

A ‘Reality of Return’: the case of the Sarawakian-Chinese Visiting China

1. Introduction

In the discourse of diaspora, it is typically advocated that members of a diaspora desire a return to their homeland in order to fulfil their longing for home, a place which according to Falzon (2004, p. 89) whilst being physically ‘unstuck’ from, they remain emotionally ‘stuck’ to. The homeland is thus held as a place of significance for identity (Basu, 2004; Brubaker, 2005; Soysal, 2000), a site of core cultural values uncontaminated by the ‘pollution’ of other cultures or other elements of change. This discourse of association between the homeland and the departed typically contains traits of collective memories, of visions and myths, and a subsequent expectation of return to the ancestral homeland (Falzon, 2003; Safran, 1991). This manifests itself in Safran's (ibid.) ‘myth of return’, a paradigm according to which displaced peoples never fully integrate with the identity of the dominant host/new culture, instead retaining their emotional ties and identification with the homeland, aspiring to an eventual return there.

For Cohen (1997) the myth of return places too much emphasis upon the relationship between the diaspora and their homeland, ignoring collective and hybridised identities that may be constructed in the host countries. Hybrid identities are created, through a process of adaptation to the host culture and a subsequent reconfiguring of a diaspora’s identity (Chambers, 1994; Featherstone, 1996; Friedman, 1999; Lowe, 1991). The creation of a re-shaped hybrid identity inevitably necessitates a re-evaluation of the relationship with the homeland and its significance to identity. For some members of the diaspora subsequent visits to the homeland may reinforce their homeland-identity whilst for others it may heighten their sense of hybridity (Kibria, 2003; Louie, 2004; Stephenson, 2002). The focus of this research concerns the identity of a hybrid diaspora, the Sarawakian-Chinese, focusing on how visits to the ‘homeland’ of China influence identity formation.

2. The making of the Sarawakian-Chinese identity

The Sarawakian-Chinese community is primarily located in Kuching in the South West of Sarawak, one of the thirteen states of Malaysia on the island of Borneo. The origins of this diaspora can be traced to the early 19th century (Reid, 1996; Skeldon, 2003) when wars and

famine within China caused emigration (Pan, 1999; Wang, 1991; Wang, 1994). During the same period, immigration to Sarawak from China was encouraged by the English Governor James Brooke for the purpose of economic expansion (Armstrong and Armstrong, 2001). However, the freedom of movement for the diaspora to return to China ended with the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 and the subsequent 'Closed Door' policy, causing relations with the homeland to be severely restricted and even severed (Chen, 2004). For the following three decades until 1978 and the re-opening of Chinese borders, the global Chinese diaspora was prohibited from returning to China causing the ethnic Chinese to become 'less' Chinese (Suryadinata, 1987). The freedom to travel to China post-1978 has permitted the renewal of contacts between the diaspora and their relatives. The effects of this on the identity is contested, with arguments of it leading to a re-orientation towards China (Nyiri, 1997) being counter-balanced by claims that after three decades of disconnection, the Chinese diaspora's identity has become more heterogeneous and hybridised (Tan, 2001; Tong and Chan, 2001).

In Sarawak, the factors leading to 'more heterogeneous and hybridised' Chinese identities are typically attributed to different education systems and religions (Ong, 1999; Parmer, 2001; Tan, 1988). Several studies have indicated that education plays a critical role in creating and defining the relationship between the hyphenated-communities and the host country, subsequently redefining identity in the national context (Gundara, 1999; Kostovicova and Prestreshi, 2003). A key aspect of why the medium of education can have a significant impact upon identity formation, is that the Chinese, English and Malay system differ in their values and world-views (Ong, 1999; Parmer, 2001; Tan, 1990). Typically, the Chinese-educated diaspora are more familiar with Chinese civilization, including philosophy, arts, music, culture, ethics and history, than their English-educated counterparts who are more likely to be orientated towards Western philosophy and cultures (Chin, 1981; Parmer, 2001; Tan, 1990) and those who attended Malay-medium schools are thought to be at least 'partially assimilated' (Parmer, 2001, p.51) into the Malay culture. However, no research was found that categorised the orientation of the identity of the Sarawakian-Chinese who have attended Malay mediums schools. In summary, the use of language in education would seem to be a significant contributor to the reconfiguration of Chinese identity in Sarawak.

