

Existential Tourism and the Homeland: The Overseas Chinese Experience

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Introduction

‘Home’ is a relative concept. For many people, the physical places that they call ‘home’ will change over the course of their lives. The reasons for changing one’s home are diverse, though geographers have traditionally viewed them as ‘push’ factors and ‘pull’ factors. Following a change in home, old and new places often vie for ‘homeness’, and as each new place becomes more of a home, each old home comes to hold a sense of ‘past homeness’. For many people, these past homes form important parts of their life experiences and personal identities. For some, these past homes can hold a greater sense of belonging and ‘at home’ feelings than their current physical home. In addition to past homes, there are also many ‘other homes’ that shape individual and group identities, often consisting of places that have never been physically lived in for any significant period or even visited. Although the origin of such ties to other homes in distant locations can be many, cultural ethnicity (including religion) and ancestry (including race) are probably the two most common.

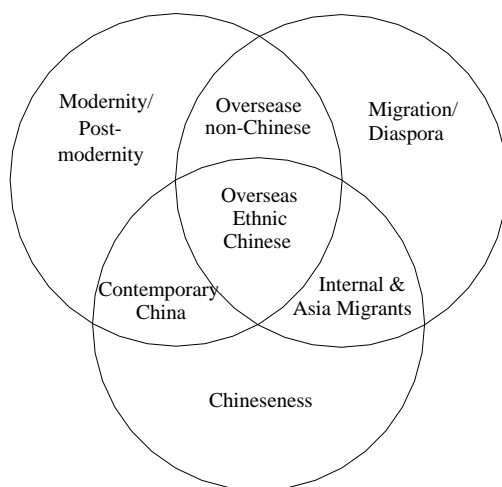
The idea of the home, as a place of security, refuge, comfort, family and simple shelter is one of the most enduring, pan-cultural desires. But what if ‘home’ becomes diverse places? Past homes and other homes are significant generators of travel and tourism, as people are drawn to and seek out places that hold special personal, and often more ‘authentic,’ meaning (cf. Oakes, this volume). These types of tourists have been considered distinctly from the majority of tourists who are motivated to travel more by recreation, education, general curiosity and escape than by an existential calling. Erik Cohen (1979a) suggested that the majority of mass tourists are either fully centered (in a psychological sense) in their physical home, and therefore travel mostly for recreation and curiosity; or they are largely decentered, and travel because it serves as a temporary distraction from an already alienated home existence.

Cohen proposed one other form of highly centered tourist; one whose center was not in the physical home, but in another home: the existential tourist. The existential tourist is not decentered, but also is not centered wholly in their place of residence. Instead the existential tourist negotiates space to return to a home away from home to past homes and other homes. With the increasing ease of travel and migration that has accompanied the end of the Cold War and the rise of economic globalization in the late twentieth century, ever larger numbers of people have been living far from their places of

birth and ancestry (Ma 2003). In a time when many nationalities (defined here in cultural terms) can claim to have their diasporic populations scattered across the world, the potential for existential tourism is greater than ever.

This chapter explores conditions of existential tourism among overseas Chinese, focusing on relations with their ancestral homeland areas in China. Like other diasporic ethnic groups, overseas Chinese migrants, in both historic and contemporary times, have followed long established paths, bound by ‘networks of ethnicity’, which “extend the group’s identity spatially, and are an important facet of social and economic organization, particularly within migrant communities” (Mitchell 2000: 392). Highly structured ethnic networks support existential tourism to China and several major fields of influence shape this structuration process, overlapping in different ways. Figure 18.1 Overseas Chinese institutional structures support ideas about traditional Chinese values, thereby working to enable and maintain a sense of ‘Chineseness’. ‘Traditional values’, however, have also adapted to meet the special conditions of the migrant/diasporic community, as migration creates both ‘outsider’ and ‘home out there’ experiences, the evolution of multiple homes, and the need for mechanisms to overcome geographic spaces between old, new and transitory homes (Leung 2003). The influence of space-shrinking technologies and globalizing modernity provide further realms of influence, shaping the form and experience of both migration and ‘Chineseness, by, for example, enabling closer relationships and easing the strain of return visits.

