

ROOTS TOURISM OF CHINESE AMERICANS



Naho Maruyama
Amanda Stronza
Texas A & M University

This study explored how second-generation Chinese Americans, born and raised in the United States, redefined the concept of homeland through visiting China as tourists. Narratives from 35 interviewees revealed that their imagined personal connection to the ancestral land was often contested in the actual encounter. The differences in language, class, family structure, and gender roles overpowered a sense of affinity. At the same time, Hong Kong, where they could speak English and blend with local people, emerged as a surrogate home where their desire for homecoming was fulfilled. (Roots tourism, Chinese diaspora, surrogate homeland)

“Home” can be the most powerful unifying symbol for diaspora peoples (Gupta and Ferguson 1992). Sheffer (1986:3) defines modern diaspora as “ethnic minority groups of migrant origins residing and acting in host countries but maintaining strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin—their homelands.” By this definition, diaspora peoples are conceptually associated with their original, or ancestral, homeland. Memory of the ancestral land is a way to gain a sense of solidarity with people who still live there and to feel a sense of empowerment to have succeeded in a country of settlement. In Sheffer’s definition, countries of origin are equated with homelands—ancestral lands that signify “home” for modern diaspora. However, the notion of an ancestral home as fixed and durable disintegrates in the increasingly globalized and interconnected world. With continuous mobility of goods, capital, information, and people, boundaries between “here” and “there” become vague, and the association between place and people, the ancestral lands and diaspora, cannot be taken for granted (Appadurai 1996). Tourism, including ancestral roots tourism, is one facet of globalization that contributes to these changes (Little 2000; Handley 2006).

Visiting one’s ancestral land as a tourist has recently become popular (Cole and Timothy 2004; Duval 2004; Hall and Duval 2004; Chan 2005). Roots tourism is a kind of tourism by which immigrants and their descendants visit the communities of their ancestors to see family and relatives, for leisure, and to discover the culture of the ancestral society, without the intention of permanent settlement or work-related purposes (Feng and Page 2000; Kibria 2002). Roots

tourism is often promoted in ways that seek to appeal to visitors' nostalgia for the ancestral land and to their search for belonging (Cohen 2004). For example, the Wales Tourist Board sent a letter accompanied by a video to Welsh diaspora descendants encouraging them to visit Wales. The letter stated, "Someone special is waiting to welcome you home to Wales . . . to remind you of what you're missing and why it's time to come home for a visit" (Morgan and Pritchard 2004:238). Empirical studies of roots visits, however, show that the desire to belong in one's ancestral land often leads people to confuse nostalgic imagination with reality (Kibria 2002; Louie 2003; Skrbis 2007). Hall (1997) argues that the homeland is not merely waiting to be discovered, as the letter from Wales might suggest, but it is also continually reconstructed through imagination, negotiation, and re-creation:

The homeland is not waiting back there for new ethnics to rediscover it. There is a past to be learnt about, but the past is now seen, and has been grasped as a history . . . it is grasped through memory . . . it is grasped through reconstruction. It is not just a fact that has been waiting to ground our identity. (Hall 1997:38)

This article explores the ways by which second-generation Chinese Americans born and raised in the United States shape, reshape, define, and redefine the concept of homeland through visiting China as tourists. Narratives from 35 interviews reveal that the roots tourists in this study imagined their connection to China through their immigrant parents and peers, and such imaginations became the central motivation for them to visit China. However, the imagined tie was in many ways challenged by the actual encounter with the homeland. As a result, roots tourists acknowledged China as their ancestral home while also distinguishing it from their homeland. In turn, they ascribed the United States with new and renewed significance as the homeland where they had been born and raised.

HOMELAND AND DIASPORA

Scholars of migration and diaspora have made significant contributions to our understanding of the motivations, patterns, and meanings of visiting ancestral lands. On the one hand, diaspora is conceptually connected to their ancestral lands, being defined as those who have been dislocated from a place of origin and who continue to maintain ties with it. Based on this concept, visiting the ancestral land has been represented as a secular pilgrimage (Delaney 1990) or as existential tourism (Cohen 1979). However, the notion that diasporic peoples have fixed and stable relations to an ancestral land has been criticized for overlooking how diasporic peoples develop multiple, fluid, and changing

relationships with ancestral lands. In fact, roots tourists may find that they need to renegotiate notions of homeland and belonging after actually encountering their ancestral land.

Ancestral lands have been described as central features of diaspora and ethnic identities (Cohen 1997). Safran (1991), for example, notes that diasporic communities or their forebears have been dislocated from an original “center” to foreign countries but maintain their collective memory about their ancestral land. They may also perceive their ancestral land as a “true home” to which they or their descendants dream to return. Diaspora may, therefore, be committed to the prosperity of their ancestral land. Levy (2005) calls this notion of inseparable ties between diaspora and ancestral land as a “solar system model,” where diasporic communities are perceived, and perceive themselves, as symbolic satellites “circulating around their cherished ‘mother/father-sun’ throughout history” (Levy 2005:69). Espiritu and Tran (2002) find that first-generation Vietnamese immigrants in the United States continue to instill their traditional values and norms in their children through their home life, and the children have the desire to be involved in the economic and political affairs of Vietnam, even though they are physically disconnected from their ancestral land.

