

NEGOTIATING IDENTITY: EXPERIENCES OF “VISITING HOME” AMONG CHINESE AMERICANS

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“Roots tourism” is loosely defined as a type of tourism in which ethnic minorities visit their ancestral lands to discover ethnic roots and culture. Despite the recent popularity of this type of tourism, many gaps remain in the study of roots tourism, particularly about its influence on the tourists’ identity. This exploratory study investigates the ways in which second and subsequent generations of Chinese Americans discuss their identity and feelings of belonging after visiting China. Face-to-face, in-depth interviews with Chinese Americans revealed that, contrary to the idea that roots tourism experiences provide individuals with strong feelings of belonging to one’s ancestral land, interviewees did not return from their visit with a feeling of connection to China. Rather, they reported a need to negotiate and redefine who they were and where they belonged. This study highlights how physical markers of Chinese identity added complexity to the negotiation of one’s identity. Because the interviewees “looked” Chinese, in a variety of situations they were automatically assumed to be Chinese while their American identity was ignored. Although Chinese Americans occasionally took advantage of such ascribed identity as Chinese, they often felt frustration, anger, and ambiguity about how they defined themselves and how others defined them. As a result of visiting China, although Chinese American tourists developed a certain sense of affinity to their ancestral land, they also affirmed that their true home was in the US. This study suggests a complexity and limitation to fostering a sense of belonging to their ancestral land through roots tourism.

Key words: Roots tourism; Chinese American; Diaspora; Globalism; Identity negotiation

Introduction

Recent advancement of travel technology provides immigrants and their descendents with the means by which to visit their ancestral countries more frequently than ever before. The trend has promoted the growth of “roots tourism.” Roots

tourism can be loosely defined as a type of tourism in which people travel to the communities of their ancestors for such purposes as leisure, visiting family and relatives, discovering the culture of the ancestral society, and searching for one’s roots and identity without the intention of permanent settlement or other work-related purposes (Feng &

Page, 2000; Kibria, 2004). In response to the increasing popularity of roots tourism, scholars have begun to investigate different elements of this type of activity, including motivations and travel patterns (Hall & Duval, 2004; King, 1994), local people's view about roots tourists (Louie, 2004), various structures of organized roots tours (Lehrer, 2006; Louie, 2004), and economic and political impacts on local communities (Carter, 2004; Lew & Wong, 2002; Oxfeld, 2004). Yet, many gaps remain in our understanding of roots tourism. For example, we are still not certain about its influence on tourists' identity. In what ways does visiting an ancestral land influence a sense of who one is and where one belongs? Do these tourists feel at "home" in their ancestral land? Roots tourists' answers to these questions may be better understood when they are seen in the context of mobility, globalization, and transnationalism.

Duval (2004) argued that roots tourism would foster an identity attached to tourists' ancestral lands. However, other scholars (Kibria, 2002; Louie, 2004; Tsuda, 2003) argued that such "homecoming" experiences did not necessarily foster a transnational sense of identity. Rather, emotional attachment to the ancestral land may become more diffused, especially as people gain awareness of other facets of their identity, including language, class, and citizenship. Roots tourists may realize the consequence of displacement or disconnection from their ancestral land and a need to negotiate and reevaluate who they are and where they belong (Stephenson, 2002).

The aim of this article is to illustrate the ways in which Chinese Americans who visit China negotiate and redefine their identity and a sense of belonging. In particular, this study reveals that physical markers of Chinese ethnicity add tension and complexity to the negotiation and definition of identity. On the one hand, physical markers allowed Chinese Americans to become immersed in the local population. Some even consciously acted as locals to gain the advantage given only to Chinese individuals. On the other hand, the markers generated the expectation for the Chinese Americans to be competent in Chinese cultural skills. The expectation often challenged their "ethnic authenticity" because many Chinese Americans lacked the skills as a result of their American up-

bringing. At the same time, their "Americanness" was often distrusted because they "looked" Chinese in the eyes of others.

Roots Tourism and Identity Negotiation

Vertovec (2001) suggested that identity was constructed through "a kind of internal (self-attributed) and external (other-ascribed) dialectic conditioned within specific social worlds" (p. 577). Similarly, other scholars maintained that it was a process of self and other ascription (Barth, 1969; Phinney, 1992). Lee, Noh, Yoo, and Doh (2007) illustrated that "in a situation or context in which there is a distinction between two groups, people tend to identify with the group that is perceived as most similar to them" (p. 115). Then, the continuous process of comparison and negotiation leads individuals to form a sense of belonging, emotional attachment, and pride and to accept the norms, attitude, symbols, and behavior of the group.

In the study of tourism and identity, particularly for ethnic minorities, scholars have overtly focused on the ways in which ethnic groups as "host" communities maintain, modify, and materialize their ethnic identity to respond to tourists' gaze (Adams, 2006; Strain, 2003; Urry, 2002; Yea, 2002). In other words, less attention has been paid on how ethnic minorities as tourists, or "guests," transform their identity through travel experiences. The study of roots tourism is gradually filling this gap by investigating the relationship between tourists' experiences of visiting ancestral lands and their identity.