Figure 18.1 - Influences Shaping the Overseas Chinese Experience



For overseas Chinese, modernity as a social and historical phenomenon has shaped migration from China and existential tourist travel back to China. Economic migration, which has characterized

most overseas Chinese migration, has been an integral part of modernity's global project (Giddens 1990). Individuals who participate in the migration process have come to epitomize modernity through their transnational/postnational and transborder organizational structures, multiple and hybrid cultures, and cosmopolitan openness (Anthia 1999, Bhabha 1994). Indeed, the overseas Chinese, probably more so than those who stayed behind, are modern subjects, "cut loose from [their] moorings in the reassurance of tradition" (Giddens 1990: 176). Yet at the same time, they are often more bound to the *idea* of China than those who never left (Sun 2002). For them, existential tourism, and the social institutions that have been built to support it, is a modernist system that holds the promise of transcending both geographic and social space, and overcoming the risks of an uncertain future.

What are the existential tourist's landscapes of experience? Among overseas Chinese tied to ethnicity networks, touristed landscapes are sites where ties in the network touch down and locate, where 'flows' of 'ethnoscapes' (Appadurai 1990) become emplaced. These sites may be as easily be 'Chinatowns' or affluent suburbs of world cities, immigration lines or airplanes, and, ultimately, the home town of the patriline, the ancestral home of the family. For overseas Chinese who themselves or whose forebears left rural China, the ultimate destination is the ancestral village, the ancestral home and the gravesites (if they survived grave removal in the name of recovering arable land during the Maoist era) of one's ancestors. For those who left towns and cities, attempting to locate the past may result in another kind of alienation: the discovery that the family home has been torn down to make way for new high rise and commercial development. This contemporary existential tourist undergoes an even more extreme 'search' for 'home', one in which all homes are displaced.

These are some of the general conditions, social and spatial, in which overseas Chinese have constructed their relationships to China, and their existential tourist trips to home provinces, towns and ancestral villages. Some aspects of these conditions are universal, such as modern alienation and the postmodern search for a center(s) 'out there'. Other aspects are situated in the realm of diaspora and migration writ large, including displacement, hybrid identities and existential tourism. And then there is the realm of what is 'Chineseness', with a complex set of arrangements centered on extended family relations and obligations.

Overseas 'Chineseness'

Chinese diasporas have largely been a modernist and capitalist phenomenon. Although migrations from China to Southeast Asia are recorded as far back as the third century BCE the earliest significant Chinese settlement in the Philippines, the Malacca Straits area, and the islands of Indonesia occurred during Ming dynasty (1368-1644) (Poston and Yu 1990, G. Wang 2000). Most of the merchant traders of the era were sojourners, though some migrated permanently. They occupied a kind of 'third space' (Bhabha 1990, 1994); for example, between the Malay and Chinese cultural worlds, by establishing families with local, non-Chinese women, while successfully

maintaining a high degree of Chineseness through many centuries of descendants. The result was a hybrid culture, known as *Peranakan* in Malaysia and Indonesia. Distinctive forms of Peranakan culture still exist in Malacca and Penang in Malaysia, as well as in Singapore (Cartier 1996, 1998).

Early Chinese migrants undertook their quasi-modernist project, driven by economic imperatives in a process of regionalization (if not globalization) rather than nationalization, forging new transborder hybrid identities that maintained aspects of traditional ethnicity while adjusting to the politics of ‘outsideness’ and the economics of regional relationships (Cartier 2003, Pieterse 1995, Wong 1997). By the mid-sixteenth century, European traders found ethnic Chinese merchants and communities well established throughout Southeast Asia and occasionally beyond. In 1712 the Manchurian Qing dynasty, fearing revolutionary influences, made the return of Chinese from abroad punishable by death. Chinese were not allowed to legally leave China and emigrants were accused of having had “deserted their ancestors graves to seek profits abroad” (Duara 1997: 42). This edict had greater moral than practical meaning, for the Chinese maritime communities of the South China coast for whom long distance trade was a way of life; they largely continued active trading across the East and Southeast Asian seas through the Qing dynasty (Cartier 2001).