Mitchell (1997), in contrast, argues that scholars should challenge the traditional narratives of diaspora, especially those that emphasize fixity of ancestral land-diaspora relations, and instead explore the changing relations. Weingrod and Levy (2006) illustrate how the ancestral land is differently perceived depending on one’s location. For example, Moroccan Jews who left Morocco to live in Israel experienced discrimination there, and Morocco, where they previously lived, became the homeland to which they were emotionally attached. Consequently, Morocco becomes their heritage tour destination and symbolic roots. Weingrod and Levy (2006) distinguish “homeland” and “center.” Homeland is one’s historical place, to which one is emotionally attached and obligated to return, while center is the place toward which one constructs positive memories and a personal attachment but is not obliged to return. Instead, one may simply enjoy visiting a “center.” Barcus and Werner (2007) report that the Mongolian Kazakhs are drawn to their homeland differently, depending on their economic status, educational attainment, and generation. Those who perceive fewer economic opportunities in Mongolia tend to migrate to Kazakh, their ancestral land, to seek a better future, while those who are successful in Mongolia tend not to move back. Some of their children, however, consider attending universities in Kazakh for its better economic prospects. Similarly, Malkki (1992), who compared Burundese refugees from Tanzania living in a urban area and in a camp, argued that the different levels of integration to the host society influence people’s attachment to the ancestral land. Adam (2008)

pointed out that social status in the community before their forced migration would explain the varying intentions to return among indigenous people in Ambon, Indonesia.

If political, economic, social, and cultural realities cause the ancestral land to not offer the attributes of home, the diaspora may create an alternative home in a different territory. For example, Falzon (2003) explains that Hindus who left Sindh do not feel affinity to their homeland because of religious and political hostility and lack of economic viability. Instead, they construct their new homeland in a different territory, namely Mumbai. Mumbai, India, has become a “cultural heart” where Sindhis dispersed in the world visit to socialize with their relatives, find marriage partners, celebrate Sindhi identity, network for business connections, and make financial investments. As Clifford (1994:306) maintains, the current diasporic experiences are rooted in changing histories and multiple localities across nations. The definition of homeland for diaspora is determined by economic, social, and cultural contexts in both the ancestral land and country of settlement, and is subject to processes of displacement, levels of suffering, adaptation, and resistance. These factors often count as much as the symbolic centrality of a place for defining home and homeland.

Globalization has made the relationships between diaspora people and their ancestral lands ever more dynamic and complex. Technological developments in transportation and communication have enabled diaspora to create, re-create, and maintain social, economic, political, and emotional ties to ancestral lands. Papastergiadis (2000) states that individuals may construct a sense of home in various communities even though they are not physically located in the territories. Yet, frequent contacts with the ancestral land may estrange diaspora in their homeland because the contact reveals more essential differences than similarities in class, gender roles, and cultural norms and practices between those who have left and those who have stayed (Horst 2007; Stefansson 2004).

Roots Tourism as Visiting Home

Roots tourism has been examined primarily from two perspectives. Some scholars describe temporary touristic returns to the homeland as symbolic expressions of loyalty and a desire “to belong” to the ancestral land (Ali and Holden 2006; Baldassar 2002; Basu 2004). Some scholars have distinguished roots tourism as a form of “existential tourism” (Lew and Wong 2005) with existential tourists defined as those who live in exile but are committed to an “elective center,” external to their place of residence (Cohen 1979). For them, visiting the elective center is a journey to seek meaning and a sense of belonging. In this way, roots tourism is a type of pilgrimage. Indeed, Delany (1990) refers to the

annual visits of Turkish migrants living in Belgium to their villages as a “secular pilgrimage.” For the immigrants who face difficulty assimilating to the host country, the ancestral village is symbolized as “a vital center” (Delany 1990:523), and the visit to the center allows them “to touch the foundation of their being . . . and renew their identity as Turks and gives them dignity” (Delany 1990:525). Also, Stephenson (2002) argues that the motivation to visit the ancestral land among Caribbean islanders living in the United Kingdom is strongly related to a search for belonging. It is true for those who were born and raised in the United Kingdom and never lived in their ancestral island. Bruner (1996) describes African American opposition to plans to renovate the Elmina castle in Ghana for tourism. Originally built in 1482, the castle was a center of slave trade. African Americans opposed changes to the castle because they saw it as a place to achieve spiritual reunion with their ancestors. In this sense, the ancestral land is, to some extent, romanticized as an unchanged, static place where roots tourists are always welcome and able to activate social ties with the locals.