Cohen (1979) stated in his phenomenology of tourism that visiting ancestral lands represented a quest for the "spiritual center" and ultimate belonging, especially for immigrants and their descendants who felt alienated in their everyday lives. Since his study, scholars have emphasized that roots tourism may allow not only the first generation but also the second and later generations of immigrants to satisfy longings for "home" and foster an identity attached to their ancestral land (Ali & Holden, 2006; Basu, 2001; Duval, 2003). For example, Nguyen, King, and Turner (2003) argued that visiting the ancestral land functioned to "replenish the sense of self and provide empowerment, belonging and direction" (p. 176)

among Vietnamese immigrants in Australia. Similarly, Basu (2001) illustrated that Scotland was conceptualized as sites of memory, sources of identity, and shrines of self by Scottish Canadian roots tourists. More precisely, by visiting Scotland, the descendents of the Scottish immigrants felt a sense of embodiment and internalization of the past. Such internalization of the collective memory allowed them to confirm the inherited connection to Scotland, and the visit represented a quest for self. Similarly, second generation Dominican Americans shaped their dual orientation towards the US and their ancestral land through frequent visit to Dominican Republic (Louie, 2006a).

When visiting their ancestral countries, roots tourists become surrounded by others who share a common ethnic background. Such ethnic immersion may be particularly intriguing for immigrants and their descendants, who are surrounded by ethnic others in their everyday lives. In fact, some scholars have maintained that roots travelers' disempowered position as an ethnic minority in their everyday life becomes a push factor for seeking feelings of legitimate belonging to their ancestral land (Amato, 2005; Bruner, 1996). Ali and Holden (2006) explained that roots tourism enabled the Pakistani immigrants who always felt like foreigners in the UK to visit familiar surroundings and regain a sense of confidence. Similarly, Lew and Wong (2005) reported that overseas Chinese often questioned their own identity and values because, in a country of settlement, their Chinese physical and cultural markers represented “minoritiness.” However, when visiting China, they can become surrounded by people who “look like them” and share the similar cultural traits, and the experience compensates the feeling of being minority in the one's everyday life. Roots tourism may therefore be, as Duval (2004) argued, a vehicle through which the ancestral land grows to be a significant reference point for constructing identity.

These ideas relate to the social science theories that address the influence of globalization and transnationalism on migrants with regard to constructing, maintaining, and negotiating identities across the geographical borders of nation states. More precisely, scholars have argued that through the current advancement of communication and transportation, immigrants and their descendents

are able to maintain connections with their ancestral land across national and regional borders (Kivisto, 2001; Levitt, 2001; Portes, 2003; Vertovec, 2003). Kotkin (1994), for example, described this phenomenon as the development of “global tribes.” According to Kotkin (1994), a global tribe is a cosmopolitan group whose members have a common ethnic origin, are geographically dispersed beyond the national borders, and do not surrender their sense of ethnic identity but use it to survive in the global economy and political order. The development of global tribes may allow a diasporic community to expand transnational business relations and solidarity based on the ethnic ties (Hsing, 2003) and promote loyalty to the ancestral country from afar (Anderson, 1992; Glick-Schiller & Fouron, 2001; Skrbi, 2007). Moreover, belonging to a global tribe may become a strategy for people in diaspora to dissociate or liberate themselves somewhat from the Western racial hierarchy within which they are categorized as “ethnic minorities” (Espiritu & Tran, 2002; Faist, 2000; Louie, 2006b). People in diaspora, who once lived in the exile, now can rise as global actors for whom the geographical boundary of nation-states may matter less, if any, to define identity.

Yet, visiting the ancestral land is not always unproblematic and fulfilling; it may instead be associated with surprise, confusion, and disappointment (Kibria, 2002; Louie, 2004). As Stephenson (2002) argued, the roots tourists may need to reassess their identity, rather than reaffirming it, because the visit reveals consequences of social and cultural displacement from the ancestral land:

Despite wanting to embrace one's cultural heritage and ethnic roots, the experience of visiting the ancestral homeland can encourage individuals to reassess their own identities. . . . Travel experiences present diverse social contexts within which individuals have to reconstruct their identities as a consequence of being culturally displaced and socially disconnected from the ancestral homeland. (p. 410)

Indeed, case studies have illustrated that the roots tourists, particularly those who left their hometown decades ago and were born and raised in the country of settlement, may find more differences than similarities between past and present,

imagination and reality, and cultures of the country of settlement and of the ancestral land (Epstein & Kheimets, 2001; Kibria 2002; Skrbi, 2007). For example, Skrbi (2007) argued that, as old immigrants visiting their home villages found out their homes had been demolished or realized that there was nobody left to visit in their hometown, they painfully confronted the changes from the past. Epstein and Kheimets (2001) explored the experience of the Russian-born Jewish travelers who visited Jerusalem. According to the study, these Jewish tourists had a preconstructed mental image of Jerusalem with luxury castles and churches based on popular novels and media. However, the actual ancient architecture was rather plain and unadorned, which left the tourists disillusioned. Kibria (2004) illustrated that the second generation of Korean Americans who visited Korea experienced difficulties “fitting in” with the local society because of differences in language and manners between the two countries. Similarly, Baldassar (2001) illustrated that, although second-generation Italian Australians experienced cultural renewal through visiting their ancestral village, they also felt foreign because of the differences in language and dress code, and the negative stereotype that locals had towards Australians.

