic groups with respect to age shows that the Chinese ethnic population tends to be younger, on average, than the British ethnic population. The main reason for this is that many of those of Chinese origin are more recent immigrants, and immigrants tend to be younger, on average, than the existing population. Also, those reporting Canadian as their ethnic origin are younger relative to the total population. These are likely people who were born in Canada

and do not consider themselves to be of British origin, even though they may in fact technically be in that category. This is possibly the case with other European ethnic groups as well. Many of those of European origin are at least second generation Canadians, compared to those of Asian origin who are more likely to be either immigrants themselves, or the children of immigrants. The end result is that the age structure of those reporting European origins tends to be older.

The ethnic group that exhibits the youngest age structure among those in the top ten in British Columbia, is the Aboriginal group. About one half of those reporting a single Aboriginal ethnic origin were under 25 years old. This compares to under one quarter of those reporting British as their ethnic origin.

Figure 5
Age Structure by Ethnicity, British Columbia
1991 Census



Outlook

With the influx of immigrants from Asian sources, and the aging of the existing European immigrant population, it is likely that British Columbia will continue to see a shift in its ethnic mosaic. People of Asian ethnicity will likely continue to grow as a proportion of the population, although there is a possibility that there will be a change in the source of immigrants in the future. It is difficult to predict what will happen twenty years from now. Just as in the past the source of immigrants changed as world events unfolded (e.g. with the Vietnam war there was a large increase in immigrants from the United States; with the situation in Hong Kong there have been a greater proportion of immigrants arriving from that country; etc.), so too may the source change in the future. There is the possibility that Canada may see more immigrants from the former communist countries of Eastern Europe, for example, in which case, the proportion of European ethnic groups in the population may increase. For the short term, at least, there will be a greater proportion of people of Asian ethnicity in British Columbia, and this will have policy implications.

One result of the changing ethnic mosaic is an increase in the number of visible minorities. According to the 1991 Census, 14.2 per cent of the British Columbia population belonged to a visible minority group. In the Vancouver Metropolitan Area, the proportion was much higher, with 24.0 per cent belonging to a visible minority group.

There are long term policy implications associated with the growing number of visible minorities, as prospective generations of existing visible minorities, although growing in proportion, will continue to be visible minorities for the foreseeable future. Government policies and programs that ensure visible minorities are equally represented, and potential racial conflicts are minimized, will need to be developed and maintained.

The *Employment Equity* program is one example of a policy initiated by the government to meet these goals. It is designed to ensure that those who belong to a particular group are not disadvantaged in terms of employment opportunities.

Another example is the annual event of *Immigration Week*, which is a joint provincial-federal effort to promote the recognition of the value of immigrants and multiculturalism. This kind of education campaign helps increase public awareness of minority groups and recent immigrants of various ethnic backgrounds, and thereby aid in the settlement process.

Also, language training (the *English as a Second Language* program) will continue to be one of the most important immigrant settlement policies in British Columbia. With more people arriving from non-English speaking countries, there will be a greater need than ever before for these services.

With the continually changing ethnic mosaic, these kinds of programs will become even more important in the future. The cultural diversity created by the changing ethnic mosaic will offer many benefits, but there will be some hurdles to overcome as well. The programs mentioned here are just a sample of the kinds of programs that will be needed to surmount these problems and achieve the benefits available.

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