But the conditions for migration changed appreciably after the British forced China to open its southern ports following the first Opium War in 1841. Through the turn of the century, impoverished Chinese laborers emigrated in droves to Southeast Asia and beyond (Pan 1990). These ‘coolie’ laborers differed from their merchant forebears in that most, though not all, were of rural peasant origin and intended to return to China after they made their fortune overseas; they were classical ‘sojourners’. In an effort to capture the growing wealth and political clout of overseas Chinese, the Republic of China (founded in 1910) made all Chinese throughout the world citizens of China; the People’s Republic of China (PRC) discontinued this practice in 1949. In the early 1950s, China was again closed to out-migration, the Southeast Asian nations gained independence, and many sojourners become permanent residents in these countries and others. The PRC at times embraced the overseas Chinese and at other times rejected them, while all the while attempting to manipulate them in its ideological war with the Republic of China on Taiwan (Tu 1994). During windows of acceptance, some overseas Chinese also returned to China to settle, mostly due to turmoil in their adopted lands, such as in Indonesia in the 1960s and in Vietnam in the 1970s.

After the end of the Maoist era, in 1976, China reopened its doors beginning around 1980. The newest and continuing wave Chinese migrants have more diverse backgrounds and motivations than earlier generations (Wong 1997). Some are sojourners, but most are permanent immigrants. They come from both rural and urban areas, and they work as laborers and professionals. Aihwa Ong describes this new wave of migrants as exerting ‘flexible citizenship,’ with different locations and countries selected for family, work, and investments: “Flexibility, migration, and relocation, instead of being coerced and resisted, became practices to strive for...” (Ong 1999: 19). What all of the more than 60 million ethnic Chinese living outside of China proper have in common are historical,

cultural and racial ties to the homeland of China (Lew and Wong 2002). For some, this relationship becomes manifest through travel and existential tourism. Such travel could be considered a postmodern form of sojourning—one that is more flexible and less essential than the permanent return of the sojourner.

Motivations for maintaining ties to the homeland are many. For all Chinese there is a racial identity that ties them to China and separates them from other racial groups in their adopted lands. China itself, especially in the Han areas of eastern China, is among the most racially and ethnically homogeneous countries of the world. A trip to China allows immersion in racial (if not fully ethnic) sameness that is possible in only a few places outside of China (such as in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and larger Chinatowns around the world). At the same time, race alone provides a somewhat superficial basis for establishing identity (Chang 1997). In the Chinese case, however, Han Chinese ethnic culture is so closely tied to the Chinese race that it is able to overcome a good portion of the great diversity of origin and migration experiences (Wong 1997). Sub-ethnic language and home region affiliations (at provincial, county, or better yet, township and village levels) allow for even greater degrees of kinship identity formation among overseas Chinese traveling back to China. The Chinese practice of genealogy is another important force structuring family ties. Most villages in China maintained detailed genealogical records that followed the male line of descent back to the legendary periods of Chinese history over 3000 years ago (even as some were fictive in part). Many of these original genealogy records were destroyed during China's Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), but many also survived and in alternative forms (Lim 2002).

For overseas Chinese, their Chineseness is a centering force that has a clearly defined 'homeland' in the country of China, even if the individual's home village has been long lost and the home of residence is thousands of miles away from China (Ma 2003). While Chineseness can represent a minority status in a non-Chinese place (Chang 1997), structures that support the centering quality of a Chinese homeland can help to overcome this 'othering' experience, which can otherwise lead to a questioning of personal identity and values. Prasenjit Duara (1995), for example, identifies the sharing of historical memories (through the development for both formal and informal institutions), along with the experience of both 'othering' and being 'othered', as crucial elements in the community building process among diasporic populations. Genealogical records are a form of group memory that can transcend space and offer new opportunities for community-building. Meeting a distant or long lost relative reaffirms one's human and place relations in the world and offers new possibilities to transcend differences and share common stories. Visiting a homeland offers this same experience, in addition to new memories that can be shared at future opportunities. On the geographic space that separates diasporic populations from their homelands, Sun (2002: 131) says "This geographic lack will continue to be compensated for through the growing importance of memories—memories of the past that are portable, potent, patriotic, and available for constant repetitious retrieval." In this way, memories, and traveling as a way of creating new memories, and

rebuilding genealogical ties, affirm ideas of well being about one's place in relation to distant relations and homelands.