Duval (2003) argued that roots tourists often needed to negotiate their identities as “natives” and “foreigners.” That is, in one way roots tourists are thought of, and think of themselves, as the old community members who attempt to reestablish and maintain a sociocultural connection with their families and friends. However, the roots tourists may feel disassociated from their ancestral communities when they encounter changes or when locals treat them as mere tourists. Ebron’s (1999) study of African American roots tour, sponsored by McDonald’s, also illustrated the series of tensions between the tour participants’ identities as “returners” and as “foreign tourists.” According to the study, the tour to Senegal was carefully fashioned to pursue Victor Turner’s ritual process to separate the tourists completely from their normal lives and experience the liminality of “returning” to the ancestral land (Turner, 1969). However, the ritual process was often destroyed by the sponsor’s commercialism, and tourists’ identity as “for-

eign tourists,” or consumers of a Western leisure product, became highlighted.

The difference in the economic class between roots tourists and locals can be another source of the identity conflict between “foreignness” and “nativeness.” More precisely, roots tourists are often perceived as economically more successful than locals and are expected to make material donations to the ancestral communities. Lew and Wong (2004), for example, illustrated that roots tourists to mainland China were obligated to provide red envelopes (*hong bao*) with money and fine meals to all relatives. Such a role as an economic benefactor influences the tourists’ identification in their ancestral land in two different ways. On the one hand, as Stephenson (2002) argued, the material help strengthens the connection between the roots tourists and their ancestral land because the help indicates expatriates’ concerns for family in their ancestral land. On the other hand, the benefactor role uncovers the economic discrepancy between roots tourists and locals (Espiritu & Tran, 2002; Louie, 2004). Tourists may feel uncertain whether they visit the ancestral village as a member of a native family or as a mere foreign investor.

Accordingly, roots tourists often feel uncertain about their identity as foreigners and natives in their ancestral land. Indeed, Kibria (2002) stated that the commonality in ethnicity and ancestry became overwhelmed by the differences in other assets of identity, such as language, culture, class, and nationality. However, this study indicates that the “common ethnicity” is not merely submerged by such differences but may instead generate more tension and complexity in the negotiation of one’s identity.

Study Population

Chinese Americans are the third largest minority group in the US. According to the 2000 US Census, there are 2,432,585 Chinese Americans under category of Chinese alone. Of those, 678,222 people were second and subsequent generations who were born in the US.

The Chinese immigration to the US began around 1840, when gold was discovered in California (Kwang & Miscevic, 2005; Tong, 2003).

An estimated 34,000 Chinese laborers, almost all young male peasants from the rural areas in the Guangdong province, came to the US to fulfill the demand for cheap laborers (Douw, 1999). As the number of Chinese workers increased, prejudice toward them became harsh. In 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act was enforced by the US government. It prohibited the entry of new Chinese immigrants as a way of controlling the labor competition and reshaping the patterns of family formation (Louie, 2003). The act also took away some rights and privileges of Chinese immigrants who had already been in the US. As a result of the act, the size of the Chinese population dropped dramatically to around 60,000 (Fan, 2003).

The Chinese immigrants' identity from the early to exclusion eras was often described as “sojourners,” because their objective was to improve the economic status of their families whom they left in their home villages and to return to the villages after retirement. They sent remittances and traveled back to the villages of origin to maintain ties with families, manage properties, and find wives (Lew & Wong, 2004).

However, the linkage between Chinese Americans and China was abruptly terminated in 1949, when the Communist Party of China gained power (Kwang & Miscevic, 2005). As a result, the US government banned Chinese Americans from contacting or sending remittances to their families and relatives in China. Accordingly, Chinese Americans relinquished their dream of returning to their ancestral villages after retirement and, instead, had only limited access to China until the late 1960s.

Links between the two countries began to be gradually restored following the enactment of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (Tong, 2003). The new American immigration policy encouraged a large number of intellectuals and skilled workers to immigrate to the US. The normalization of the US–China diplomatic relationship as well as anti-Chinese discrimination in South Asia and Latin America in the 1970s led to a further influx of affluent overseas Chinese to the US.