Other scholars have argued that visiting the ancestral land may cause social marginalization or “re-diasporization” of diaspora in their ancestral land (Kibria 2002; Louie 2004; Stephenson 2002). In the actual encounter with the ancestral land, the longing for belonging to the ancestral land may be easily overwhelmed by changes since the past, gaps between the idealized homeland and reality, and differences between those who left and those who remained. As a result, visitors may feel alien, instead of “at home.” They may need to reframe their concept of homeland and may construct an alternate, or “surrogate,” home (Skrbis 2007). Espiritu and Tran (2002) describe how second-generation Vietnamese Americans felt connected to Vietnam through imagination, but when they actually visited there, they had a difficult time adjusting to the climate and living conditions. As a result, they came to perceive the United States as their “home.” Korean adoptees who participated in a tour organized by the Korean government experienced tensions in their “motherland,” in terms of the notion of identity, ethnic authenticity, citizenship, and belonging, and resisted hegemonic appropriations of their identity and notion of “home” (Kim 2003). Skrbis (2007) similarly points out that senior Croatians who visited their home villages and discovered their homes had been demolished painfully confronted the changes from the past and realized that the new reality of the homeland no longer corresponded with their memory. To compensate for the sense of loss, they constructed Medjugorje, a small village also known as an active pilgrimage center, as an alternative home. In Medjugorje, roots tourists can stay at accommodations where home cooking and spiritual care are offered. Although the domesticity and intimacy are staged, Croatian tourists perceive such features not

merely as services but as true meanings of home. Thus Medjugorje became their “surrogate home,” where longing for home could be satisfied.

In sum, scholars have described various patterns of homeland-diaspora relations and changing meanings of visiting ancestral lands. However, most studies of roots tourism have focused on the experiences of the first, second, and later generations as a single phenomenon (Duval 2004; Lew and Wong 2004; Stephenson 2002). Studies of the ways in which second and later generations respond to roots tourism are relatively few, except for studies with African Americans (Austin 2000; Bruner 1996; Holsey 2004), with Jewish diaspora (Cole and Timothy 2004; Ioannides and Ioannides 2004), and a few with Asian Americans (Kibria 2002; Louie 2004).

This results in a lack of understanding of ancestral land-diaspora relations among a growing segment of the U.S. population. Levitt and Waters (2002) point out that in 2000, approximately 27.5 million individuals—10 percent of the United States population—were second-generation immigrants (mainly from Latin America and Asia) who arrived in the 1960s. Unlike earlier immigrants who had only limited means to stay in touch with their ancestral country, migrants today can easily maintain their political, economic, and social ties to their homelands, owing to technological developments.

Louie (2004), whose study focuses specifically on second and later generations, argues that they have relationships with ancestral lands that differ from the first generation. Based on interviews and ethnographic observations of Chinese American roots tourists who participated in a government sponsored program to visit China, she maintained that second-generation Chinese Americans know China only through secondary information (e.g., media, parents’ stories). Therefore, when they visit China they feel a familiarity and a sense of connection only to what they experienced in the United States with their friends and family (e.g., Chinese food, language, and village physical features that look like Chinatown). As a result, even though the sponsors of the tours may expect such visits to evoke a sense of loyalty to the contemporary nation-state and encourage financial investment, Chinese Americans may become more active in the Chinese American activities primarily based in the United States.

CHINESE AMERICANS’ “HOMELAND”

Chinese immigration to the United States began around 1840, when gold was discovered in California (Kwan and Miscevic 2005; Tong 2003). An estimated 34,000 Chinese laborers, almost all young male peasants from Guangdong province, came to the United States to meet the demand for cheap labor. As the number of Chinese workers increased, prejudice toward them ensued. In 1882,

the Chinese Exclusion Act of the U.S. government prohibited the entry of more Chinese immigrants, and also took away some rights and privileges of those who were in the United States. Consequently, the Chinese population in the U.S. dropped to around 60,000 (Fan 2003). The act was repealed in 1943.

Chinese diaspora have long been conceptually connected to China even though they were physically distant from it. Since the beginning of the immigration, they sent remittances and traveled to the villages of origin to maintain families ties, manage property, and find spouses (Lew and Wong 2004; Yung 1999). Their objective was to improve the economic status of their families at home and return there upon retirement. However, the connection between Chinese Americans and China was severed in 1949 when the Communist Party of China gained power (Kwan and Miscevic 2005). The U.S. government prohibited Chinese Americans from sending remittances or visiting China. Chinese Americans had limited access to China until the late 1960s, following the enactment of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (Tong 2003). The new immigration policy encouraged a large number of intellectuals and skilled workers from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and mainland China to immigrate to the United States. The normalization of the United States-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 United States.