The diaspora embraces a plurality of faiths, including Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism and Christianity, with a small percentage of the Sarawakian-Chinese having converted to Islam.

These traditional Chinese belief systems embrace the practice of ancestor worship, an essential component for encouraging filial piety and the maintenance and renewal of extended family relationships (Wee and Davies, 1999). As for education, adopted religions are influential for creating sub-cultures of identity that are also associated to social class. Notably a conversion to Christianity is most prominent amongst many of the English-educated Sarawakian-Chinese, leading them to being labelled as ‘westernised’ and ‘de-cultured’ by other members of the diaspora (DeBernardi, 2001, Meewald, 2002). The effects of these differing world-views, values and experiences associated with religion and education has been to create a path of cultural evolution towards sub-identities.

Despite there are differences in religious and educational experiences, Chinese culture emphasises China as the ‘*Zhunguo*’, the ‘central kingdom’ of civilisation and cultural authenticity (Braziel and Mannur, 2003; Parker, 1995; Tu, 1994). Closely tied to the paradigm of the homeland representing the roots of civilisation and authenticity is the discourse of ‘essentialism’, whose premise is that identity has an essence, possessing fixed cultural and historical traits pre-determined by primordial forces (Haslam, et al., 2000; Rothbart and Taylor, 1992). According to essentialism there exists only one form of Chinese identity based upon a tradition of shared physiological, historical and cultural characteristics. These include: a genetic inheritance traceable to the Yellow Emperor; an ability to fluently converse in Mandarin as part of the Chinese linguistic world; the observation of a cultural code of ethics; and an orientation to the homeland as the mother country (Tu, 1991).

Morley and Robins (1995, p.8) argue that an over-emphasis on the homeland as the point of reference for identity construction promotes ‘the absolutism of the pure’ and several scholars have de-emphasied this homeland orientation (Clifford, 1997; Falzon, 2003). An alternative perspective to Chinese identity is located within the framework of anti-essentialism, which recognises that identity is continually being reconstructed in response to global forces (Chambers, 1994; Tan, 2004). This perspective places an emphasis on the significance of differing contexts and varied situations in articulating identity (Barth, 1969 Eriksen, 1991), leading to a plurality of identities, including hybridity. The trend toward hybridity is typically reinforced through successive generations of diaspora resulting in identity being tied to ‘places’ rather than a ‘place’ (Featherstone, 1996; Friedman, 1999; Lowe, 1991).

3. Tourism and Identity

Whilst practices of education, religion and language are acknowledged determinants of diasporas' identities, the relationship of tourism to hybridity and identity formation is comparatively marginalised in the existing literature (Coles and Timothy, 2004). A key theme of the limited number of studies into the motivations of visits to the ancestral homeland is a search for identity re-affirmation and a connection with one's cultural roots, a quest that may re-affirm a sense of belonging that may be absent in the host country (Coles and Timothy, 2004; Duval, 2003; Hall and Williams, 2002). Visits to the homeland may strengthen cultural connections with the past, a place: 'to reflect on the perennial questions of diasporic existence and the individual's relationship to place' (Kelner, 2010, p.3).

Important to the impact of return visits on the identity of diaspora is how changes that have occurred in the homeland since departure are interpreted and evaluated as Duval (2003, p.83) comments: 'the essence of measuring change and transformation is really one of comparison and identity negotiation' (2003, p.289). The outcome of self-evaluation in relation to the culture of the homeland may be disconcerting and challenging, resulting in what Coles and Timothy (2004, p.13) describe as 'troubling, disconcerting and ambiguous experiences as well as newfound ambivalences.' This process of individual re-evaluation is similarly experienced by the Chinese diaspora returning 'home', a common theme being that those born in Western countries felt themselves to have more of a Western identity than a Chinese one (Kibria, 2003; Louie, 2004). A shared sentiment was that they did not feel a sense of belonging to their homeland, rather a sense of being 'out of place' and 'out of time'. This sentiment was also expressed by the Italian diaspora of Australia returning to Italy, who found that the lifestyle had substantially changed from what they remembered resulting in a reinforced connection with their 'new' home (Thompson, 1980).