Overseas Chinese as a Global Tribe

The political changes coupled with the advancement of technology in communication and

transportation provided the opportunity for Chinese Americans to reconstruct transnational ties with their ancestral land and with other overseas Chinese who are geographically dispersed (Hsing, 2003; Lew & Wong, 2002, 2005; Yang, 2003). Indeed, Kotkin (1994) identified Chinese diaspora as one of the five most significant global tribes, along with Jews, British, Japanese, and Indians. Tu (2005) advocated building “cultural China,” a transnational network among Chinese intellectuals residing overseas to assist Chinese modernization and to “explore the meaning of being Chinese in a global context” (p. 162). Other scholars also highlighted the ways in which overseas Chinese expand a transnational business network based on strong ties with family and co-ethnics (Hsing, 2003; Ma, 2003). Lew and Wong (2003) illustrated the effort by the Guangdong province, a major source of Chinese immigrants to North America, to strengthen the network with overseas Chinese to ultimately enhance future business and investment. As Nonini and Ong (1997) maintained, transnational unification with co-ethnics enables overseas Chinese “to circumvent disciplining by nation states” (p. 3).

The idea of overseas Chinese as a global tribe, however, has been criticized for several reasons. First, it is seen as too simple an equation of ancestry, ethnicity, and blood without considering the diversity within the community of overseas Chinese, which includes differences in class, gender composition, language, generations, immigration history, and nationalities (Skeldon, 2003; Waiming, 2003). As Ang (2001) stated, in imagining the global community of Chinese diaspora, “differences which have been constructed by heterogeneous diasporic conditions and experiences are suppressed in favor of illusory modes of bonding and belonging” (p. 50). Second, in the idea of the global tribe of diaspora, the ancestral origin is overly valued while geographical presence of the nation state, in which the overseas Chinese currently reside as citizens, may be largely ignored (Ang, 2001). Overly emphasizing the ethnic ties may imply the temporariness of residence in the country of settlement and become a source of suspicion of disloyalty to the host countries. Third, the construction of the global tribe may impose

the Chinese identity on those who do not have any emotional or cultural connection to China, including many of the second and later generations of overseas Chinese (Chow, 1993).

Methods

This study employed a qualitative approach using in-depth interviews. Eight interviewees were selected through a purposive sampling method. Although this sampling renders generalization of the study unlikely, it enables researchers to choose individuals who rigorously reflect characteristics important for a particular study (Bernard, 2006). Therefore, while the sample is not representative of the entire population, it ensures a theoretical representation. For this study, the eight interviewees were chosen because of their characteristics in ethnic background (second generation Chinese Americans) and previous experiences (visited China within 12 months prior to the interview). Two interviewees were recruited using the Internet list server at the University of California at Berkeley. The message posted on the list server was disseminated again to various Chinese-related list servers in the Bay Area. Table 1 provides profiles of the interview participants.

Data were collected through face-to-face, in-depth interviews with each participant, which took place in San Francisco and Berkeley, California,

from March to April 2006. Most interviews lasted 50–60 minutes, although some lasted 2–3 hours. A series of open-ended questions were provided to frame the interviews, so the interviewees could articulate their experiences in China. These questions were formed based on relevant literature and tested through two pilot interviews conducted prior to the data collection. The interview questions include:

1. What things were *familiar* to you in China?
2. What things were *foreign or uncomfortable* to you in China?
3. What experience(s) was (were) unexpected?
4. What was (were) the most significant experience(s) to you?
5. Where do you feel like “home” and why?
6. Has and, if so, in what ways has your feeling of belonging changed because of the visit to China?

While the questions provided the outline of the discussion, the interviewees were encouraged to bring new topics into the conversation. To analyze the data, a cross-case approach was used. In the approach, social phenomena are observed, recorded, classified, and then compared (Goetz & LeCompte, 1981). Through the constant comparison of an event with previous events, Goetz and LeCompte

Table 1
Profile of Interview Participants

Name	Gender	Age	Place of Origin	No. of Visits to China	Proficiency in Chinese	Style of Travel
Alice	female	25	San Francisco, CA	twice	moderate	Summer-long language program; Organized tour
Angela	female	27	San Francisco, CA	once	poor	Organized tour
Ellen	female	21	Los Angeles, CA	four times	moderate	With family; By herself; Summer-long language program
Henry	male	20	San Francisco, CA	twice	fluent	Organized tour
Jennifer	female	25	Union City, CA	six times	fluent	With family; By herself; With business partners
Sharon	female	26	San Francisco, CA	once	moderate	Organized tour
Tiffany	female	25	San Francisco, CA	once	poor	Organized tour
Tommy	male	23	San Francisco, CA	twice	moderate	With family; By himself

Names are pseudonyms.

argued, “new topological dimensions, as well as new relationships, may be discovered” (p. 58). Dye, Schatz, Rosenberg, and Coleman (2000) describe three steps involved in the method. *Categorizing data bits* is a process of reducing the complexity of the data and uncovering and categorizing the primary patterns in the data. It requires careful consideration and judgment about what is significant and meaningful in the data. After creating temporary categories, the categories across the cases or events are *compared* to look for patterns and variations. *Refining categories* is the continuous effort to determine the categories and fit between the categories and data bits. Through continuous refinement, the standard for including and excluding data bits becomes more accurate. In the next section, the three categories that emerged as a result of the three steps will be introduced.