Political changes coupled with the advancement of technology in communication and transportation allowed Chinese Americans to reconnect with their ancestral land. Yet, the changes led to new dynamics in diaspora-ancestral land relations among Chinese Americans and tension in conceptualizing their relation to the homeland. On the one hand, scholars and policy makers attempt to encompass Chinese Americans as a part of the Chinese diasporic community that retains a strong tie to the ancestral land (Lew and Wong 2003; Tu 2005). For example, government officials in Guangdong province attempt to strengthen ties with overseas Chinese (Lew and Wong 2003) with the hope to enhance business partnerships and financial investment. Tu (2005) also maintains that China symbolizes the trunk of a tree, and overseas Chinese are like branches that need the trunk to stay alive. However, some scholars (Skeldon 2003; Wai-Ming 2003) question the strength of the ties between overseas Chinese and China. They point to strong feelings of belonging, identity, and social ties that many Chinese who live outside of China maintain. Wang (1998) argues that an overemphasis on ancestral origins may mistakenly imply resident status in the country of settlement as only temporary.

STUDY METHODS

For this study, individual interviews were conducted with 35 Chinese Americans, 17 males and 18 females, to understand their experiences with roots tourism. Interviewees were recruited through quota sampling, which means a certain number of individuals who represented a spectrum of characteristics of relevance to the study was selected (Bernard 2006). The interviewees were chosen because of their ethnic background (second-generation Chinese Americans), previous experiences (visited China within 12 months prior to the interview), gender, and age. Twenty of the interviewees live in California and the rest live in Houston, Texas.

The first author had prior experience conducting face-to-face interviews with Native Americans (Maruyama, Yen, and Stronza 2008; Maruyama and Yen 2004) and with Chinese Americans (Maruyama, Weber, and Stronza 2010). The second author also had experience conducting interviews, and for this study checked the quality of the analysis.

Maruyama recruited interviewees through the faculty contacts and presentations made in some universities in the San Francisco and Houston areas and posted a message on an Internet listserv used by the universities. The message was further disseminated to Chinese-related listservs. Men and women interviewees are equally represented from both locations and ranged in age from 19 to 25 years. This age group is particularly relevant to a study of transnational life. The college years are typically the time when peer groups and ethnic identity become especially salient, and youth are inclined to visit the ancestral land (Phinney and Ong 2007; Smith 2002). As people get older, the freedom to visit ancestral lands decreases because of the demands of work and family. Thirteen of the interviewees in this study were working full-time, and the rest were in four-year colleges at the time of the interviews. Among those who work full-time, three have a master's degree and ten obtained a bachelor's degree.

The second generation is defined for this study as those who have immigrant parent(s) and were raised in the United States, even if they were born in another country. One of the interviewees was born in Taiwan, and one was born in mainland China. These two emigrated to the United States before they were five years old. Zhou and Bankston (1998) point out that those who immigrated at preschool age can be included in the second generation because their linguistic, cultural, and developmental experiences are similar to those who were born in the country of settlement. Six interviewees identified Taiwan as their ancestral land, the rest identified mainland China.

Of the 35 interviewees, 26 had visited their ancestral land more than once. The most popular visit was traveling as families to visit relatives in China or Taiwan.

Indeed, 30 had done so at least once. During the family visit, they usually toured some famous tourist spots, such as the Great Wall, Tiananmen Square, and the Summer Palace. Six interviewees participated in a summer-long language program. Although their primary purpose was to learn the language, during their stay they visited their ancestral villages and met relatives. Also, six interviewees participated in a group tour organized specifically for Chinese Americans to visit their ancestral villages. The program included intensive genealogical research prior to their visit.

In-depth interviews with each participant took place between March 2006 and January 2008. Most interviews lasted 50 to 60 minutes, and some went two to three hours. Interviews took place in a private room at a library or at a café, depending on each interviewee's convenience. Questions were open-ended and included:

What made you decide to visit China?

What things were familiar, foreign, or uncomfortable to you in China?

What experience(s) was(were) unexpected?

What was(were) the most significant experience(s) to you?

In what ways did you feel connected/disconnected to China?

Where do you feel at "home" and why?

Have your feelings of belonging changed because of the visit to China? In what ways?

While the questions provided the outline of the discussion, the interviewees were encouraged to bring new topics into the conversation. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed later for analysis.

The interview narratives were interpreted using a cross-case approach (Goetz and LeCompte 1981; Strauss and Corbin 1998). This entails recording, classifying, and then comparing interview narratives. First, using Atlas/ti 5.0, the transcripts were coded and categorized based on the research questions and emerging patterns. This reduced the complexity of the narratives to common themes in the interviewees' descriptions of their experiences in China and the United States. Once common themes emerged, the categories were compared across the cases to find patterns.

