

A Family Affair: Migration, Dispersal and the Emergent Identity of the Chinese Cosmopolitan

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Migration often disperses family members, thus massively ‘manufacturing’ a familial form often viewed by family specialists as pathological. This view is especially common among those who take it for granted that the family as a unit must be based on family members being physically together—in order to articulate their family life *in one physical place*, under the same roof (Cheal 1993; Bernades 1993). To the practitioner in marital counselling, family therapy, social work, psychotherapy, and psychoanalysis, as well as to those providing pastoral care through various religious institutions or the mass media, family dispersal is usually evidence of family disorganization, and needs to be corrected.

Yet, when one looks beyond these narrow concerns and scrutinizes the classical and contemporary migration literature with special reference to the *actual* processual workings of the family, one notices that family dispersal often, if not always, coexists with migration; there is evidence of family dispersal having been accepted, anticipated, and seized upon as a rational strategy to optimize the benefits of migration while minimizing its risks and costs. Stark’s (1995) portfolio investment theory is among several attempts (see Fawcett 1989; DeJong et al. 1986; Perez 1986) to place the family at the heart of the migration decision—to place analyses of migration within the context of the family.

Stark (1995, p. 103) argues that when family members migrate from a rural to an urban area, usually as the result of a collective decision, the family is ‘simultaneously sampling from a number of separate markets (that is, investing in one without completely liquidating and shifting holdings from another), and sharing both costs (e.g., financing the move) and rewards (e.g. through remittances), and so forth’. Families disperse their labour resources over geographically scattered and qualitatively different markets in order to both reduce risks and pool and share their incomes. Support, in the form of remittances, flows to that sector of the family that stays home and deals with, say, crop failure; but remittances can also go to the urban migrant during times of economic recession. All this, of course, is contingent upon the migrant

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(the son or daughter)¹ and the family (represented by the father) entering into a co-insurance contract, a form of diversified portfolio investment, in which the command of the family over the migrant is secure, if not guaranteed. As such, family dispersal is not simply a ‘consequence’ of migration; on the contrary, the acceptance, anticipation, and adoption of family dispersal as strategy releases, sets in motion, and precedes the very act of migration in the first place.

Of course, family dispersal as migration strategy is not without its costs, strains, and stresses; the family sociologist is thus by necessity as interested in its problematic character as in its attendant coping strategies (Chan 1994). Yet, as this chapter argues, the scattering of family in a duality or, increasingly, a plurality of geographic places within a new, enabling global environment provides one crucial context within which a *Chinese cosmopolitan* identity emerges and is articulated. Other relevant contexts include the development of a system of intimately intertwined world economies with multidirectional flows of trade and investment; the emergence of a Chinese diasporic economy with its ethnically structured networks of nodes and poles (see Lever-Tracy and Ip 1996); and modern technological advances in communications and transport that facilitate the transmission of popular culture (Cohen 1994). Together, these conflicts and conditions further enhance the effectiveness and viability of familial dispersal as an intermediary strategy of transnational migration and, in turn, of Chinese cosmopolitanism. Correspondingly, the phenomenology and anthropology of this new, emergent Chinese identity necessitates a re-think of such issues as traditional versus modern Chinese culture; culture loss versus culture gain; and assimilation versus the persistence of ethnic

consciousness. Speaking sociologically and historically, the contemporary ‘astronaut families’ (a term I will explicate later in the chapter) of Hong Kong are best seen as a *variant, not deviant*, family form—or, simply, as a migration strategy, a positive act, long noted in the migratory history of mankind, although they are now much more mobile, resource-rich, and resilient than their nineteenth-century predecessors. As a group or class, the resulting diaspora is constituted by what are variously called the ‘transilients’ (Richmond 1995), the new overseas Chinese (Skeldon 1994a), or the new middle-class Chinese (Li 1983).

Migration and Family Dispersal in History

As early as the beginning of the nineteenth century, there was massive movement across the Atlantic of male migrants from old Europe—who left their spouses, children, and extended families behind—into the brave new world of America to seek better opportunities and new fortunes. This migratory movement intensified in 1845–1850, then again in 1880 and onwards, and captured the attention of sociologists decades later. Thomas and Znaniecki’s (1918–1920a, b) *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, partly based on content analysis of letters exchanged between husbands and wives and between family members across the Atlantic, is a classic in the genre of migration studies. Handlin’s (1953) *The Uprooted* is another. In these two texts, marital separation and family dispersal as forms of social disorganization and alienation were salient themes. As a social phenomenon, the dispersal of families in disparate geographic places as a result of migration was long noted in the migration literature, but by and large it was looked upon negatively, as an undesirable consequence.