Sojourner Migration

The Chinese sojourner tradition, from the middle of the eighteenth to the middle of the nineteenth centuries, represents the clearest example of the adaptation of traditional 'Chineseness' in the diasporic community. Several conditions recommended the sojourner lifestyle over permanent migration (Woon 1989). The leading historical condition is the importance of the extended family and insecurity in a place lacking the extended family reference group. Overseas Chinese adopted pseudo-extended family experiences through overseas voluntary associations in their countries of residence, based on lineage/surname, province, town or village, dialect, trade/profession, and other special interests (Brogger 2000, Lew and Wong 2003b, Lim 2000). A second condition derived from the classic notions of filial piety, which pressured migrants to return home. Chinese traditions and holidays have drawn on obligations of filial piety, as expressed in terms of caring for aged parents and for maintaining graves of the ancestors (Pan 1990: 55). In southern China, despite many decades of communist rule, most of the Chinese who left before 1949 maintained ownership of their village homes, or passed the deeds on to their foreign-born children (Lew and Wong 2003a). A third condition has been the presence of a relatively open class society in South China—a 'cultural borderland', where the Confucian land owning class was less dominant—allowing greater openness and upward socioeconomic mobility (Pan 1990: 13). The idea of leaving China to improve one's position in life was simply more accepted in southern China, with its maritime ports and traditions of overseas trade, than in the north. A final condition is the social prestige conveyed to expatriate sojourners through home visits and donations to hometown causes and infrastructure. Making more trips home before retirement increased one's prestige among fellow sojourners. So did the amount of money sent home to relatives, and donated for public works projects for the villages.

The sojourner experience transformed following the establishment of the PRC in 1949, but these values remained strong among Chinese who left China in the first half of the twentieth century. Within China itself, Overseas Chinese Affairs Offices became established at national and local levels immediately after the People's Republic was founded. These offices continue to assist Overseas Chinese in finding their ancestral roots and finding ways to contribute to their home villages (Lew and Wong 2003a). They regularly publish magazines for the overseas Chinese community containing news of root-finding visits and homeland donations and economic investments, and many now provide this information on the World Wide Web, for example the Guangdong Overseas Chinese website, with links to other provinces (GOCW 2002). Many overseas Chinese villages and towns in South China are full of monuments to the sojourning and overseas Chinese experience. Temples have been rebuilt with donations from visiting local descendants, in addition to other kinds of public infrastructure, including roads and bridges. Local schools are especially favored for donations, and visible subscription boards honor leading donors, thereby continuing to construct social prestige for the overseas Chinese visitors.

Traditional sojourner values are less prominent among the more heterogeneous migrant populations that have emerged since the 1960s (Wong 1997). The shrinking time-space economy of the 1990s, with economic globalization, the expansion of the Internet, and cheaper and more accessible travel have made traditional sojourning less necessary, though still an option. Recent migrants, however, still share some common characteristics with earlier generations. In addition to shared racial and cultural characteristics, these can include a sense of existential ‘outsideness’, common among migrants and expatriates, a desire to build communities with shared values and experiences, and a goal of improving one’s situation in life. The long history of Chinese filial piety, extended family and genealogical traditions may be less apparent among younger overseas Chinese, but these values and conditions are likely to exert themselves over time as this cohort matures and comes to recognize the ‘center out there’ as offering a unique opportunity for self identity formation and ethnic solidarity.

Modern Motivations

The field of modernity/postmodernity (Figure 18.1) has influenced the migration/diaspora realm by structuring both the motivation and form of Chinese diasporic movement. The global time-space convergence brought about by transportation and telecommunication advances in the twentieth century has further intensified at the beginning of the twenty-first century, helping to alleviate the strains of displacement, while also encouraging more people to risk migration, enabling new levels of both permanent and temporary migration, easier communication among dispersed family members and more frequent home visits for larger numbers of migrants. Prosperity has increased for many, access to international travel and the Internet has become more widespread, rates for international telephone services have plummeted, and economic and cultural globalization have made transnational lifestyles more commonplace. One way that these new levels of ‘hypermodernity’ have changed the overseas Chinese migration equation has been to reenact the sojourner model, through frequent home visits and continuous access to news from the homeland via telephone, email and the World Wide Web.

