Experiences of Transnational Chinese Migrants in the Asia-Pacific

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Editors

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This edited volume had its origins in an international conference on "Middle-Class Chinese Migrants in Australia: Settlement, Needs and Dilemmas" which was held at Griffith University, Queensland, Australia in February 2002. The conference was a joint effort of the School of Social Science at the University of Queensland, the School of Public Health and Asia Pacific Council at Griffith University. The conference was prompted by the findings from a research project conducted by Professor Cordia Chu, Associate Professor David Ip and a research team consisted of Chi-wai Lui, Ru Yan and Bessy Chen. The research identified a wide range of social and health needs when Chinese migrant women from Taiwan, Hong Kong and the PRC (People's Republic of China) were confronted by various dilemmas in their settlement process even though many were of middle-class backgrounds. And it was the consensus among participants in the conference that as the Australian immigration policy for the foreseeable future is likely to be favouring those highly skilled and resource rich immigrants typified by the middle-class Chinese, that the research findings presented at the conference would be most useful in understanding how decisions and long-term plans were made by these migrants when settling in Australia and how such knowledge could contribute to the development of programmes and services that would enhance the social wellbeing and quality of life of these immigrants.

In revisiting some of the papers presented at the conference, however, we felt that an important aspect of the recent Chinese migration in the Asia-Pacific had been left unexamined – that is, given the middle-class background of these migrants, and their visible practices in various efforts and activities to maintain their socio-cultural, emotion as well political ties with their place of origin, the role of transnationalism in shaping their being and engaging in a new lifeworld should deserve closer investigation. For this reason, the present volume decided to re-examine the social field of Chinese migration through the lens of transnationalism.

Many people have contributed to support us to undertake a new direction for this project. Suggestions for needed research. Specifically, we would like to first and foremost acknowledge the generosity the Chiang Ching-Kuo Foundation for Scholarly International Exchange extended to us for hosting the 2002 conference. Both the University of Queensland and Griffith University in Australia, and the City University of Hong Kong, have also been most supportive in providing us with the appropriate institutional resources. Our colleagues and contributors, particularly those who first participated in the fore-mentioned conference, and agreed to revise and add new material to their work specifically for this volume when

approached by us, should also deserve accolade not only for their enthusiasm and commitment in advancing the field, but also for the incredible patience and forbearance they extended to us during the reviewing processes.

However, this book would not be a reality without the support of Mr. Frank Columbus of Nova Science Publishers, Inc., (New York). The encouragement and confidence he has given us and to this publication have been most vital for our completion of this volume. conference mentioned earlier. We hope that this edited volume makes an important contribution to an emerging literature on Chinese migration and transnationalism and will open further critical debate and investigation for students and scholars who have an interest in Chinese transmigration in the Asia-Pacific region.

David Ip, Ray Hibbins and Wing Hong Chui
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Chapter 1

TRANSNATIONALISM AND CHINESE MIGRATION

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INTRODUCTION

As the twenty-first century progresses, the movements of people, whether they are temporary or permanent, local or international, are continuing to rise (Hauchler, Messmer and Nuscheler, 1997). However, what distinguishes these recent movements of people from those of the past is that, as Castles and Millers (1998) note, they form a distinct bipolar pattern. This means that not only are the poor motivated to move in search of better economic opportunities, those who are relatively skilled or highly skilled and currently enjoy economically secure positions are equally likely to migrate (Iredale, Guo and Rozario, 2003; Lo and Wang, 2004).

For Castles (2003:11), this new migration pattern is particularly apparent in Asia. He observed that contract labour migration expanded rapidly as early as 1973 when oil-rich countries hired expatriate experts and low-skilled manual workers to carry out ambitious programs of infrastructural development, construction and industrialization. This soon spread to the 'tiger economies' experiencing severe labour shortages when their economies were booming. Many '3-D jobs' (dirty, difficult and dangerous) in these countries were left unoccupied when the local population was given greater educational opportunities and occupational mobility. Subsequently migrants from countries in the Asian region with slower economic performance, lower wages and more limited employment opportunities quickly moved into these jobs (Werbner, 1999; Gibson, Law and McKay, 2001).