China in the nineteenth century was a distressed society. Among the push factors associated with the massive emigration of the Chinese, the demographic and economic ones were the most prominent: a failing economy, tenant exploitation by landlords, overpopulation, shortage of

¹ In this chapter, I use ‘he’ most of the time in reference to the migrant or immigrant, partly because international migration of the Chinese in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was, of necessity, almost wholly a male phenomenon. I acknowledge the recent appearance of women as members of the *new* overseas Chinese. I avoid the usage of ‘he or she’ because I consider it a cumbersome expression that achieves very little gender neutrality.

basic food staples, inflation, gross social insecurity, natural calamities, and civil wars. News and rumours about the proliferation of opportunities in America had also begun to seize the imagination of many potential Chinese emigrants. The discovery of gold at John Sutter's Mill along the Sacramento River in 1848 set into place a tumultuous 'pull' that induced a worldwide migratory movement. Between 1848 and 1852, there was an influx of up to 25,000 male migrants from China's Pearl River delta region into the west coast of the United States and, later in 1858, into Canada's Fraser River Valley—migratory men crossed the Pacific to partake in the so-called Gold Fever, and later to work as manual labourers, building roads and railways or working in various other burgeoning industries (Chan 1991).² Lacking passage money and uncertain about their own fortune in America, the migrants left their wives and children (when they had any) behind in the Chinese villages. The more fortunate ones managed to make occasional trips back home, staying in China only long enough (typically one to two years or only months) to father children and renew kin ties, while others continued to send home letters (most of which they did not write themselves

because of their illiteracy) with remittances to keep their family and marital ties alive. Letter writing and sending remittances home³ were gestures of family solidarity, a means of ensuring one's continued role and integration into the patrilineal family and kin network, a way of sharing rewards with others to ensure the collective well-being of the family. Most of the time, the husband-fathers played out their roles and discharged their responsibilities, however inadequately, *at a distance*. They eked out their migrant labourers' existence in a 'male bachelor society', often finding themselves vulnerable to the so-called ethnic vices (Chan 1991)—gambling, opium addiction, visiting prostitutes, and so on—long noted in the social science as well as literary texts dealing with overseas Chinese males.

Throughout the early 1900s, Chinese migrants in the United States and Canada were often unfairly caricatured and stereotyped in the mass media, accused of 'vices' that emerged precisely because they were denied the rights to bring over their women and families. The sexual orientation and behaviour of the Chinese male migrant was often portrayed by the media in extremes; the Chinese male was either sexless or oversexed, and he was viewed as abnormal or pathological. The myriad of clan- and occupation-related associations in the Chinatown area acted as 'surrogate' or substitute families for many migrant persons, whose sexual relief continued to be found among non-Chinese prostitutes elsewhere.

On 6 May 1882, US President Chester A. Arthur signed into law the Exclusion Act—the first of what was to become a series of acts and policies aimed at excluding Chinese from American immigration. The Act prohibited the importation of Chinese skilled and unskilled labour into the United States and was not repealed until 1943, 61 years later. In Canada, the Chinese Immigration Act of 1885 levied a head tax of \$50 on almost every Chinese upon entry into the host country; this was increased to \$100 in 1900 and

²In this chapter, I focus on the historical and contemporary experiences of the Chinese migrants and immigrants to Canada and the United States for three reasons. First, I am most familiar with these two experiences, having studied them and lived in Canada for close to two decades. Second, the Chinese experiences in Canada and the United States have close chronological and political parallels. In fact, they are best seen as two closely related histories—a scholarly analysis of which is yet to be attempted. Third, the bulk of the theoretical and empirical literature on the experience of the ethnic Chinese overseas I draw upon for this chapter is Canadian- and American-based. I am, of course, fully aware of the limits of generalizability of my analyses to ethnic Chinese elsewhere. For me, the degree of fit between theory, experience, and data is considerable and attractive. The 'astronaut families' of Hong Kong were chosen as a *case* illustrative of modern-day dispersed families among the ethnic Chinese overseas. Many such families are made up of the resource-rich, hypermobile 'transilients' I attempt to delineate in this chapter. Not at all coincidentally, Canada, the United States, and Australia are their favourite countries of adoption. Hong Kong has lately been under the watchful eye of the world. The sheer magnitude of its emigration compels me to examine the 'astronaut families' thus created.