In the contemporary world of ‘ultramodernity’, ‘flexibility’ prevails far and wide: governments deregulate, economies are irrational, social relativism prevails, and personal relations are impermanent (Harvey 1989, N. Wang 2000, Wong 1997). Cultural and moral relativism in social relationships, the pressure of global competition in the workplace, and the uncertainty wrought by constantly shifting economic and political fortunes (including the unpredictability of terrorism) are some of the major sources of ‘postmodern’ stress. This new world of uncertainty, fragmentation, displacement, lack of center, and constant change requires a high degree of flexibility in response, which can also generate anxiety and doubt about one’s identity (Ong 1999). At the same time, rapidly developing technologies offer continually emerging opportunities to transcend time-space barriers, transform traditional structures and forms of social relationships, and strengthen the

existential homeland tie for today's sojourner (Ohmae 2000). People are finding new ways to participate in communities that are scattered across the globe, as well as new ways to express meaningful self-identities.

Just as the sojourner's strengthening of existential homeland ties served to accommodate the stress of modernity, so too might existential tourism contribute to addressing the needs of a postmodern world. An existential homeland is particularly relevant to issues related to a sense of placelessness and alienation. Through detached and objective modernity, and deconstructed and centerless postmodernity, people have "suffered from a deepening condition of *homelessness*.... It goes without saying that this condition is psychologically hard to bear. It has therefore engendered...*nostalgias*...for a condition of 'being at home' in society, with oneself and, ultimately, in the universe" (Berger et al. 1974: 82; italics added)

There are many ways that these nostalgias emerge in our daily lives, ranging from the more authentic to simulcra and kitsch. Many are part of the tourism economy, which since at least the 1970s, has been viewed as a means of addressing alienation and the social and psychological needs of modernity. Dean MacCannell (1976a), for example, argued that through the tourist experience, individuals sought to overcome the alienating forces of the modern world by gazing upon, and being situated in, places of shared social and symbolic significance. While MacCannell saw the tourist as a decentered modern subject negotiating space in search of a group or social center, Cohen's existential tourist was one who was individually centered, but with a center or home 'out there' in a place different from the place of residence. The home out there addresses the condition of feeling homelessness, and partially overcomes the tensions of displacement. This is the situation of many ethnic Chinese residing outside of mainland China, though in other ways their tourism experience is similar to MacCannell's search for a center. The ancestral homeland in China also satisfies the nostalgia for an earlier time when purpose, authority and ethics were more clearly defined.

For the overseas Chinese visitor, both the idea of China and the touristed landscape are commodified and shaped through act of being a tourist. Unlike the traditional sojourner for whom the return home was an important life cycle event, the temporary and non-committal nature of the existential tourism visit has the paradoxical affect of othering the home place even as the visitor seeks union through this place encounter. Despite the expected rights (and sometimes unrecognized responsibilities) that accompany a blood relationship to a place, the commodity nature of the existential tourist trip divides the buyer and the bought, as the existential tourist is visiting a place but moreover creating a nostalgia. The overarching narrative is the genealogical past, which makes the geographic present a scene for negotiating the historic bloodline. John Goss (this volume) goes even further, pointing out that

landscapes of tourist consumption are structured by allegory: saturated in the pathos of material loss, represented in verbal narratives, visual images, and objects in

various stages of decay and obsolescence, and in the spatial displacement evoked in themes of departure and arrival....

The scenes of existential tourism too are subsumed by historical narratives, and together with the consumptive nature of the tourism phenomenon, can have the affect of sidelining the lived lives and contemporary landscapes of the homeland.