Results

Discovering Chinese Connection

The Chinese American interviewees spoke of their experiences in which they felt a strong sense of affinity to China. The occasion they mentioned most frequently was when they visited their ancestral towns and met their relatives. Although the interviewees had known about their relatives in China through genealogy research or occasional exchanges of telephone calls and letters, the visit was their first time to meet relatives in person. Alice, who visited the village of her maternal ancestors, recalled that although she was highly anxious before the first meeting with her relatives, it turned out to be a joyful gathering that transformed the indirect, uncertain family tie into a solid and real connection:

[When I visited] My mother’s father’s village, [my relatives] asked me to come to dinner with them. I was really scared, and actually I didn’t want to go because I was a little too overwhelmed. But I decided to join in and when I got to their apartment, they have this entire table, full of food, and I realized that they have been preparing for me for hours or probably a day preparing food, and everybody was there like 30 people. . . . So, it was a big thing, how important the link is to them just as it is important to me. They were so happy, and they are really celebratory. The relatives knew nothing about me, probably

95% of people I have never met in my entire life. But they were really happy to be there, and it was like a big celebration to them, and they made me feel so special.

The sense of affinity was also heightened when the Chinese Americans found pictures and letters that their grandparents and parents in the US sent to the relatives in China. These artifacts made the Chinese Americans affirm an ancestral connection that spans national borders. They made comments such as, “I felt like this is where all started” and “I felt like China is a part of me.”

Visiting the ancestral towns allowed the Chinese Americans to imagine the lives that they could have had if their ancestors had not emigrated to the US. Particularly, for those whose ancestral towns are in rural areas, the differences between the village and the US were considerably large in regards to the living conditions. They explained that, although they had prior knowledge about the substandard living conditions in China, the actual visits to villages were compelling. Alice recalled that seeing her relatives’ houses with neither air conditioners nor adequate waterworks made her realize the privilege that her ancestors’ migration to the US brought to her. Similarly, Sharon felt strong appreciation when she visited the villages of her paternal ancestor:

My relatives took me up to visit my great grandfather’s burial site. It was on the top of the very large hill, so we had to climb all up, and there is, so it took us half an hour to get up there. . . . So, when I was up there, I had this feeling of gratitude. If it wasn’t for my great grandfather, my grandfather would not have come to the US. So, it was just a feeling of “thank you for helping my family to be where it is today.”

The sense of appreciation for her ancestors’ migration to the US, however, may imply not only that Sharon realizes the disparity in the lifestyles between two countries but also that she is inclined toward the life in the US. Although visiting the ancestral village fostered a concrete connection between Sharon and her extended family in China, at the same time the visit reinforced her American orientation.

Stephenson (2002) argues that, when Caribbean islanders living in the UK visited their ancestral

islands, they distinguished themselves from foreign tourists because of their ethnic background shared with locals, knowledge of the island, and connection with their relatives and friends in the island. Similarly, the Chinese Americans in this study often compared themselves with other tourists and emphasized how much more they were familiar with Chinese culture and customs than others. For example, Jennifer stated that:

Compared to a complete foreigner, I am familiar with the subtle customs. Say, some people put off restaurants [in China] because it's noisy. But I grew up with a noisy Chinese restaurant. If you go to a Chinese restaurant, it's chaotic but it's normal for me. . . . or, if you go to a park, Chinese people write some characters and words on natural places whereas most Americans would say that it ruin the nature. But it is aesthetic for Chinese. Well, I cannot read them, I don't know what they mean. But I know it's art and symbolic in a way.

Their Chinese physical characteristics allowed the interviewees to blend in with the local Chinese population. One female interviewee jokingly stated, "When I arrived in China, I looked around and thought, oh my God, everyone here looks like us. There are so many Chinese people here!" Being surrounded by people who "look like them" was somewhat a notable experience for the interviewees. It provided them with a certain level of comfort. Moreover, some stated that they occasionally pretended to be local Chinese. Some did so merely for fun but others consciously did so to take advantage of their Chinese identity. Tiffany described that she was able to gain a free access to the region where foreign visitors need to get a permission to enter because she "looked" Chinese:

Sometimes it's great [to look Chinese], because you can do things that foreigners can't do. This one region, where, if you are a foreigner, if you're not Chinese national, you need to get a special permission to enter. And sometimes, I got away without getting permission because I look Chinese, I just pretended I was and because so many different lot dialects in China. It's okay if your Chinese is not perfect. They figured that you come from a different part of the country.