³These remittances were usually sent through the occasional returning migrants or through one of the many brokering agencies set up by Chinese merchants or family and clan associations in Chinatown districts.

\$500 in 1903, culminating in the implementation of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1923, which ‘fortified’ the male bachelor society earlier immigration had created while further institutionalizing marital separation and family dispersal among the Chinese. What had started out as a partly purposive and partly involuntary migration strategy soon became an institutionally imposed course of action. The Canadian Chinese Immigration Act was not repealed until 1947, at which point many Chinese families were reunited and many wives were brought into Canada, often after decades of marital separation. Wives had to look after husbands who were aging and, often, also frail, weak, and sick, if not dying (Chan 1991).

The Family and Its Role in Migration

The social science literature on migration in general has long noted, though not often explicitly enough, that both migration and, invariably, the explicit policies of the host governments and their recruiting brokers *select* young, strong, able-bodied males and launch them on long-distance voyages. The demand in a rapidly developing host society is for foreign migrants to provide a constant supply of dependable cheap labour. Looked at micro-sociologically, the family selects strong, able-bodied males as ‘target migrants’ to undertake the precarious journeys of migration to further the fortunes of the family left behind, to ensure its survival and continuing well-being.

In *Stepping Out*, a study I co-authored with the Chinese business pioneers who came to Singapore in the 1920s, often penniless, having left poverty-stricken villages in Southern China, we noted the same process of migration in general, and pertaining to the family–kin group in particular. Poverty required that the process of decision-making about migration be undertaken cautiously and collectively, with the participation and consent of the elderly members of the family and kin network. Mothers and wives often played a crucial role in arranging for the passage money through loans from the larger family–kin group; as such, *women* left back home had considerable

say in who was to migrate, when, how, and to where (Chan and Chiang 1994). The group deliberated, selected the ‘target migrants’, launching them on a sojourn overseas, and forced the paradox of separating and dispersing the family in order to ensure its continuity, prosperity, and the hoped-for eventual re-unification. Some member of the family, whether the husband or the male child, had to be sent away to make good for both himself and the family, to keep the functionally deficient family from falling further apart. The family’s role must be foregrounded in the migration process. In a sense, the extended family collects and releases the migration inertia energy; the elders borrow money from kin, neighbours, friends, and acquaintances to pay for passage, make transactions with migration brokering agencies stationed in China, locate and utilize sources of contact in targeted countries of destination. The family plans and plays an instrumental role in each and every stage of decision-making before, during, and after the departure of the target migrant. Ultimately, while it is the lone individual who moves, physically speaking, it is the family that is active, that constitutes, articulates, negotiates both with the micro and domestic groups and with the macro, socio-economic, and political forces in both country of departure and country of arrival. Migration is a family affair, a business of the family, too important to be left to the individual himself.

The more contemporary migration literature has not been negligent in foregrounding the saliency of the family in terms of its role in the internal as well as external dynamics of the migration process. In her review, Boyd (1989) characterizes the family, understood in its broadest sense as a set of personal networks or linkages, as an essential strategic constituent element of the international migration system (Fawcett 1989; Fawcett and Arnold 1987; DeJong et al. 1986; Perez 1986). Methodologically and substantively speaking, the family mediates or ‘intervenes’ between individual migrants (as actors) and larger, structural, transnational forces (to which the actors are subjected); it also connects the personal-individual, the ‘micro’, with the structural, ‘macro’, and

global levels of analyses; properly viewed, *the family also increases the explanatory power of theories about the motivation to migrate*. Finally, the family connects the forces responsible for migration in countries of departure and arrival. In addition, once the dispersed family as a system of networks and linkages is in place globally and becomes fully operational, subsequent flows of migrants are set in motion to join the pioneers or 'family predecessors' because the opportunity structure and all the other necessary supportive and facilitative infrastructures are by now in place: hence the unfolding of 'chain migration'. As Fawcett puts it, 'family relationships have an *enduring* impact on migrants. Policies, rules and norms may change, but obligations among family members are of *an abiding nature*' (1989, p.678).