In some instances, these ambivalences of feelings and emotions are compounded by the discomfort of the reception and reaction in the ancestral homeland (Stephenson, 2002). For example, African-Americans returning to Ghana found themselves labelled as 'obruni' by the local Ghanians, meaning 'white and foreign' despite their self-perceived identity of being black (Bruner, 1996). A further irony was that while having a generic label of being 'white foreigners', they perceived themselves as being treated as a second-class foreigner relative to those of white skin colour. The interpretations of experiences of diaspora returning to their homeland are thus uncertain, ranging from a re-enforcement of association to challenging and

uncomfortable cultural interactions that may alternatively reinforce a sense of a hybrid identity, enhancing the sense of social well-being and contentment in the new country (Chetkovich, 2002; Grimes, 1979).

4. Methodology

This ethnographic study is primarily concerned with eliciting and analysing individual articulations, perceptions and experiences, to attain deeper and more nuanced understandings of the relationship between tourism and identity for the Sarawakian-Chinese diaspora. Ethnography is an effective tool to discursively analyse and diversely interpret human behaviour and social situations (Park, 2011). As the ethnographer's background and the subjects being studied are not independent of each other in the field of research (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995), the involvement and detachment of ethnographers has direct relevance to the way ethnographers construct and interpret their data. Accordingly, the principal researcher, who is Sarawakian-Chinese, explores both the identity of her people and herself within the research process. She is a third generation Sarawakian-Chinese born in Kuching, of Christian religion, fluent in English, Malay, Chinese and local dialects, and has attended Chinese-, Malay- and English-medium schools. This position of being a 'native ethnographer' enabled the principal researcher to develop an 'emic stance' in which she could become a participant herself in the research setting rather than merely remaining as an observer.

Ethnographic field research was undertaken in Sarawak and China over a period of three years that allowed for on-going analysis and reflection upon the complex social phenomena essential to an emergent inquiry. The use of ethnography in tourism research in Sarawak is innovative and this is the first study to enquire into the relationship between tourism and Sarawakian identity. The procuring of samples for ethnographic research in the Chinese community faces cultural challenges as it is necessary to observe the Chinese cultural practice of '*quanxi*' or social networking, which is reliant upon the 'drawing on connections in order to secure favours in personal relations' (Luo, 1997, p. 2). The issue of 'trust' is central to developing contacts and individuals are more likely to be receptive to people introduced through a known person (Usunier, 2005). In *quanxi* relationships the sharing of knowledge is a primary function as one is culturally obliged to disclose important information with those who are considered to be 'insiders' (Gao and Ting-Toomey, 1998).

In this case, to gain access into the community and establish wider networks it was necessary to develop and extend relationships with the principal researcher's family and friends, letting a snowballing effect occur. To ensure the appropriateness of interviewees, the following criteria were employed: i) the possession of Malaysian citizenship; ii) a family history of traceable Chinese origin; iii) being over 18 years of age; and iv) having visited China at least once. The methods for data collection were semi-structured in-depth interviews in Sarawak and participant observation with a group tour of China. After reflection on and revision of the pilot study which involved ten trusted interviewees, the main part of the fieldwork was based upon 35 semi-structured ethnographic interviews, at which point data saturation was determined to have been achieved. The respondents were diverse in terms of their ages, levels of education, religious practices and socio-economic backgrounds and the interviews were conducted in English, Malay, and Mandarin, Hokkien and Foochow, to incorporate all the Chinese-speaking groups. Participant-observation was employed with a group of Sarawakian-Chinese during an organised tour to China. The rationale for the employment of this method was to observe the experiences of the Sarawakian-Chinese whilst on vacation in their homeland and to record their reactions to cultural experiences, thereby gaining an intimate insight to their social interactions. During the tour every day conversations, casual discussions and patterns of behaviour became significant activities, which were recorded daily in a field diary.