Tiffany's reply may be an example of what is called "racial identity play" (Kibria, 2002). The

term is referred to "the self-conscious manipulation, by those on whom it is imposed, of the marker of race and the assumptions and meanings about identity that marker signals" (Kibria, 2002, p. 83). Kibria (2002) argued that through the racial identity play, the individual would obtain an advantage over the presumption imposed on the one by others. Indeed, Tiffany consciously took advantage of others' assumptions about her nationality based on her physical markers to gain the privilege given only to Chinese individuals.

Challenged Chineseness/Distrusted Americanness

The Chinese identity ascribed to Chinese Americans based on their physical characteristics, however, was not always an advantage. The Chinese Americans stated that they often found themselves expected to be competent in Chinese culture because they looked Chinese. Such expectations often challenged the authenticity of their identity as true Chinese because many Chinese Americans lacked the cultural skills, such as language, as a result of their American upbringing. For example, Tommy stated, "When I don't speak Chinese to [the locals], they go like 'what kind of Chinese are you?'"

Encounters with locals who expect immigrants' descendants to be familiar with the ancestral culture have not been uncommon in the experiences of roots tourists with various ethnic backgrounds (Kibria, 2004; Stephenson, 2002). However, such an expectation seemed particularly demanding among the Chinese because of what Dikotter (1992, cited by Louie, 2001) called a Chinese "racial ideology." In the ideology, Chinese identity is based primarily on blood and lineage, and yellow skin and black hair are constructed as important ethnic markers that represent faith and loyalty to Chinese heritage, nation, and culture. In other words, Chinese individuals who have the ethnic markers are assumed to remain essentially Chinese and to perform the Chinese cultural identity, regardless of whether they are in the mainland or abroad.

However, as Louie (2000) pointed out, while Chinese Americans keep the physical markers as Chinese, they often lack the cultural competency. Indeed, the interviewees in the study described

their experiences in which the gap between their physical identity and cultural upbringing created tension in the interactions between locals and other tourists. The lack of language skills was the most obvious cause of the resentful experiences with locals. In this study, only two of the interviewees were fluent in the Chinese language, and the rest of the interviewees' proficiency level was moderate to poor. Four interviewees could carry a simple conversation, and two interviewees stated that they only knew some words and phrases. Jennifer, who primarily used English both at home and at school, spoke of a sense of frustration that she felt in an encounter with a local Chinese man. She said that although she told the man that she was born and raised in the US, he did not understand why Jennifer did not speak Chinese because he had the notion that the Chinese language skill should be inherited:

I was on a train in a three-day trip in China, and I met this Chinese guy. He said, “Why don't you speak Chinese, because you are Chinese.” And, I explained to him that I am from the US. But he said, “You are Chinese.” So, it's frustrating. . . . I tried to explain but some people don't understand that language is not an innate ability. A lot of people don't understand that.

The gap between their physical and cultural identities became a concern in the interaction with other tourists, too. Angela, who traveled in China with her Caucasian friends, felt “odd” because her friends expected her to be familiar with Chinese culture and asked her numerous questions. She, however, sometimes did not have answers. As a result, she became uncertain about her true Chineseness:

I feel, I'm only halfway Chinese. . . . Like I was always called to explain to them, “oh, what is this” and “what is that” and sometimes I know, and sometimes I don't know. . . . I only partly know. . . . If you're talking about authenticity, you know, is it really I am being Chinese or I am performing the whole time? It was a little bit awkward.

When they were censured by others for a lack of knowledge of Chinese culture, or had the painful realization themselves, the interviewees often

used their American identity as an “instrument” to disassociate themselves from the negative encounters. One interviewee defensively countered, “There is always the American mind to come back to.” Other interviewees also emphasized the boundary between local Chinese (“they”) and the Chinese Americans (“we”) when they described the negative encounters with locals.

Ironically, however, the interviewees also recalled their experiences in which the authenticity of their American identity was questioned. According to the interviewees, local Chinese did not believe that the Chinese Americans were “true Americans” because being an American means “white” for local Chinese. As Henry indicated, Chinese Americans looked “too Chinese” and “don't look like Americans” in the eyes of the local Chinese. Jennifer, who tried to teach English to local Chinese students during her summer study abroad in China, stated that local Chinese did not give credit to her English skills. To teach English, one needs to look Western:

A lot of students doing study abroad in China, if they spoke English they try to get the job to teach English because there are a lot of jobs available. . . . So, you know, my English is good. It's my native language. But I look Chinese, so people are less inclined to learn English from me, because I am disassociated with the language. Not just Chinese from North America but Chinese Dutch. Dutch speak wonderful English. So do South Africans. They speak wonderful English. But if there's a French girl whose English is horrible, she would get a job, because she looks white. So, that was frustrating. . . . It's insulting to some degree, because even here, my English is better than most of my American friends. So it's insulting because, you are not given credibility.

