

Title: The Moral and Instrumental Values of Diversity and Inclusion in Canada

Essay Question # 3: As an Asian Canadian, how do you view Canadian diversity and inclusion? Are diversity and inclusion just moral imperatives, or are they considered as socio-economic advantages in the global village? (Examples can be drawn from all areas of Canadian society: academic, business, economic, non-profit organizations, political, research, science, trades, etc.)

The Moral and Instrumental Values of Diversity and Inclusion in Canada

As an Asian-Canadian, there are two places that I feel proud calling “home.” The first is my birthplace in China, where I was brought up in my native language, local customs, and cultural traditions. The second place that I feel proud to call home is Canada, the country that my family immigrated to 20 years ago. What makes Canada feel like “home” is not the fact of my legal citizenship status in Canada, nor the fact that it is the physical location of my apartment. Living in Canada for the past 20 years has played a fundamental role in shaping the person I am today, but it has done so in a way that allowed me to preserve so much of my native Chinese identity, culture, and background. In fact, my identity as a Canadian is inseparable from the ability that I had, throughout my time here in Canada, to embrace my traditional identity, upbringing, and culture. This feeling of “home” that Canada has created for myself, my family, and so many other immigrant families alike, is rooted most significantly in the distinctly Canadian values that form the lifeblood of the nation: diversity and inclusion. These values are most meaningfully reflected in Canada’s policy of multiculturalism, first announced as an official government policy by Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau in his statement at the House of Commons in October 1971. In his statement, Trudeau voiced a uniquely Canadian conception of multiculturalism, arguing that a policy of multiculturalism is “the most suitable means of assuring the cultural freedom of Canadians,” “can form the base of a society which is based on fair play for all,” and can “contribute to a richer life” for all Canadians.¹ Several years later, the policy of multiculturalism was incorporated into the country’s supreme law, as the Canadian

¹ “Canadian Multiculturalism Policy, 1971.” Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21. <https://pier21.ca/research/immigration-history/canadian-multiculturalism-policy-1971>

Constitution's Charter of Rights and Freedoms mandated, under section 27, that the Charter "shall be interpreted in a manner consistent with the preservation and enhancement of the multicultural heritage of Canadians."² Overtime, diversity and inclusion have become essential elements that make up the unique DNA of the Canadian nation.

The Moral Imperative

At its core, the Canadian policy of multiculturalism and its underlying values of diversity and inclusion are moral imperatives of a free and just democratic society. One of the most authoritative conceptions of morality and justice in contemporary Western political philosophy is developed by John Rawls in his theory of "justice as fairness."³ In his conception, Rawls addresses the fact that any modern liberal society is marked by a degree of pluralism and diversity. Amidst this context of pluralism and diversity, a morally righteous and just society is a society where institutions of social cooperation are fair, and where citizens are free and equal. Specifically, the freedom and equality of citizens require that each member of society be entitled to adequate and equal basic rights and liberties, retain all political rights with respect to their unique cultural and religious identities, and has the freedom to make choices to plan their own lives.⁴ Canada's policy of multiculturalism gives meaning to this Rawlsian vision of the morally just society of free and equal citizens. As Trudeau stated back in 1971, "the individual's freedom would be hampered if he were locked for life within a particular compartment by the accident of birth or language..." and a policy of multiculturalism is "the conscious support of individual freedom of choice."⁵ He further added that this individual freedom cannot be left to chance but instead must be actively pursued and fostered: "if freedom of choice is in danger for

² Romulo F. Magsino, John C. Long, and Raymond G. Théberge, "Canadian pluralism, the Charter and Citizenship Education," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* XXXII No. 1 (2000) 89-110.

³ John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (Cumberland: Harvard University Press, 2001); John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971).

⁴ "John Rawls," Stanford Encyclopedia (2008). <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/rawls/#ReaPluPubPolCul>

⁵ Magsino et al., "Canadian pluralism, the Charter and Citizenship Education."

some ethnic groups, it is in danger for all.”⁶ Furthermore, Canada’s formulation and implementation of its multiculturalism policy is also a critical part of the pursuit of equality and justice for minority cultural groups.⁷ Going beyond mere formal equality, Canada’s approach towards diversity and inclusion aim to pursue substantive and genuine equality for minority ethnic and cultural groups that make up the Canadian mosaic. This is most clearly seen in the field of Canadian jurisprudence, where the Supreme Court over time has confirmed the right to wear a Kirpan in a school with a no weapons policy, the right of a Muslim woman to wear a Niqab when testifying in court, the right of a Jewish person to erect a Sukkah on a condo balcony, among many other progressive decisions that confirmed Canada’s duty of respectful accommodation of different races, cultures and religions.⁸ Overall, the Canadian policy of multiculturalism, motivated by the underlying values of diversity and inclusion, is a policy that not only accepts but embraces pluralism, and safeguards the freedom and equality of citizens to make personal choices regarding customs, religion, culture, and lifestyle.⁹ In this way, Canada’s values of diversity and inclusion are at the heart of what makes Canadian society a moral and just society.

The Socio-Economic Advantage

In addition to their moral significance, Canadian values of diversity and inclusion, as implemented through the policy of multiculturalism, are also foundational building blocks of Canada’s comparative advantage in the global community. Economically, Canada’s workforce, businesses, global competitiveness, and economic growth depends critically on the diverse population of Canadian society, particularly the foreign-born immigrant population, and the diverse talents that they bring with

⁶ Magsino et al., “Canadian pluralism, the Charter and Citizenship Education.”