At the same time, forces of modernity/postmodernity are rapidly changing the meaning of Chineseness within China itself, reshaping nostalgic landscapes and the relationships of both residents and visitors to them. This is probably best displayed in the urban landscapes of contemporary China. Postmodern-style façade treatments are rife in the new residential high rises and recreational shopping streets that are now found in every large city in the country. Beyond the surface, China is changing in many other ways, as well. In less than a decade China will have more Internet users than any other country (in 2002 it was second to the US) (Greenspan 2002) and in less than a couple of decades it will generate more international leisure tourists than any other country (WTO 2001c). This is the reality of contemporary China—especially in its urban areas. Although rural China is also undergoing change, the pace has been much slower (especially in the central and western parts of the country) and for those who have not migrated to cities, premodern Chinese values and traditions remain relatively strong. For the existential traveler, the China visited today will rarely match the image of traditional China, though for a more pragmatic (and less nostalgic) visitor it may offer opportunities for the development of more contemporary networks of ethnicity than were possible in the past. In essence, the modernization of China. For the existential traveler, the China visited today will rarely match the image of traditional China, though for a more pragmatic (and less nostalgic) visitor it may offer opportunities for the development of more contemporary networks of ethnicity than were possible in the past. In essence, the modernization of China in the twentieth century and the postmodern economic and social globalization worldwide in the twenty-first century have reshaped the Chinese sojourner experience into a modified existential visiting-friends-and-relatives and quasi-business tourism and travel experience. In this era of rapidly changing geographic space and place, the existential trip to the homeland will often fall short of its identity-affirming goals (Oxfeld 2001).

Travel Behavior

At the center of this whirlwind of tradition, change and physical movement through geographic space, is the overseas ethnic Chinese subject, balancing competing influences and negotiating a path toward wholeness of culture, history and identity. Existential tourism is one of the most effective ways in which this goal can be achieved. A survey of overseas Chinese visitors to China provides an empirical basis for understanding some of the characteristics of existential tourism and its broader manifestations in China. The survey was part of a larger sample of residents from selected countries and administered at Hong Kong's Chek Lap Kok International Airport (cf. Hui and McKercher

2001). Residents of China (n=218) and non-ethnic Chinese visitors (n=312) were excluded from the overseas Chinese questions. The total valid responses from overseas Chinese was 350, which was a fairly high percentage (52.9) of all of the valid non-mainland Chinese respondents (n=662). Table 18.1 Of these, 6.3 percent of the respondents were part Chinese.

Table 18.1 - Chinese ethnicity of Hong Kong visitor respondents by country of residence

<u>Residence</u>	<u>Taiwan</u>	<u>Singapore</u>	<u>Malaysia</u>	<u>USA</u>	<u>Australia</u>	<u>Western Europe</u>	<u>Mean</u>
N Respondents	136	96	82	123	88	137	662
% Ethnic Chinese ¹	95.3	88.5	100	26.0	15.9	5.1	52.9
% Ethnic Chinese citizens in country's total population	98.0	76.7	27.0	.85	1.58	.40 ²	34.1
Visitation Rate ³	.97	1.2	3.7	30.6	10.1	12.8	1.6
% Visited their Home Village Area	39.6	36.8	28.8				

Sources: Singapore, Malaysia and Taiwan: CIA 2002; US: Kim 2001; Western Europe: Huaren.org 2002

Notes:

1. “% Chinese” includes the survey category of “part Chinese,” which had an overall mean 6.3% of all ethnic Chinese respondents.
2. Western Europe’s “% ethnic Chinese citizens” is a mean based on census rates in the UK, France and Spain.
3. “Visitation Rate” = “% ethnic Chinese respondents” divided by “% ethnic Chinese citizens” in each country. Higher rates indicate higher than expected proportions of ethnic Chinese among visitors from that country.

The results of the survey indicated that although Chinese residing within Asia visited China in larger total numbers, those living in non-Chinese cultures far from their ancestral homeland demonstrated the strongest propensity to reconnect and reaffirm their Chineseness. This was seen in many ways. The visitation rates to Hong Kong among the more spatially displaced traveler groups were extraordinarily high, with Chinese residing in the US visiting at rates over 30 times their actual proportion of US citizenry. Furthermore, over half of these long-haul ethnic Chinese visitors have visited their ancestral village area in China and they are more likely to have relatives and friends in the home village to whom they continue to send remittances. Table 18.2