Female respondents found themselves trapped in the gender and class hierarchy in China. They were often criticized by the locals for going to college instead of getting married and having children. Moreover, Angela, who visited Shanghai, described her encounter at one local bar where she found many white men and local Chinese women were dating. The women's hope, Angela indicated, was to find a white man so they can marry and leave China. She felt extremely bothered to see the phenomenon because of two reasons. In

one way, she felt pure anger about the white man exercising his economic and social power to take advantage of a disadvantaged Asian woman. In addition, she felt uncomfortable because she might appear to be one of the Chinese women looking for a white date, because of her Chinese physical markers:

In Shanghai, sometimes I went to this one club, and mainly white males go there. If there were any local Chinese, they were local Chinese women. So you felt this dynamic of Asian women and white men, and that is awkward for me because if you do hear stories of women who wants to marry so she can leave the country. It really bothers me when you see this ugly, old white man with a beautiful young Chinese woman, and you are like, well, that wouldn't happen in the US. He is only able to do so [in China] because he is wealthy and he is foreign.

(Interviewer): What really bothers you that much?

Because this ugly, old white man is taking an advantage of the fact that there is this power dynamics in terms of social status, economic status taking place. That's frustrating. Because . . . a lot of my friends in Shanghai are American men, white men, for whatever the reasons. But you feel that the locals would think that, maybe, I was a local Chinese woman looking to marry and leave the country, you know what I mean? So that's awkward.

In summary, although the Chinese American interviewees attempted to justify their lack of Chinese language skill and cultural knowledge based on their American background, their physical markers as Chinese was powerful enough to allow locals to label the Chinese Americans as "not American enough." The Chinese Americans felt frustrated or even anger toward being labeled in such way, and the frustration weakened a sense of connection with local Chinese.

Identity In-Between

Because of the contestation and negotiation of identities as Chinese and American, particularly through the interaction with the locals, the Chinese American tourists developed a sense of ethnic identities lying between the two countries. In one way, they certainly felt a heightened sense of con-

nection to China. Some of them began to learn the Chinese language after the visit, participate in Chinese cultural events, and be more conscious about ways in which Chinese culture is represented in the US. They also spoke of their willingness to take their children to China in the future. Moreover, their visit encouraged some of the interviewees' parents who had not ever been to China or had not been since their immigration to consider visiting. Indeed, two interviewees visited China with their parents after their first visit, and two were planning the family trip in the near future. At the same time, however, all the interviewees stated that they could not picture themselves living in China. Alice stated that although she felt a strong sense of affinity to China owing to her grandmother, who had often talked about China, she does not consider living in China:

There was definitely the time I would look out, then, really proud of that the landscape is my home. I thought it's just because my ancestor came from there, my grandmother has a story about it. I could've grown up here, and part of me actually had grown up there. Just like, listening to her story, taking up mannerism that she has, you know? But then, I couldn't picture of myself living there. This isn't me. This is not me. I couldn't live there. For me, "home" is with a Western toilet, coffee shop, Internet access all over, laptop computer. That's my home.

Sharon similarly stated:

There are definitely parts [of China] that are familiar [to me]. Like, when we were riding a bus and look outside the landscape, and I'm like "oh," you know, the rice patios and everything. I feel like "oh, this is kind of cool, this is where my ancestors come from." And, because of the connection, I feel like home. But on the flip side, if I'd be walking around the villages, I didn't understand what villagers were saying, or if I'd be in the city, I didn't know where I was. And, that would sort of feel very unfamiliar, feel like I was visiting a foreign country.

The two excerpts above present contradictory meanings of China. In one way, Alice and Sharon identified China as "home" because of the ancestral connection. The visit to China transformed the abstract idea about their ancestral land to a concrete sense of connection. At the same time, they

also consider China as a “foreign country” for them because of the unfamiliarity in many aspects of everyday life. The US was the “true home” for them.

Discussion

The findings of this study are significant in a number of ways. First, the tourists’ experiences with locals and other tourists concerning their ethnic authenticity is parallel to Kibria’s (2002) study on Chinese Americans’ everyday interactions with people of non-Asian origin in the US. Kibria (2002) illustrated that Chinese Americans were constantly assumed to have a genuine connection to Chinese culture while lacking knowledge in the mainstream American culture. Similarly, in this study, Tommy, among others, recalled his experience of being criticized for his lack of Chinese language skills. Moreover, Angela was expected to be familiar with Chinese culture by her friends and was expected to act like a tour guide. At the same time, their American identity was often not trusted. Jennifer, who tried to teach English in China, stated, “People are less inclined to learn English from me” because she “looks” Chinese. The parallel between the two studies may indicate that the visit to China was not a quest to a spiritual center for Chinese Americans, as Cohen (1979) and other scholars (Ali & Holden, 2006; Nguyen et al., 2003) suggested. Instead of feeling a sense of ultimate belonging and security in China, the Chinese American tourists found their identity continuously contested and often alienated in the same way as they experience in everyday life.