On the other hand, however, as Skeldon (1994), Anstee (1995), Wong and Salaff (1998), Coughlan and McNamara (1997), Mak (1997), and Ip, Anstee and Wu (1998) suggested, a concomitant population movement emanating from Asia also emerged. This involved professionals, executives, technicians and other highly skilled personnel seeking better employment prospects and lifestyle in the international labour market. Castles (2003: 108) noted, [i]ncreasingly business people and professionals sought employment in international labour markets, and were willing to move in search of higher rewards. Immigration countries,

such as the USA, Australia and Canada put increasing emphasis on skilled and business migrants, and offered inducements to attract them.

For Collins (2001), this means contemporary immigration is more skilled and professional, more middle class and less working class, than it was thirty years ago in Australia, making it the most distinct change in the segmentation of Australian labour market.

Not surprisingly, Asia became the main source of origin for recent migrants to the countries in the Asian-Pacific region – the United States, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. Excluding the Indo-Chinese refugees in the 1970s, the number of migrants from Asia has grown steadily in these countries since the early 1990s. In the US, for example, Asians were said to make up 40 to 50 per cent of its total immigration intake (Castles, 2003: 106). In Australia, a similar picture has also transpired. In the 1990s, about half of new migrants in Australia were from Asia. Likewise in Canada, migration from Asia also grew rapidly during the 1980s and again during the1990s, accounting for almost half of all new entrants into Canada (Castles, 2003: 106). More specifically, according to Ley and Kobaysshi (2005), about 380,000 migrants from Hong Kong arrived between 1980 and 2001, including 100,000 receiving visas for business migration, and another 64,000 for independent skilled migration, hence making Hong Kong the leading immigrant source to Canada for a decade since 1994, particularly in the Pacific province of British Columbia.

In Australia, in 1994 the Asian-born population was estimated at 4.6 per cent of the total population, almost doubling what it had in the previous decades (Castles, 2003: 106). However, in numerical terms, between the late 1980s and the early 1990s, Hong Kong was the top source of Australia's immigrants (Inglis, 1998). Along with the Taiwanese they also formed the largest immigrant group entering through the Business Migration Program in the early 1990s (Inglis and Wu, 1991). The fact that their presence, particularly made more visible by their settlement in relatively affluent urban locales, and their ostentatious display of wealth and status, subsequently led them become easy scapegoats for so-called public 'debates' about the value of Asian migrants, along with dubious fears about Australia becoming an 'Asian nation', has ironically confirmed what Coughlan and McNamara (1997) observed earlier – that Asian immigration constitutes the single most important feature of socio-economic change in Australian society in the last decade.

EMERGING TRANSNATIONALISM

Given the rapid expansion of Asian migration in the 1990s, a new body of literature on Asian migration proliferated. While the research of Constable (1997), Pratt (1997, 1999), Yeoh and Huang (1999), Anderson (2001), Chang (2001), Hugo (2002), and McKay (2004) were focussed on examining Asian labour migration, particularly involving women in Asia and north America, much of the literature was drawn to the migration of middle class Asians and their role in the transformations of overseas Chinese communities and their settlement experiences (Inglis and Wu, 1991; Zhou, 1992, 1998; Ip, 1993, 1999; Lary, Inglis and Wu, 1994; Anstee, 1995; Tseng, 1995; Inglis, Ip and Wu, 1996; Inglis, 1998; Ip et al., 1998; Ip, Wu and Inglis, 1998a, 1998b; Li, 1998, 2001; Wu, Ip and Inglis, 1998; Schak, 1999; Iredale, Hawksley and Castles, 2003; Hsu, 2003, 2004).