Table 18.2 - Respondent's connection to home village by country of residence

<u>RESIDENCE:</u>	<u>Taiwan</u>	<u>Singapore</u>	<u>Malaysia</u>	<u>USA</u>	<u>Australia</u>	<u>W Europe</u>	<u>MEAN</u>
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<u>Are you connected to your home village?</u>							
<i>Yes</i>	38.2	42.1	39.0	59.3	75.0	85.7	56.5
<u>TYPES OF CONNECTIONS</u>							
<i>Relatives</i>	30.4	35.1	30.5	59.3	66.7	71.4	48.9
<i>Friends</i>	6.9	12.3	6.8	11.1	25.0	57.1	19.9
<i>Remittances to relatives</i>	10.8	10.5	15.3	18.5	16.7	28.6	16.7
<i>Investments/work</i> 1	9.8	5.3	3.4	3.7	8.3	14.3	7.5
<i>School Donations</i>	0	3.5	3.4	0	0	0	1.1
<i>Other Donations</i> 2	1.0	3.5	5.1	0	0	0	1.6
N Respondents	102	57	59	27	12	7	264

Notes:

1. Investments: car repair, consultant company, information technology, real estate investment (2), seafood, textile industry, tourism, toy manufacturing, retail trade; Work: electronics goods, medical, training

2. ancestral hall, temples, roads, bridges, hospital/clinic, and unspecified

For the ethnic Chinese who resided in countries in which they were a substantial minority, existential travel to their ancestral homeland, whether a specific village or China as a whole, provided a promise of overcoming the stresses of modernity, displacement and minority status. This is accomplished through the continuing influence of traditional sojourner values, the continuing patronage of voluntary associations in overseas Chinese communities, and by the modern transformation of communication and transportation that support and enhance continued communication between immigrants and their relations in China. Their existential travel reaffirms their Chineseness, though few would probably recognize it in these terms.

While these same patterns emerged for ethnic Chinese residing in places closer to China, the degree of intensity was somewhat lower. Minority status is less of an issue for these Asian overseas Chinese, and thus the need for reaffirmation is less, though it still exists. At the same time, Asian overseas Chinese have easier and cheaper access to a wider range of Chinese-identity forming places within Asia where they can actually collect a more complex range of experiences through which to identify for themselves what it means to be Chinese (Lew and McKercher 2002).

The survey found one indicator that overseas Chinese in Asia are more closely tied to traditional Chineseness. This was in the likelihood of making donations to, and investments in, the ancestral village area in China. Table 18.2 Asian-based overseas Chinese were somewhat more likely to participate in these activities, possibly indicating stronger sojourner values in this population than among those who are further removed from China. Because of geographic propinquity, investment and tourism promotion trips by Overseas Chinese Affairs Offices in China were more common to Southeast Asia than elsewhere (Lew and Wong 2003a).

The difference between Asian and non-Asia overseas Chinese relates somewhat to the economic and political differences between ‘Greater China I’ (Guangdong, Fujian, Hainan, Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan) and ‘Greater China II’ (ethnic Chinese beyond the immediate vicinity of China) (Chang 1995). Greater China I has been the core focus of overseas Chinese-driven economic development in China. It is the region of origin of most overseas Chinese, it is the destination of most of their trips to China, and it is where they have re-established their familial and economic relationships (Ma 2003). It is no exaggeration to say that Greater China I is a driving force behind much of China’s phenomenal economic growth in the 1980s and 1990s.

Greater China II is a more difficult concept, both economically and politically, due to its dispersed and heterogeneous nature (Lew and Wong 2002). What ties these dispersed overseas Chinese together is the race-based cultural notion of Chineseness and the seduction of China that Chineseness tends to generate (Ang 2001, Chan 1999). The results of this study, however, indicate that there is a need to distinguish a ‘Greater China III’, which would consist of ethnic Chinese residing outside of East and Southeast Asia, a group that Laurence Ma (2003) estimated to number about 7.5 million. Though the results of the survey cited here are cursory and exploratory in nature, they seem to indicate that these co-ethnics residing outside Asia share a significantly stronger likelihood of maintaining social ties to China and to participating in existential tourism experiences than do those residing in Asian countries.