The foregrounding of the family points to the paradox underpinning the 'individual' migrant's situation. For the Chinese individuals involved, migration continues to be family-initiated and family-sponsored, and this fact has deep, far-reaching psychological and moral consequences for the individual. He must make good, not just for himself, but for the family. He owes it to the family to make it in the new world. He has an existential burden in that the family is perpetually 'on his back': to escape entirely (read, psychologically) from the influence of the ancestors' shadow is a virtual impossibility. The 'family' inside him controls him from within. The lone migrant is seemingly set free to go off home ground, into the air, like a kite—but not without the family pulling the string, if necessary, back to the hearth, though not always successfully.⁴ The migrant thus experiences the family in his everyday sojourning life as a real factor, sometimes seeing it as a liability, a constraint, other times as a source of strength and enablement. The destinies of the family and the individual are intertwined.

Family, Migrant Community, and Cultural Change

Much of the literature on non-Chinese migration, as well as the 'intuition' of many westerners, is that assimilation follows migration because distance from the family and homeland is a form of 'groundlessness', an absence of transition (Chan and Tong 1993). The physical 'groundedness' in homeland or village is compensated for by other means in Chinese migration: the Confucian and patrilineal family ethos, coupled with the concentration of Chinese immigrants themselves into the peculiar ghettos known as Chinatowns, transforms and reinforces tradition. The lone migrant is a physical carrier of traditions and culture, while the family back in the homeland acts as an origin, a source of cultural transmission, and an agent of continuity. Being held in the family grid, the migrant is put in close contact with traditional Chinese cultural values: filial piety, obligations and duties to the family, hard work, frugality, and so on. Over time, the migrants, paradoxically, become 'enthusiastic proponents of traditional values' (Watson 1975, p. 215), often to a greater degree than when they left. As a result of the 'workings' of the family, the traditional culture is maintained and reproduced *within* the person of the migrant. The sociologist of Chinese migration rarely loses sight of the fact that the migrant as individual, though now away from the homeland, operates within a Chinatown, a migrant community which has its own institutional structure made up of a myriad of immigrant associations and organizations that are, in the case of the Chinese overseas, based on family/kin ties, common surname, and origin-locality. Home village, ancestral tomb, and common name are the stuff of the socio-cultural 'glue'. While reproducing traditional culture, such immigrant associations often function as 'surrogate' or 'substitute' families. They nurture and protect, but also apply sanctions on individual migrants, holding them in check, policing them, so to speak. The migrant communities are thus best seen as a sociological entity in a particular physical and cultural space.

⁴ I owe the analogy of the kite to a discussion with Professor Taban Lo Liyong on 27 May 1994, at National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, Japan.

They evolve and develop for themselves a blend of migrant ethos and morals and insist that the migrants abide by them or run the risk of being ostracized or disowned by the only community they can lay any claim to in a foreign land. The behaviour of the lone migrant is held in check both by a remote family, or the 'family idea', and by the immigrant associations' disciplinary influence. The migrant keeps his moral eye, his gaze, on others who share his values. As a result, he necessarily also keeps his gaze on himself—thus, the migrants collectively evolve a 'moral community'. The 'associational life' (Rex 1987; Rex and Josephides 1987) of individual migrants thus has its conservative, self-reinforcing, self-maintaining side.

The resulting social artefact is neither a migrant culture retrieved and transplanted from the past, from homeland, *in toto*, in its purest, essentialist form, nor a wholesale embrace and internalization of the host culture, since migrants' integration into the mainstream societal institutions is not desired by the natives—in fact, this integration is often systematically curtailed or blocked because of prejudice and discrimination. Ideologically speaking, two diametrically opposing 'identity options' (Rex 1987; Rex and Josephides 1987) are *on offer* to the migrant: assimilation or 'voluntary' confinement to an ethnic/cultural enclave (Wang 1993). Yet another option, increasingly available and chosen by many modern-day migrants, is that of a gradual combination of the two previously mutually exclusive options. The immigrant initially finds himself 'in the cracks' of a pull from the traditional culture and a push toward the mainstream local culture. Existentially, in his everyday life, he experiences the inevitable tension intrinsic to his dual existence. He is the marginal man (Park 1928) *par excellence*. But in the end, his marginality to two ways of being is no longer an either/or; it metamorphoses, producing a new hybridity, an integrated multiplicity. As a result of ethnic revival, through ethnicization and re-sinification, or through a personal or third-generation 'loopback' into tradition and heritage (Nagata 1985; Ang 1993), the culture of the past is to some extent retrieved, but also imagined,