⁷ Magsino et al., “Canadian pluralism, the Charter and Citizenship Education.”

⁸ Richard Albert and David R. Cameron, Eds. *Canada in the World: Comparative Perspectives on the Canadian Constitution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

⁹ Magsino et al., “Canadian pluralism, the Charter and Citizenship Education.”

them. Moreover, there is still a significant amount of untapped economic potential in the Canadian immigrant population. Many quantitative studies have been conducted in this area, outlining the magnitude of economic benefits brought by Canada's immigrant population and the magnitude of the untapped potential. One recent study has shown that if immigrants were more successfully integrated into the Canadian workforce, there would be an extra 1.6 million jobs and an extra \$174 billion in personal income.¹⁰ Similarly, within large firms and small businesses alike, diversity in employment are conducive to finding hidden talents, new perspectives, and more innovative solutions.¹¹

Even more significant than the economic advantages of diversity and inclusion are its social benefits. Canada's national unity and the social cohesion of Canadian society depends crucially on its diversity and inclusion. As Trudeau stated back in 1971, "national unity, if it is to mean anything in the deeply personal sense, must be founded on confidence in one's own individual identity; out of this can grow respect for that of others and a willingness to share ideas, attitudes, and assumptions. A vigorous policy of multiculturalism will help create this confidence."¹² For me personally, my identification as a Canadian is intricately connected to my native Chinese identity. Home is a place where I feel confident about all aspects my personal identity – including where I was born, what my childhood experience was like, my family's background, and the story of my immigration. I truly feel that Canada is my home because it is a place that accommodates all of the aspects of my personal background and life experiences that make me unique. Furthermore, the presence of such a diverse range of cultural and ethnic communities makes this home such a unique and interesting place to live, learn, and grow. Throughout my middle school, high school, undergraduate, and graduate education in Canada, I had an unparalleled opportunity to meet, make friends with, and work with peers from all over the world. It is

¹⁰ RBC, "The Diversity Advantage: A Case for Canada's 21st Century Economy," Presentation at 10th International Metropolis Conference (Toronto, 2005). <http://www.rbc.com/diversity/pdf/diversityAdvantage.pdf>

¹¹ RBC, "The Diversity Advantage: A Case for Canada's 21st Century Economy."

¹² Magsino et al., "Canadian pluralism, the Charter and Citizenship Education."

my interaction with such a diverse range of people – each with their own unique backgrounds, experiences, and stories – that made my experience in Canada so rich and valuable. While most of my friends identified as Canadians, what united us was not how similar we were but our differences and the fact that each of us had something unique to offer. At the same time, it is the different – sometimes even clashing and conflicting perspectives that I encountered – that truly allowed me to learn and grow. It is also through these experiences and encounters that I had the opportunity to vastly expand my horizon, challenge myself to think further and more critically, and allowed myself to develop the invaluable traits of empathy, tolerance, and understanding. Taking a step back to look at the larger picture, the diversity in world views, perspectives, outlooks, and convictions, is what makes the social fabric in Canada so rich, lively, and vibrant. On the whole, diversity and inclusion are not only moral imperatives but also values that are crucial to Canada's economic prosperity and social vitality.

Looking to the Future

Looking ahead, there is perhaps a third place that I will call home: the global village which is the common home shared by us all. Given the ever-increasing extent of globalization and global interconnectedness, people in my generation are increasingly global citizens. Having spent the past 20 years in the diverse and inclusive environment of Canada, I feel more prepared than ever to take on a third layer of my identity as a global citizen. My educational experiences and overall life experiences in Canada have given me the confidence to begin to take on the responsibilities of the young generation in the 21st century global village. Similarly, at a time when international cooperation is urgently needed to solve issues that are truly global in nature, Canada's strength in its diversity and inclusion gives it a competitive edge in this new globalized world. Given the current context of divisive international politics, existentially threatening climate change, terrorist and security threats around the world, and an ongoing global pandemic with its devastating social and economic impact, global governance is facing

its greatest challenge yet. Canada's embrace of diversity and attitude of inclusion should set the example for global governance and international cooperation at large. Particularly given the global and borderless nature of contemporary challenges facing humanity, global governance needs to embrace pluralism, and the world requires truly global solutions that incorporate a diverse range of perspectives. During this time, Canada is well-suited to take on a leadership role.

Yet at a time when Canada should be a beacon of hope, recent events within the nation such as the rise of racism and divisiveness are increasingly worrisome. Diversity and inclusion are not only moral imperatives and socioeconomically advantageous values; these values are at the heart of the Canadian national identity, and at the core of what makes Canada *Canada*, and what makes Canada a place that so many people from such a diverse range of backgrounds call "home." When racism begins to increase in a country like Canada, not only are many people's sense of "home" destroyed, but the very lifeblood of the nation is also endangered. It took many decades of hard work, progressive politics, and revolutionary jurisprudence to build the strength that Canada has today. Thus, all Canadians should fight hard to protect and safeguard the essential values of diversity and inclusion that are fundamental to a morally just society, a socioeconomically advanced country, and a strong and united nation ready to take the lead in tackling the challenges facing humanity in the 21st century.

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