Park (2011) emphasises that the critical focus in interpretive-based ethnography needs to be placed on the re-conceptualisation and re-embodiment of truth or reality centred upon various individual experiences and interpretations. In this research, thematic analysis is used to analyse the interpretive ethnographic data, which according to Braun and Clarke (2006, p.79) is 'a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data'. Thus, thematic analysis uncovers themes in a text and constructs a web-like network to facilitate the structuring and interpretation of these themes. The 'keyness' of a theme is not necessarily dependent on quantifiable measures but rather on whether it captures, i.e. something important in relation to the overall research question (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Themes are identified by bringing together certain components or fragments of ideas, feelings or experiences. The subsequent step required all related patterns that emerged from the data to be catalogued into key-themes, organising clusters of similar issues. For example, the issues of 'civilisation', 'history', 'culture' and 'religion' are prevalent, emerging from the respondents' accounts of their experiences of visiting China. Finally, the sub-themes are

selected based on the ideas that emerged from the data to enhance the meaning and significance of the sub-themes, for example, how the theme of ‘civilisation’ is enhanced by the ideas of being modern or traditional.

5. Results

The results are structured upon the key emergent themes of the data analysis interspersed with quotes from the respondents to reflect the ‘voices’ of the researched. Conforming to the norms of social science research ethics, all the cited names of the respondents are pseudonyms. Whilst the use of the vernacular in some narratives may be potentially offensive to Chinese readers, the relaying of ‘folk terminologies’ and ‘cultural vocabularies’ is believed to be an essential practice in the presentation of an ethnographic text (Atkinson, 1990, p. 168). The central themes to emerge from the data analysis are:

5.1 Chinese Civilisation and History: ‘We are Chinese’

All the respondents perceived their association with the Chinese ‘civilisation’ and ‘history’ to be significant in their experiences of visiting China, often expressing their pride in being Chinese, as alongside its rich ancient history China had now achieved an advanced stage of economic development, as emphasised in the following statements:

I have been to Beijing twice. I noticed there were more Mercedes Benz cars on the road and high-rise buildings in my second trip. This is truly a sign of development and progression. I am very proud to be Chinese because what you see in China, you know ‘we’ are progressing fast. We are a civilised race. [Dina, 69 year old]

They have more cars on the road compared to my last visit. I used to see thousands of people on the bicycles. It’s very different now. Things have changed and developed, which shows ‘we’ are doing well. You don’t see other nations progressing in [*sic*] this momentum like the Chinese. [Peter, 70 year old]

The symbolism of visual interpretation is important in image construction of economic progress, especially the references to luxury cars and high-rise buildings. In the recognition of this development an association is made to the capability of the Chinese race, using the

pronoun 'we' to signify a sense of belonging. China's economic development thus becomes a sign of how *all* the Chinese have progressed, including the Sarawakian-Chinese. Whilst closely associating themselves to China's recent economic development, they also identify strongly to China's five-thousand year history, for example:

I am very proud of being Chinese. We should all be proud because we have a five thousand year of (*sic*) history. Although the Chinese came to Malaysia in the 19th century, so (*sic*) it is really a short history. I like to think we have a five thousand years of history. [Peter, 70 year old]

The emphasis on the five thousand year history was accentuated by the tour guide during the tours of historic monuments and cultural sites. Whilst historical interpretation became instrumental to the respondents' understanding of where they came from and who they are, its glorification simultaneously underlined the relative insignificance of the short history of the Chinese diaspora in Sarawak. In comparison to a rich narrative of five thousand years, two centuries of Chinese history in Sarawak was deemed to be 'less impressive' and therefore 'less significant' in informing Sarawakian-Chinese identity. The effect of visiting China on identity was thus to link it to a five thousand year evolution that differentiated it from the relatively curtailed history of the Chinese diaspora in Sarawak. This finding reinforces the work of Parker (1995) who claims that the Chinese diaspora's association with the long history of China supported a strong sense of ethnic identity in communities across the world.

5.2 Chinese Religion: 'We are (not that) Chinese'

Experiencing and witnessing religious practices in China proved to be important for the construction and reconstruction of identity. The predominance of Buddhist religious practices led to a much closer association for Sarawakian-Chinese Buddhists to a Chinese culture than for the Sarawakian-Chinese Christians. This was enhanced by the ability of Buddhists to be able to participate in the associated rituals and practices, including those of ancestor worship, e.g. burning of incense and giving offerings. For the Sarawakian-Chinese Buddhists, these practices were held as important signs of filial piety towards their ancestors, helping to ensure that family relationships are regularly observed, renewed and affirmed as evidenced in the following statement from Duke (45 year old):

I went to my village several years ago and upon arrival we were taken to the cemetery where our ancestors were buried. We paid our respect there and we

also did at the shrine built in the house. It is about giving respect and honouring your ancestors. The ritual is passed through generations so when I die, my children would do the same.