Concomitant with the expansion of Asian migration in the beginning of the 1990s however was the emergence of 'transnationalism' as a way of re-conceptualizing the migration process and also the incorporation of migrants into national spaces. Although most of these early works were concerned with the labour migration movements between American cities and migrant origins in Central America and the Caribbean islands, the migrants were not conceived as anomalies, but rather as representative of an increasingly globalized migration over the last quarter of the twentieth century (Portes, 1997, 2001; Vertovec, 1999; Gamburd, 2000; Kastoryano, 2000). Specifically, these studies considered that older theoretical models and policy assumptions were no longer adequate in dealing with the new face of globalized migration, especially when changing transport and telecommunication technologies had provided cheap, rapid and accessible links worldwide for many to make multiple international movements and maintain continuing links (social, cultural, political, economic and religious) with not only homeland, but also individuals from that homeland living in third countries (Rouse, 1995: 357, Al-Ali and Koser, 2002: 3). Some further argued that even transnationalism itself, while not a new phenomenon as it had characterized groups such as the overseas Chinese for several centuries (Foner, 1997; Ong, 1999; Benton and Gomez, 2001), in the contemporary times of globalization, many more individuals than ever have been touched by transnationalism (see, for example, Guarnizo and Smith, 1998: 4, 11). As Sanchez (1999: 2) pointed out,

> … a significant number of today's immigrants are able to maintain strong economic, cultural, political, and physical ties to their place of birth. … [And] large numbers of immigrants are simultaneously carrying out their everyday lives in more than one nation at a time.

This led Westwood and Phizacklea (2000) to conclude that transnationalism had become a most common feature amongst contemporary migrants as globalisation continued to impact on their local experiences.

In turn, the notion of transnationalism brought into question the traditional assumptions associated with place-specific immigration and immigrant issues such as citizenship, political incorporation, and cultural assimilation were increasingly challenged by the transnational process to have them not only de-linked from specific places and spaces, but also rethought and refashioned. Dual citizenship provisions, for examples, are gradually being considered to replace the older practice of single citizenship to protect the political, civic, and economic interests of immigrants in both their new and home countries. The traditional notions regarding immigrant or 'ethnic' enterprises similarly have been revised. Historically, immigrant entrepreneurial activities are seen as a stepping-stone towards economic incorporation and assimilation into the mainstream society. Now it is frequently common to find many immigrant enterprises are deeply embedded in a web of transnational networks that not only strengthens their economic solvency, solidifies their social networks, and augments their social status back home, but also challenges the place-bound notion of local economic activity.

The refocusing of migrants as transmigrants, i.e., as people 'who claim and are claimed by two or more nation-states into which they are incorporated as social actors, one of which is widely acknowledged to be their state of origin' (Glick Schiller, 1999: 96) further brought to the foreground the questions of culture and ethnic maintenance, and in turn, the concern about

identity and belonging. Through an exploration of the disciplining structures of global capitalism – 'family, community, work, travel, and nation' – and the diaspora Chinese, particularly those 'multiple passport holders', 'multicultural managers' with 'flexible capital', the 'astronaut', and the 'parachute kids', Ong (1999: 13–14) conceded that their transnational movements could be seen as their 'strategies of maneuvering and positioning' for accessing optional citizenship. Hannerz (2000: 103–104) similarly described many contemporary immigrants as 'cosmopolitans' – the privileged migrant, whose travel is voluntary and whose exit is only a phone call, a plane ticket, and a passport stamp away, a notion that is not too dissimilar to those whom Portes referred to as 'transnationals' who are often 'bilingual, move easily between different cultures, frequently maintain homes in two countries, and pursue economic, political and cultural interests that require their presence in both' on a sustained basis (Portes, 1997: 814). They also '… lead political, economic and social 'dual lives' through the creation of 'dense' cross border networks' (Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt, 1999: 219). They also resemble what Sklair (1995) called a 'transnational capitalist class' that typically consisted of transnational corporation executives, globalizing state bureaucrats, professionals and, consumerist elites in merchandising and the media. Elsewhere Vertovec and Cohen (1999) described them as those with multiple locations of work and activity, and a creolised or *hybrid consciousness* in their awareness of a 'home away from home' (p. xxi).