Second, although scholars (Amato, 2005; Lew & Wong, 2005) suggested that the shared ethnicity allowed roots tourists to be immersed in the local community and feel the genuine sense of attachment, the Chinese Americans in this study felt a sense of disorientation rather than belonging to China. More precisely, although the Chinese Americans were occasionally able to “pretend” to be local, the immersion was limited to the physical sense. They recognized more differences than similarities as they explored China and interacted with locals. Indeed, Sharon states, “I’d be walking around villages and I didn’t understand what villagers were saying, or I’d be in the city, I don’t know where I

was. . . . feel like I was visiting a foreign country.” Accordingly, the finding suggests that, as Kibria (2002) stated, other assets of identity than ethnicity, including language, culture, lifestyle, upbringing, and gender, are intertwined and generate multiple layers of meanings of Chinese Americans’ encounters with their ancestral land.

Third, the affiliation with the global tribe of Chinese was absent among the Chinese Americans in this study. Instead, the Chinese Americans expressed identification with the US, where they physically live. As Henry indicated, “I’m shaped by an American experience. . . . I belong to American experiences.” This statement represents the idea that the geographical boundaries of the nation states have significant influence on the identity among Chinese Americans. This aspect may be particularly true for second and later generations of Chinese Americans who were born and raised in the US. Louie (2001) stated that the transnational relationship with China was different for Chinese Americans who were born and raised in the US than for their immigrant ancestors:

The connections between the United States and China that they [Chinese American tourists] create out of their journey represent a type of remembering that contrasts with the nostalgic memories of transmigrants who have at one time lived in the village. Far from representing a fixed and static relationship with place . . . the transnational relationship between these Chinese Americans and China is highly mediated, loose and expansive, drawing upon a broad time span that reaches back across generations and connects to the present. (p. 372)

Certainly, the cultural references that served for the Chinese Americans in this study to develop a link to China were only vague images or second-hand information of the country. For example, when Jennifer recalled her experience of finding Chinese characters written in the park, she indicated, “I cannot read them, I don’t know what that mean,” and she only “know[s] [they are] art and symbolic in a way.” Also, Alice felt a connection to China because “my grandmother has a story about it.” In other words, China was a country that the Chinese Americans interviewees knew primarily through the imagination rather than through lived experiences. Therefore, researchers need to

consider that the experiences, significance, and meanings of visiting the ancestral lands for the second and later generations may differ considerably from those of the immigrant generation. While for the first generation the visit might function as a way to maintain and strengthen the cultural and social tie (Duval, 2003; Nguyen et al., 2003) and to express longing for home (Ali & Holden, 2006), for the second and later generations it may mean visiting a foreign country.

Conclusion

This study explored the experiences of visiting China among second and later generations of Chinese Americans. Data from the interviews with eight Chinese Americans revealed that their ethnic identity and sense of belonging were constantly challenged, negotiated and redefined through their visits to China. Particularly, this study highlighted the ways in which the interviewees' physical characteristics as Chinese added complexity to the identity negotiation. On the one hand, such markers allowed the Chinese Americans to be immersed in the local population and gain a privilege that only local Chinese have. On the other hand, the physical markers made their Chinese identity almost an a priori, if not voluntary, matter. More precisely, while the Chinese Americans were expected to be competent in the Chinese cultural skills, their American identity was disbelieved. This dual assumption challenged the authenticity of both Chinese and American identities.

In this study, the visit to China did not represent the travel to the spiritual center where the roots tourists feel the ultimate belonging. Rather than developing the identity attached to China, the Chinese Americans affirmed their American identity. That is, the commonalities in ethnicity and ancestor were not compelling enough to foster a sense of belonging to the ancestral land among the Chinese Americans. The findings also suggest that the geographical boundary of the nation states still had a significant influence on constructing identities and sense of "home," especially for the second generation Chinese Americans in this study, even though they had the mobility to visit their ancestral land under globalism.

The findings of this study presented some similarities and differences between the Chinese Ameri-

cans and members of other ethnic groups in experiences of visiting ancestral lands. For example, while Dominican Americans (Louie, 2006a) and Scottish Canadians (Basu, 2001) felt a strong sense of orientation to their ancestral lands, the Chinese Americans in this study strengthened their American orientation through visiting China. They felt a sense of affinity to China only based on the ancestral connection and not identify China as their "home" to which they belong. In this sense, their experiences were somewhat similar to Italian Australians' (Baldassar, 2001). The second generation Italian Australians embraced the "blood" connection to Italy through roots tourism. However, they also felt disoriented to their own ancestral land because of the various differences between Australian and Italian cultures and negative encounters with locals. Future studies, therefore, need to include members of other diasporic communities, particularly the second and later generations of roots tourists, to explore how and why they have similar or different experiences in their ancestral lands. Future research also needs to include more interviews to understand trends in the experiences of visiting the ancestral land among Chinese Americans. Such studies will bring clarity on the ways in which roots tourism plays a role in identity construction under the globalism.

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