For the Christians, the experience of ancestor worship was awkward and unfamiliar, typically involving the burning of incense which is contrary to the interpretation of Christianity practiced in Sarawak. Religious differences to family worship also resulted in cultural and family misunderstandings for Sarawakian-Chinese Christians; notably in situations where the extended family members in China were Buddhist. There was an expectation by the extended family that when visiting their ancestral village, the respondents would show their 'respect' to their ancestors according to Buddhist ritual, as Dina (69 year old) recounts:

Our relatives took us to the village. We were shown the family shrine but we didn't burn any incense because we are Christians. It was uncomfortable because they think you don't respect the ancestors anymore and you are turning your back on your own.

Whilst religious conversion has created the potential for cultural misunderstandings when visiting the villages, this sense of awkwardness was also witnessed in cities when visits to Chinese temples were a part of the tour itinerary. At the temples, those who were Buddhists would engage in prayer and worship, while non-Buddhists remained outside. The Sarawakian-Chinese Christians' sense of detachment suggests that they realised the Chinese traditions of visiting temples was a part of a religious identity they no longer shared. Consequently, they identified themselves as being 'not that' Chinese to separate themselves from the Chinese in China. As they did not see any congruence between their faith and Chinese heritage, they expressed little interest in visiting religious sites whilst in China.

5.3 Chinese culture: 'We are 'more' or 'less' Chinese'

Of particular interest to the interviewees were the cultural practices of the Chinese when contrasted with those in Sarawak. Two key aspects of these differences related to the practice of filial piety and the authenticity of the culture in China. There was a shared perception of the Chinese being more family-oriented and respectful of filial piety than the Sarawakian-Chinese, emphasised by the willingness of children to have their parents live with them in old age:

I never saw an old folks home [nursing homes] while I was in China. The younger generations looked after their elderly parents. I saw sons carrying their parents on their back from the top floor to the ground floor every day. They left their parents on the ground floor so the parents could spend their days with other neighbours. This is the type of devotion I am talking about. Only Chinese culture shows this kind of devotion to their parents. ‘Our’ young generation have lots to learn about this Chinese culture [Solomon, 57 year old].

The explicit reference to the younger generation in Sarawak learning from cultural practices in China reinforces the concept of ‘*Zhunguo*’ and its importance as a reference point. Alongside filial piety, many of the Sarawakian-Chinese also perceived Chinese cultural practices to be more authentic than the ‘diluted’ ones in Sarawak. Subsequently, visiting China was held as an opportunity for the respondents to experience authenticity, as emphasised by David (46 year old):

Being Chinese means my parents are Chinese and my ancestors came from China. I attended Chinese-medium schools so I am fluent in Mandarin. After visiting China, I do feel perhaps I am not as Chinese as they are but compared to some of my colleagues who are English-educated, I am more Chinese. Our Chinese culture in Malaysia is influenced by the local cultures and we are also more westernised.

Alongside illustrating the comparison of indigenous Chinese culture with the one of Sarawak, the quote emphasises a gradation of Chineseness within the Sarawakian-Chinese community and how the medium of education and language fluency influences identity. Whilst for some of the respondents visiting China re-enforced their sense of Chineseness, there were also those who felt ‘less’ Chinese because they could not identify with the cultural practices and rituals, resulting in attempts to re-define their ‘Chineseness’. This trait was particularly evident amongst those who belonged to the English-educated third generation and who struggled with their Mandarin as Jane (33 year old) explains:

I struggled when I was in China. I can’t read but I can speak a little Mandarin. I don’t understand them at all. Something looked familiar like some of the Chinese architectures and looking at their traditions, etc. But I just felt they were too Chinese for me. I am happy to be a different sort of Chinese.

The extent of the re-definition of one's identity was influenced by the perceived degree of difference to mainstream Chinese culture. The greater the perceived differences, the more the questioning of self-identity:

When I visited my relatives in China, I could tell I was very different from my cousins. I was influenced by western thinking and western education. They were mocking me because they felt I didn't know my Mandarin but knowing the English language is so much better. I thought they were backward and poor. They were eyeing my possessions so I guess I was in a better position than them. They were very impressed with us because we were able to communicate in English fluently [Amanda, 36 year old].