Understandably the perspective of transnationalism and its clear departure from the traditional assimilationist perspective which expects immigrants to assimilate into the dominant society's socio-cultural and economic systems and shed their old cultural practices and political loyalties (Warner and Srole, 1945; Alba, 1985) to attain a single national identity and allegiance, and representation in one national polity (Kessler, 1998; Motomura, 1998; Pickus, 1998; Schuck, 1998; Ostergaard-Nielsen, 2003: 13) have been regarded by many as a celebratory depiction of grassroots actors challenging the hegemony of states and global capitalism from below (Guarnizo and Smith, 1998) . However, there have also been voices of discontent. Ebaugh and Saltzman-Chafetz (2002), for example, asserted that the concept is a blurry, catch-all notion. Cano (2004) also felt that the use of the term had reached a point in which it is practically impossible to sustain the broader sense of the term beyond its generic roots. Waldinger and Fitzgerald (2003) similarly concurred that despite the rapid proliferation of literature, 'no one can quite agree on what the transnational concept actually means' (p. 9). But they also went further to argue that bi-localism has always been a product of the migration experience and citing the observation by Morawska (2001: 178) that 'the lifeworlds and disapora politics of turn-of-the-century immigrants share many of the supposedly novel features of present-day transnationalism', they concluded that transnationalism was simply an 'old hat' (Waldinger and Fitzgerald, 2003: 23).

Nonetheless, according to Smith (2001: 3), the significance of the transnationalist discourse still lies in the fact that it reminds us of the importance of borders, state policies, and national identities, even as these are transgressed by transnational communication circuits and social practices. It is also what Jackson, Crang and Dwyer (2004: 5) reaffirmed when they emphasized the dialectical nature of transnationalsim – that transnationality is in fact constituted through the dialectical relations of the grounded and the flighty, the settled and the flowing, the sticky and the smooth (2004: 8). For them, for example, the 'placed' also implies 'displaced', but it is also situated in a place that is more than geographic. Similarly, belonging is physical and practical, but it is also an emotional and imaginative manoeuvre regulated through moral and political institutions and practices (Jackson *et al.*, 2004: 7). Viewed in this

context, transnationalism is thus not necessarily pretty or progressive, and transnational practices could remain embedded in enduring asymmetries of domination, inequality, racism, sexism, class conflict and uneven development (2004: 9). Literature on refugees, exploited female international labour, or male international sporting labour, and illegal migrants is reflective of this darker and less celebratory side of transnationalism.

More important, however, is that not all researchers accept the accusation that transnationalism has nothing new to offer and that it should be written off altogether. Al-Ali and Koser (2002: 3–5), for instance, were genuinely convinced that a transnational perspective can provide new insights into understanding international migration through focusing on processes that are not necessarily novel but which have taken on new or different forms through their interaction with globalization. Specifically, they highlighted the need to ask new questions about not only the *conditions* but also the *practices* of transnationalism. Typically some of these questions could revolve around the role of nation states in shaping, encouraging or hindering transnational migration and practices (or transnationalism from above enables an environment in which transnationalism from below is more likely to occur); the diverse motivations and driving forces for transnational practices or becoming agents of transnationalism; the heterogeneous experiences of transnationalism encompassing those empowering, liberating as well as the oppressive and restricting; and the development of identities in processes anchored neither in place of origin nor destination. And the fact that notions of transnational 'communities', identity issues, delocalisation and despatialization of social relations, transnational social formations, the concept of 'belonging', are still attracting research and scholarly debate in the current transnationalism literature is testament to the life and vitality remaining in the concept.

On the notion of transnational 'communities', Ostergaard-Nielsen (2003: 14) rightly questioned whether transnational communities are based on 'imagination', state of mind, or a consciousness catalyzed by regular use of electronic media rather than frequenting an actual physical space. Similarly Iredale, Guo and Rozario (2003: 13) queried the notion of transnational community as one consisting only of cross-border migrants with common cultural, sporting, political or other interests, as they considered human agency is more important in linking individuals, families and local groups.