THEMES

Motivation: Homeland Imagination

The interviewees in this study indicated being exposed to Chinese culture through their immigrant parents at home, and this allowed them to imagine their ancestral ties to China. These imagined ties seemed to be central motivators for visits to China. For example, all of the interviewees recalled having celebrated

ethnic holidays and festivals, such as Chinese New Year and Moon Festivals, with their mothers or grandmothers. As indicated in Louie's (2006) study, the Chinese Americans had little knowledge about the meaning of the practices, but enjoyed the ceremonies as special occasions where they ate ethnic food and were given gifts. However, observing the practices allowed them to at least imagine the connection to their external homeland and to foster curiosity about their ethnic background. One interviewee stated, "Seeing the culture from here [United States], like from eyes over there but not actually being over there. It makes you feel that you want to go and join them." The interviewees also became interested in visiting China through stories about the childhood of their parents and grandparents. Clara said, "My initial reason [to visit China] is my grandmother . . . she always talks about China, how she grew up. So, I always thought, you [grandmother] live in America most of your life and what's so great about China. You know?"

Another common motivation was to visit relatives. Thirty-two interviewees did this in China or Taiwan; 17 of them stated that seeing their relatives was the primary reason to visit. Sam said, "My grandmother was over there, and a lot of relatives that I have never seen in my life before. . . . So, I decide to go to China."

In many accounts of tourism, researchers have argued that modern tourists are inclined to travel to escape from the alienation they feel in life (Cohen 1979; MacCannell 1976). The accounts of diaspora and particularly the return visit also emphasize that people are motivated to visit their ancestral land because of a sense of displacement and the difficulties involved with assimilation into the country of settlement (Bruner 1996; Lew and Wong 2005; Stephenson 2002). The interviewees of this study were raised in the United States and did not experience dislocation from their homeland, as did the first generation. In addition, they had adopted more of the language and culture in the United States than had their immigrant parents. Yet, some interviewees, especially those who grew up in neighborhoods with Asian populations, were conscious of being "different" from their white peers by ethnicity, culture, and family norms. The visit, then, was expected to be an opportunity to explore the origin of such differences and perhaps validate them. Tim said, "You live in a Western culture, you want to know more about your roots and why you are so different." Clara imagined that visiting China would be a distinct experience for her because she would "blend in" the local society owing to her physical appearance as Chinese and her family connections:

[Before the visit] I was very aware that visiting China would be very different from visiting any other foreign country . . . in a sense that if I went there, people would look at me as if I was from there because I look like them, and because of the historical ties that my family has with China.

So, I wanted to visit, in a way that was conscious of those linkages between my family and [China].

Therefore, as Stephenson (2002) argues, the desire to visit the ancestral land is not merely based on an impulse and spontaneous pursuit, but is a deliberate activity grounded in kinship, ancestors, ethnic histories, and homeland imagination.

Cohen (1974) states that when second and later generations visit their ancestral land, the recreational aspects are more pronounced than reuniting with their roots. In fact, the itineraries of the interviewees in this study often included visiting landmarks in China. The interviewees recalled that they decided to visit the famous spots not because they felt a connection to Chinese history but because they had seen pictures of them in promotion materials like travel magazines, television, and the Internet. One interviewee, who visited her relatives in China and then took a tour in Beijing, said, "I wanted to climb the Great Wall of China because it's one of the Great Wonders of the World."

The Encounter

When they talked about their actual encounter with China, a common theme was a sense of affinity that they felt to their ancestral land. To satisfy experiencing a personal heritage and "home," the interviewees visited their ancestral villages, family grave sites, and met their relatives at whose homes they found pictures, letters, and gifts their parents or grandparents had sent from the United States. Some also visited long-term residents in the community to seek more information about their ancestors, and some were able to find relatives with whom their parents had lost contact. Those who immigrated as a child visited places where they used to live. These activities helped them make personal connections to China. The interviewees often described in emotional terms the experiences of visiting their ancestral town. Sarah, who visited her paternal ancestral village, stated that even though she found that her grandfather's house had collapsed, being there made her feel connected to her ancestors:

I went back. . . . And, the one thing was, in my father's village, the house, my grandfather's house was collapsed. I didn't know that. I don't think anybody in my family knew that. So, there was nothing left. Just a part of wall or something. It didn't make me feel empty knowing that it collapsed because I was just so happy knowing the place. I could feel that . . . just being there. It didn't matter the structure wasn't standing.

Jonathan went to China to seek the origin of differences, and the visit satisfied him because it allowed him to learn where his "weird cultural trajectory" was formed:

Going there, it's a little bit comforting because I get to experience little things that I experienced in my family as well, like eating with chopsticks . . . or understanding what you are talking about, like the autumn festival or passing the New Year, stuff like that.

The sense of connection they felt, however, was mostly to the past and to ancestors. In other words, the sense of connection to ancestors did not include a connection to contemporary China. Rather, the visit raised more differences than similarities between the two countries. The economic difference between them prevented the visitors from the U.S. from constructing a sense of home in China. The interviewees, particularly those who traveled to the rural areas, recalled their shock to see the poor living conditions, such as houses with no electricity, no running water, and no Western-style bathroom. Those who visited cities like Beijing and Shanghai were also shaken by children begging for money. Prior to the visit, the interviewees had often heard stories from their parents about poverty in China, but when they actually saw the poverty, it seemed overwhelming to them. Some said they felt the poverty keenly because they could directly relate it to the experiences of their immigrant parents and grandparents. One interviewee said that seeing the poverty reinforced the importance of being humble. She stated:

My grandmother always reminded me that we are so lucky to be in America. Before [I visited China], I was just like, "oh, whatever." . . . When I really saw [life in China], I was like yeah, I really am lucky. I got food on my table. It's lucky.