As suggested above, the desire to establish and maintain existential ties to a homeland in China is generally strongest among older generation Chinese migrants who were born in China. The survey, for example, found that respondents over age 45 were far more likely to have visited their home villages (56%) than those age 18 to 45 and under (34%). In addition, 86% of those born in China and 63% of those born in Hong Kong have made existential trips to their ancestral village. The

influence of Chineseness and migration would be somewhat weaker, or perhaps just different, for the overseas-born descendants of Chinese immigrants. The survey results supported this contention as the proportion of those having visited their home village dropped to a mean of 31% for those born in other Asian countries (including Taiwan), and near 0% for the small number included in the survey who were born elsewhere. For overseas Chinese, being born in China appears to serve as a major divide in the relationship that overseas Chinese have to their ancestral villages. Those born in China have the strongest existential ties to the homeland, while those born overseas, and especially outside of Asia, have the weakest.

Conclusions

Figure 18.1 defined three major social structures or forces that have shaped and influenced the identities over overseas Chinese: Chineseness, migration/diaspora, and modernity/postmodernity. The survey data indicated that these social structures can explain the phenomena of existential tourism of overseas ethnic China back to China, though residents of different countries tend to occupy different locations in the overlapping arena of conditions, depending on the relative importance of each realm.

Stephen Chan (1999) argued that what we see today as the overseas Chinese community has been created by a series of smaller ‘geographical diasporas’, each of which has its own distinct causal structure and social organization. For him, they are tied together only by the centrality of ‘Chineseness’, which, is essentially a racial category that cannot be escaped, but which also carries with it powerful cultural significances. Ien Ang (2001: 51), for example, stated “if I am inescapably Chinese by *descent*, I am only sometimes Chinese by *consent*,” and then questioned whether one can, “when called for, say no to Chineseness?” She could not definitively answer this question. As Chen (2002: 1), reflected on his inability to speak Chinese fluently while living in Hong Kong, “Perhaps more so than any other race, being Chinese carries with it expectations beyond the physical. It’s a complete package: linguistic, historical, psychological as well as physical. To be Chinese and not speak the language fluently, well, the mind boggles.” Can one have ‘partial Chineseness’?

We have contended here that in addition to Chineseness, the migration/diaspora experience and modernity/postmodernity conditions have also been significant influences in defining the overseas Chinese subject, and need to be considered equally. The networks of ethnicity that these three influences engender become strongly articulated in the phenomenon of overseas Chinese traveling back to China. The existential tourist experience is not necessarily an easy one, though it is most assuredly reflexive and has the promise to be identity affirming—if only so in a temporary and perhaps illusory manner. Just how long does the existential relationship to an ancestral place last? Given the changes that China has undergone in recent decades, for some it may not even survive the initial arrival. But still the seduction of the homeland remains.

People participate in existential tourism because sojourning is not an option for most immigrants today. We have become too entrenched and attached in myriads of ways to our new, physical homes—even if they are lacking an existential essentialness. At the same time, the ancestral homeland is a real place that has also undergone modernization and change at a pace and purpose separate from our overseas home and life. While existential homeland ties are also real, the interactions that surround them are largely structured in a traditional and historical narrative which may often be poorly suited to contemporary diaspora needs, especially among second generation overseas Chinese (Lew and Wong 2003a). Further complicating the situation are individual social relationships between homeland and overseas Chinese that emerge as part of the existential travel process. These can be complex, ambivalent, superficial, and at worst, exploitative (Oxfeld 2001). In *Imaginary Homelands*, Salmon Rushdie (1991) claimed that we can never go ‘home’ again, no matter how many visits we make, because the homeland and the home village are as much imaginary places as a real ones. We construct our ethnicity, and our own authenticity, from what Mathews (2000) has called the postmodern ‘cultural supermarket,’ in which all identities are impermanent and the only real home is the entire world. Once one enters the cultural supermarket, which is both reflexive and fun, there is no turning back, there is no going home again. In this context, the existential tourist is a socially constructed role, though one which has been clearly informed by traditional Chineseness, shaped to the migration/diaspora experience, enabled by global modernization, and seduced by the promise of a sense of home in China.

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