On the issue of identity, while it is generally accepted that it is common for transmigrants to develop multiple and fluid identities (Yeoh, Charney and Hiong, 2003: 3) and hold multiple citizenships, particularly among those who are more well-to-do, concerns about divided loyalties (in the form of 'long distance nationalism'), tracing citizenship, and reactive ethnicities at the emergence of de-territorialised nation states or nation state building by diasporas have also become increasingly visible (Iredale, Guo and Rozario, 2003: 18; Waldinger and Fitzgerald, 2003: 29). At the same time, although frequently transmigrant identity is intersected with gender and ethnicity (Gamburd, 2000; Ley and Waters, 2004; Yeoh and Willis, 2004), as indicated by a burgeoning literature on the changing gender roles under the influence of migration experiences, Jackson *et al.* (2004) found that the relationship between permeable borders of transnational space and the meaning of 'ethnicity' remained highly contested but under researched. Moreover, in spite of the recent increase in grounded theoretical qualitative research based on social constructionism that explores the subjective accounts of the lived experiences of transnational migrants, research on transnationalism as a cognitive and affective state that considers issues of 'belonging', 'memory' and 'homeland' is still patchy. Smith (2001: 9) thus saw the importance of understanding better 'transnational

social formations', or the inexorable enmeshing of the everyday activities of many residents of both 'sending' and 'receiving' localities, and the necessity to continue investigating and challenging the inter-subjective lifeworlds of transmigrant identities and their relations to social structures, particularly in terms of how culture and place, or the spaces of transnationality, are reconfigured subjectively. For Jackson *et al.* (2004), in studying transnationalism, it is thus important to valorize neither the one-dimensional nature of the transnationalism 'from above' nor the overemphasis on human agency in transnationalism 'from below' but to focus on transnationalism 'in-between'.

In sum, while research on transnationalism is considered by some as a 'conceptual muddle' that still confuses (Jackson *et al.*, 2004: 14), Cano (2004: 5) maintains that the confusion should be seen not as something entirely negative. He attributes the confusion of the concept to its origins in its 'generosity' – generous in the sense that it can be used in many fields ranging from sociology, economics, political science, history, geography to anthropology. Indeed it is a concept that can be embraced easily by a multitude of disciplines with different meanings and foci. In his view, however, 'this is the beauty of the term: it can be developed through imagined disciplinary borders, but in essence is an open invitation to creative, solid, and provocative research, the ideal combination to enhance progress in the social sciences' (Cano, 2004: 56).

CHINESE IMMIGRATION AND TRANSNATIONALISM

According to the search conducted by Cano (2004: 9) in February 2004 using the term 'transnational/transnationalism' in the *Social Science Abstracts Database*, the literature on the subject had grown most rapidly in the last 5 years – out of a total of 1,278 publications published since 1982, almost two thirds of the publications on the subject were written between 1998 and 2003. Despite this dramatic expansion, as Al-Ali and Kosher (2002: 4) also observed, the prevailing literature on transnational migration had tended to focus on labour migration in the North American context. To the extent that recent research focussed on transnationalism among Chinese transmigrants in the Asia-Pacific region, it has done so in a restricted manner – that is, while many research studies may have picked up the vocabulary of transnationalism, few have been able to actually move beyond demographic and quantitative analyses of the details of settlement among different segments of recent Chinese transmigrants (e.g., Ip *et al.*, 1994; Ip, Anstee and Wu, 1998; Inglis, 1998) to actively situate their transnational practices and commitments in an open-ended migration process and a subsequent life-world that invokes more like a travel plan that is continuously stretched rather than finite (Ley and Kobayashi, 2005).

Notwithstanding, certain themes of transnationalism related to Chinese transmigrants are more popular than others. Most frequently observed is the study of transnationalism as an avenue for capital movement and accumulation through the reinvention of personalised cross border business networks (Yeung, 1998; 2000) and new forms of organizations and 'modernized' Chinese business practices among Chinese diaspora in a globalized economic arena (see Ong, 1993, 1999; Lever-Tracy, Ip and Tracy, 1996; Wong, 1997; Hamilton, 1999; 2002; Ma and Cartier, 2003). However, what has been raised in the research is not merely the