One interviewee recalled her surprise at the size and condition of her grandmother's house:

It was like an old country. [I wondered] how do you guys live like this? . . . I could say that my grandmother's living room and bedroom together is as big as my room. . . . And you feel guilty because you are living in a really big house [in the United States].

Observing the poverty also made them imagine the life they would have had if their ancestors had not come to the United States. Although they became aware of their privilege and appreciated it, they also knew they could not live in China because they were too used to their prosperous life in the U.S. Karen expressed an affinity to China owing to her ancestral connection, but added, "China isn't my home. How can I call it 'home' when I cannot even eat the food or use the bathroom over there?"

Ang (2001), born in a Chinese immigrant family in Indonesia, wrote of the sense of ambivalence she experienced when visiting China on a tour of foreign tourists. Although she had an ancestral connection to China, she grew up elsewhere and did not speak any local language. Like Ang, the interviewees

hoped to blend in with the Chinese but were challenged in the actual encounters. Despite the common ethnicity, the Chinese Americans quickly learned that “locals can tell” they are not native Chinese. The interviewees said the Chinese could identify them as foreigners by dress, facial expressions, behavior, and language. Karen observed that Chinese women took small steps and seemed hesitant when they walked, while Chinese Americans walk with “our chest sticking out and heads up.” Also, Chinese Americans talk and laugh loudly, drink a lot, and dress casually with tank tops and flip-flops. Language was another barrier Chinese Americans experienced. Eleven of the interviewees had only limited skills in Chinese, and felt frustration in not being able to understand locals. Moreover, they were often berated by locals for not speaking Chinese. Even those fluent in Chinese still felt a difference because their way of speaking often was not “up-to-date,” and they often could not understand the slang and jokes or fully participate in conversations on topics such as current politics or entertainment in China.

In addition, the interviewees identified the gaps between the locals and themselves in “intangible” parts of everyday life, such as the family system and gender roles. Although studies have indicated that Chinese immigrant parents are more authoritarian than American parents (Louie 2006), the interviewees in this study were surprised at the Chinese authoritarian family structure. They realized that they had more freedom than those in the Chinese family. Some expressed surprise at the excessive pressure from parents on the academic success of their youth. Kevin said that he was shocked to see his cousins studying 13 or more hours a day for a college entrance exam and having less freedom to choose their college major. Andrew observed that children were strictly disciplined to not talk at the dinner table. When he was invited to dinner with children present, he felt uncomfortable answering questions from his relatives about his life in the United States:

I really thought that, man, I really can't say anything because of this cultural difference. And then people would ask me questions about how America is, and it was just like, I really don't want to say anything because, you know, I don't want to be out loud. . . . So I just go back to eating.

Wan-Fang described how her attitude toward her mother was often criticized by her grandparents and relatives in Taiwan:

Even though my parents are very traditional . . . I did not grow up like that. So, I will fight against my parents. I was riding in the taxi cabs. . . . We were trying to discuss what we were doing, and I was like “No, no, I don't want to do that!” And my cousins were like, “Wow, why are your parents listening to you?”

Differences in gender roles also made the interviewees feel alien. Both male and female interviewees found that the gender roles in China are more traditional than in the United States. Male interviewees expressed the discourtesy toward them and their female family members. For example, Andrew recalled how offended he was when his parents attempted to establish a business connection in China. Even though his mother manages the business in the United States, at the meeting in China, the Chinese mainly talked and listened to his father while treating his mother as an inferior. Kevin described that when he visited his mother's friend and tried to clear dishes after dinner, the daughters of the family stopped him because it is a woman's job:

Then, she is like "no no no, men don't do that in China." I was like "what!?" [She said,] "It's women's thing." . . . I was like, "Excuse me! If I didn't do it, my mom is going to kill me!" . . . It was the way I was brought up. It's like, after dinner you take out your dishes, and I just think that's the way to go. There is no difference between men and women. All I can think of is that in China men and women are not on the same plane, and I am kind of ashamed by that.

Similarly, David felt like an outsider because of the special treatment he was given in China as a first grandson in his family:

I am the only male grandson in my family. So, obviously, the Asian culture comes into [play] really deep. I get the first-class treatment, and I feel like an outsider sometimes, and I am trying to take care of my cousin when I get the best stuff.