A common trend of re-identification was as a 'Westernised-Chinese', which granted a superior status based upon living in a developed country and fluency in English. A possible explanation for this perceived superiority that passes beyond purely an association with the material benefits derived from being a citizen of a developed country is the demonstration effect of the British during the colonisation of Sarawak. In his analysis of the processes of colonialism, Sarup (1996) observes that the colonised were typically portrayed as barbaric in nature and a positive association was made with them adopting the behaviour and practices of the coloniser, a process that was reinforced through the colonial education system. Progressively, the colonised hybridise the identity of the colonisers, regarding those who retain their own original culture as being 'barbaric', 'old-fashioned', 'uncivilised' and 'uncultured' (ibid.).

5.4 Chinese Homeland: 'This is not our home'

An integral component of identity formation is identified as the notion of '*jia*' or 'home'. Many of the Sarawakian-Chinese referred to their journey to China as '*hui*' or 'return', including the second and third generations who were not born in China. Traditionally the term '*hui*' would signify the final journey back to the place of origin to re-settle there but it is now commonly used to signify any journey to China in the context of the 'homeland'. However, a significant differentiation was made between 'homeland' and 'home', as exemplified in the statements of Allan and Aaron:

I 'return' to China every few years to see my siblings then I come back to my home in Kuching. [Do you plan to settle in China?] No. My family is here

(Kuching) and I have no home in China. I am only a guest when I 'return' to China. My 'home' is in Kuching and my homeland is China. They are not the same. [Allan, 65 year old]

I went back to China few years ago but I didn't go back to the village. I toured the cities. [Why do you say 'went back' to China? Were you born there?] No. I was born in Kuching and China is not my home. It is my ancestral homeland. I have no intention to live there. I just use the term because everyone used it when they talked about visiting China. My grandparents and my parents use it so I suppose I also use it without wanting to settle there. [Aaron, 38 year old]

All the Sarawakian-Chinese interviewed during the research, including the first generation born in China, claimed their home to be Sarawak and not China. The notion of 'home' was constructed as a place of immediate family and familiarity, thus Sarawak was home and China was held to be a temporary place for visits. The identification of Sarawak as home was underlined by the respondents' lack of desire to return to their homeland to retire or be buried there. None of the Sarawakian-Chinese maintained a house or other type of physical residence in China, there was no symbolic place for return. Another shared sentiment was that it would be difficult to settle in China because of cultural differences. Following their visits to China many of the respondents expressed a feeling of being a foreigner or 'outsider' in the homeland:

Home is definitely here in Kuching. Even though I do like China, I won't live there. I support China whenever China played any match against other countries including Malaysia... My home is still here in Kuching because my children and grandchildren are here. [Joyce, 61 year old]

When I was in China, my relatives treated me like their guest. Although they tried to make me feel welcome, it is still not home. I cannot behave the same way like I behave if I were back home. I only visit China for a short time then I go home. [Harry, 55 year old]

6. Discussion

For the Sarawakian-Chinese, the homeland remains a significant place that informs and communicates the identity of the diaspora, reinforcing an association with both the Chinese identity and the Sarawakian one in different contexts. Whilst the influence of the 'foreign'

Sarawakian culture has been significant in shaping the identity of the Sarawakian-Chinese, the physical separation from China has reinforced their hybridity. This disconnection with China was heightened by the 'Closed Door' policy that severed physical ties between the homeland and the Sarawakian-Chinese encouraging the emergence of a 'localised and personalised' Chinese consciousness specific to the Sarawak community.

This sense of being different to the Chinese of the homeland is reinforced through visits to China, where the cultural differences between the Sarawakian-Chinese and local people are observable, resulting in a sense of 'othering'. Whilst *Zhunguo* retains its cultural inheritance of perceived authenticity, the Sarawakian-Chinese diaspora do not actualise or reconstruct a 'myth of return'. Instead, tourism plays a critical role in reaffirming a 'reality of return' through which their identity becomes contested, negotiated and hybridised, a finding common to other studies of diasporas return visits to their ancestral homeland (see Kibria, 2003; Louie, 2004; Stephenson, 2002). For the English-educated Sarawakian-Chinese, their visits to China re-enforced their identity as being 'superior' to those who were perceived to be 'more' Chinese than they were, supporting the observation of Sakai (1989) that Western educated ethnic minorities adopt a Western discourse in the way they experience 'others'. The influences of education, alongside religion, language ability, and the effects of colonisation are all important forces in shaping the hybridised identity of the Sarawakian-Chinese.