Chinese men are privileged over women in education and business (Ma 2003). The father is foremost, and a first son is given the opportunity of higher education. However, Chinese American men have less power as head of a household, and share domestic tasks as more Chinese American women work in the public domain (Fan 2003). The comments by Kevin and David reflect such changes in gender roles in Chinese American families, and they were not accustomed to preferential treatment.

According to Ong (1999), transnationalism often puts women in a dilemma between the gender equality of Western society and their inferior position in their own societies. The status of Chinese American women in households and communities has been greatly elevated as they obtained better education and increased economic status (Yung 1999). In China, women remain subordinate to men in various aspects of daily lives (Woo 2006). In contemporary China, women often experience discrimination at work, and struggle with their conservative husbands who will not share domestic chores (Pimentel 2006). Judy, an interviewee in this study, recalled being questioned by a local male about her plan to find a job after graduating from college:

I remember having a conversation with one of the staff members at the language school. [He told] me that 25 . . . is the perfect [age] to get married and have kids. And I was like “I don’t know; I want to get a good job, make some good money.” And he was like, “you are [a] woman, what do you need money or a job for?” I was like, “I am not going to get into this with you!”

When Ann was exercising in a Beijing gym, many local men looked at her curiously because working out is “a guy thing” in China, and few women were at the gym. Some asked her whether she was a foreigner, and one even commented that she was “like a man.”

I felt like a big time outsider . . . [because of] the way the gender relations are structured. . . . I was running faster on the track than the other guys, and they gave me some weird looks. And then, the fact that I was among the weight machines in workout clothes got me super weird looks. Yeah, it’s a guy thing. . . . There were gymnastic bars, . . . and I hung upside down, the kind of stuff you do in elementary school [in the United States]. And [one man] said, “Wow, she is just like a guy, she can do anything!” So, gender, it’s still much gendered. It made me feel very glad that I live in the States.

A few interviewees noted what they perceived as changing gender roles, especially among younger generations in China. Yet, those who observed some equality of men and women in China still stated that Chinese women seemed more feminized than American women.

Concept of Home

The interviewees acknowledged that the visit was significantly different from mere tourist travel. They felt fulfilled to find their family roots, meet relatives, and relearn a culture. They felt that China was their “cultural homeland” or ancestral homeland. Visiting China represented “going home” because China is where their blood came from. At the same time they maintained that the cultural or ancestral homeland is not their own homeland. Theirs is the United States because that is where they were born and raised. Indeed, they confessed that toward the end of their visit to China, they wanted to return to the United States. So, visiting China was not homecoming, while going back to the United States was. Like other interviewees, Tommie felt an affinity to China, but visiting it made him aware that homeland is where one is born and raised.

I feel that the United States will always be my homeland. Visiting China made me realize that. Even though it’s not like a cultural homeland, United States still feels like my home because you are born here and you are raised here so of course, you are more comfortable here. I feel kinship there [in China], but then if you would ask which your homeland is, then I say United States. If China got into a war, then I would fight for the United States and not China.

Twelve interviewees who visited mainland China also visited Hong Kong. Only two of them had relatives in Hong Kong. For most, the motivation and style of the visit had little to do with roots. They stayed at hotels and enjoyed strolling through towns and shopping for souvenirs without visiting relatives. Yet, they said that they felt more comfortable and even at home in Hong Kong, more so than in the mainland. Josh stated:

I liked Hong Kong, because it is so modernized, it felt like more of a tourist place; like everyone there was a tourist. Everyone there speaks enough English to get by. In Hong Kong I could travel and walk around by myself and . . . speak in English to people there, whereas in China everyone either spoke Mandarin or Cantonese.

Tim also recalled that, while he felt like a foreigner in China, this was not so in Hong Kong:

Hong Kong is a little bit like San Francisco to me. There were a lot of similarities. I can speak Cantonese and my accent is like a “Hong Kongese.” So they think I am from Hong Kong, and they don’t exclude. But in other parts of China, people were looking at me like I am a foreigner, because I am.

One reason the interviewees felt more at home in Hong Kong than in mainland China was because the service, food, and amenities in Hong Kong were like those in the United States. Another reason was that they could use English to communicate with the locals, instead of being criticized for not speaking Chinese. For those who needed their parents or relatives as translators in China, Hong Kong was where they could be independent and explore on their own, and at the same time they could blend into the community. Like the Croatian roots tourists who identify Medjugorje as their “surrogate home,” and can “express their diasporic brand of Croatian identity without the scrutiny of the locals” (Skrbis 2007:326), in Hong Kong, the Chinese Americans can act as diaspora Chinese who are both Chinese and no longer Chinese without confrontation by locals. Ann, who visited Hong Kong after visiting her ancestral town near Shanghai, stated:

I felt more comfortable in Hong Kong than in Shanghai because being a former English colony, they speak English. In Hong Kong, if they knew they can’t talk to me in Chinese, they would switch over to English. So I’d not necessarily call it home, but I felt comfortable [in Hong Kong].

DISCUSSION

This study explored how second-generation Chinese Americans defined and redefined the concept of homeland through visiting as tourists. Their narratives showed that their imagined ties to the homeland, influenced in part by their

immigrant parents and grandparents, were often challenged by actual encounters with the ancestral land. The sense of affinity they felt to China, owing to a family connection, was relatively easily overcome by differences between the two countries. After they returned from China, they acknowledged China as an ancestral homeland but reaffirmed their real homeland as the United States.

The narratives indicate that roots tourism is hardly conventional tourism. Roots tourists' motivations were generated by family history, ethnicity, and homeland imagination. Chinese Americans were motivated to visit China to experience the ethnic culture of their parents, to meet kin, and to experience their ethnicity; and their desire to be immersed in the community was somewhat fulfilled. They did feel a sense of connection and affinity during their visit.

At the same time, there are limits to how roots tourism can construct a sense of belonging to the ancestral land among second-generation immigrants. The interviewees in this study had their imagined ties to the ancestral land, but such ties were often contested and redefined through the differences in norms, language, socioeconomic class, language, upbringing, and family and gender structures. This was particularly true for those who were born or primarily raised in the United States and had not experienced living in China. They attempted to experience an ancestral connection based on their homeland imagination and a short-term visit. Therefore, the process of creating an ancestral tie for second and later generations may be much more complex and multilayered than that for the first generation.

There are other implications for the diaspora-ancestral land relationship, particularly regarding tourism. Roots tourism has often been described as an expression of a desire to belong to the ancestral land and as a form of "existential tourism." Existential tourists are those who live in exile but are spiritually committed to an "elective center," a place outside of where they live (Cohen 1979). Visiting such a center represents a journey from a meaningless existence to a meaningful one. In this study, the Chinese Americans were neither completely external to the United States nor fully committed to China as their elective center. They were more oriented to American culture and therefore did not perceive a meaningful home life in China. The findings suggest that their visit to China is better described as "experiential" or "experimental" in Cohen's (1979) terms. Where they visit, "experimental" tourists may enjoy authentic features, while "experiential" tourists may seek to become absorbed in what they perceive as authentic life. However, both types of tourists refuse to be fully committed to the destination. In terms of their motivation, the interviewees in this study may be understood as neither experimental nor experiential tourists because they did not feel excluded or disadvantaged as ethnic minorities in the United States and traveled to compensate for the feeling. However, when they visited China, they

compared the aspects of life in the United States and in China and evaluated which better suited them.

The findings also help expand the concepts of “homeland,” “center,” and “elective center” for diaspora. “Homeland” is a historical place and a home to which people are emotionally attached and obligated to return; “center” is the place toward which one constructs positive memories and an attachment, but is not obligated to return (Weingrod and Levy 2006). Moreover, Cohen (1979) states that “elective center” is a place that is external to the society in which one physically lives but to which there is a spiritual commitment. For the Chinese Americans in this study, China was none of the three. Rather, they identified China as a “cultural home” or an “ancestral homeland” to which they were historically connected and somewhat obliged to visit. They did not express a strong attachment to China. Rather, through experiencing China, the United States gained significance as their “homeland.” In addition, Hong Kong emerged as a “surrogate home” for some interviewees, a place where the desire for a homecoming was fulfilled without surrendering their American orientation.

This study also has implications for the relationships between diaspora and their ancestral lands in the context of globalism. In the traditional view, diaspora is strongly associated with the ancestral land (Sheffer 1986), considered as the “true home” to which diaspora and their forebears desire to return. But some scholars argue that the ancestral land is differently perceived, depending on one’s current location as well as the cultural, economic, and social conditions of the ancestral country and the country of settlement (Clifford 1994; Mitchell 1997). The findings of this study are consistent with the latter view. Through visiting China, the Chinese Americans in this study acknowledged a historical connection with China while also realizing that their homeland is the United States. Although the concept of globalism suggests that one’s identity, sense of belonging, and sense of home may transcend the geographical boundary of nation states (Appdurai 1996; Papastergiadias 2000), the findings of this study suggest that the concept of homeland is fairly localized with the Chinese American interviewees. Even though they can easily visit the ancestral land, they still regard “home” as the United States, the place where they were born and raised, have family and friends, are familiar with the culture, have experiences and memory, and thus where they belong.

Revealing the dynamic and complex experiences of roots tourists contributes to a deeper understanding of feelings of belonging or not belonging among diaspora. Also, while all interviewees in this study traveled with others, including their families and peers, further studies might explore the experience of traveling to an ancestral land alone.

This study did not explore the differences in experiences based on travel styles. Some roots tourists' experiences and their notion of "home" after the visit may be strongly influenced by their peers (Kim 2003; Louie 2004). Therefore, it is worthwhile to explore how the experience of traveling to the ancestral land with families differs from traveling with peers. Such studies will contribute to a better understanding of ways in which roots tourism can be a part of the process of finding out where is home and what is home.

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