The experiences of the Sarawakian-Chinese in redefining their own ways of being Chinese support Ang's (1998) conclusions that the Chinese diaspora has constructed new ways of living in response to local circumstances. The heterogeneity displayed by the Sarawakian-Chinese is also consistent with Geertz's (1988) concept of hybridity and Bhabha's (1990) 'third space', i.e. the creation of a site where an individual's ambiguity, complexity and hybridity can be housed. Visits to China facilitate the creation of this 'third space' within which the Sarawakian-Chinese can both recognise and question their associations with China. In this space the Sarawakian-Chinese can sometimes be a part of a collective identity of being 'Chinese', or associate with a more hybrid identity of being 'more or less Chinese' or 'not that Chinese', according to context. For example, they may be part of a collective identity associated with a rich history and 'progressive' race but feel detached from certain religious heritage or cultural practices.

For members of the first generation who were born in China their connections to the homeland are rooted in formative childhood and adolescent experiences. They display a higher degree of emotional attachment and obligation towards the cultural practices of the places they come from than do successive generations. This is typically expressed through emphasising the renewing of familial connections with their relatives in China by visiting them. This practice is similar to many other diasporic communities whose primary purpose for visiting the ancestral homeland is the maintenance of family and cultural ties (see Duval, 2003; Nguyen and King, 2002; Stephenson, 2002). By contrast, the second generation's connection to their ancestral homeland is realised through cultural and historical links rather than emotional and personal ties. Whilst not as emotionally attached to their ancestral homeland as the first generation, many of the second generation regard China as the cradle of Chinese culture and identity, the *Zhunguo*. For the third generation the strength of emotional and cultural ties are substantially weaker with visits to their ancestral villages reinforcing a separate identity and China often being considered as little more than another tourist destination. Despite these generational differences in the way the experiences of homeland were interpreted there was a consensus across the generations that China is not any more their home.

7. Conclusion

The case of the Sarawakian-Chinese informs how travel to the homeland is experienced and highlights the significance of tourism for the construction and reconstruction of ethnic and cultural identity. Visits to the homeland provide the Sarawakian-Chinese with opportunities for direct observations and interactions that cannot be replicated elsewhere. It is evident that tourism plays a significant role in contributing to the reflexive negotiated (re)construction of the Sarawakian-Chinese identity, particularly in relation to (re)affirming new and hybrid diasporic identities outside the homeland, as visitors experience the ambivalence of being simultaneously insiders and outsiders in their homeland.

The research results also emphasise that a critical assessment of diasporic identity can be enhanced through systematically examining the ambivalent and contentious relationship to the homeland experienced through travelling. It is evident that visiting China has equally complex and varied effects on the identity of the Sarawakian-Chinese, influenced by the heterogeneous character of the community, the varied existing identities of individuals and differences in interpretation of their experiences whilst there. Importantly, different

educational, religious and generational background of the diaspora shapes varying levels of diasporic belonging to homeland. Visits to China become a journey of reaffirming the meaning of 'homeland', a symbolic place of past associations and 'home', a physical place of present life. Consequently, travelling to ancestral homeland encourages the Sarawakian-Chinese to redefine and re-authenticate their sense of Chineseness by way of encountering both certainties and ambiguities of diasporic identities and identifications.

It is revealed that the existing identities of diaspora shaped by such factors as education, religion and generation play a critical role in the varied, divergent and personal articulations of their experiences in tourism and their implications in repositioning the discursive relationship between homeland and home. However, it would be epistemologically problematic to claim that the case of the Sarawak represents the whole spectrum of diasporic identities and tourism experiences. Future research possibilities will therefore arise from a need to systematically evaluate the role of the existing identities in other diasporas' tourism experiences. It would also be insightful to examine ways in which previously held identifications of homeland are sustained, contested and (re)negotiated during the travelling experiences of diasporic communities in future studies. Furthermore, focus group discussions including the members of different generation before and after visits to homeland would be pertinent in provoking varying elaborations and different evaluations of each generation in the complex and intricate dynamics between diasporic identities and their experience of tourism.

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