idealized, romanticized, purified (Turner 1987; Lowenthal 1985; Chase and Shaw 1989); it is not a past duplicated *in toto*, in its completeness or essence. *The observed traditional cultural values that are enacted by the migrant are thus better seen as 'adaptive' or 'reactive' values than as transplanted, orthodox, authentic values* (Light 1980). The resultant past, thus transformed, can be more past than the past. This is why many a keen anthropological observer finds cultural behaviours in the immigrant community long lost or transformed in the homeland but, ironically, maintained, 're-antiquated', or re-packaged in their purest, 'most ancient' ways, paradoxically, in a new home.

Nagata (1985) reports in her study of Indonesian Chinese immigrants in Toronto, Canada, that immigrants typically change their names back to the Chinese originals, enrol in Chinese language classes for the first time, and show renewed interest in Chinese issues (to the consternation of the Indonesian Consul there). Others begin to celebrate Chinese festivals, observe customs, or practice rituals they have formerly (before migration) neglected, ignored, or taken for granted. Suddenly, Chinese New Year, Mid-Autumn Festival, Hungry Ghost Festival, and so forth are reinvented and take on added significance.⁵

Typically, the migrant is brusquely thrown upon the harsh, always demanding present. His task is to transform himself, to acculturate; he must earn his hybridity, multiplicity, heterogeneity, and multi-dimensionality (Lowe 1991). Much is lost, much is gained. The immigrant is an emergent man, tentatively—but necessarily—a cul-

⁵Race riots punctuate the history of Indonesia, the latest as recent as May 1998. In 1965, Chinese stores were looted; 'killing communists' was often synonymous with killing Chinese. The Chinese were forced to send their children to Indonesian-language schools, culminating in the closure of all Chinese-medium schools in 1966. Today there are no Chinese schools in Indonesia. Ill feeling and distrust continue to exist between the Chinese and the Indonesians. In May 1998, Chinese were the targets of organized destructive attacks: their shops and homes were looted and burned down; many Chinese were injured or killed, and many Chinese women were raped. It was reported that about 100,000 Chinese had fled the country.

tural relativist, a pluralist. The immigrant community is an emergent community. The immigrant culture is an emergent culture. It incorporates into its orbit the triangle of China (tradition), the host society (present), and the world Chinese diaspora (future) as one colossal imagined community. The sociologist and anthropologist must therefore look at the problematic of cultural continuity and change in various overseas Chinese communities from this standpoint.

The Hong Kong 'Astronaut Families'

By 1992, five years before the 1997 return of Hong Kong to China, official Hong Kong government estimates of emigration put the number of those leaving Hong Kong at over 66,000 per annum, the highest since it reached 20,000 in the early 1980s (Skeldon 1994b). Their principal destination countries were Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States. These Hong Kong emigrants are among the world's middle-class international migrants—the elite (Wong 1992), the 'new middle class' (Li 1983), and the 'new' Chinese overseas (Skeldon 1994c). As a class of new actors on the international stage of migration, they set themselves apart from the unskilled, male labour migrants of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Well educated, highly trained with portable skills, and probably classified everywhere in the world as 'professional, technical, administrative, and managerial personnel' well versed in the art of dealing with government bureaucrats as well as in exploiting personal relations, they have been seeking entry en masse into the West. Their requests are often granted under increasingly popular programs for business immigrants and economic investors. They bring significant human capital and ethnic as well as class resources to their countries of destination.

'Astronaut families' is a term coined by the Hong Kong mass media to refer to contemporary middle-class dispersed nuclear families. They usually begin with one spouse (usually, though not always, the wife) and children settling in a host country, while another spouse (usually,

though not always, the husband) continues with his or her business or job in Hong Kong, periodically shuttling between the two places, making short stays in the adopted country to fulfil minimum immigration requirements and to maintain the solidarity of the family and the marriage. The term 'astronaut family' has a triple meaning. First, it denotes a family (or parts of it) and individuals in flight, in aerial motion, commuting, shuttling, traversing, travelling, crossing border sites; second, it signifies a family straddling two places, not in either one or the other but rather in both, in doubleness, in marginality and duality, in a 'two-legged existence', one in the country of 'exit' and 'origin', another in the country of 'entry' and 'destination'. Third, it attempts to describe the physical, psychic, and psychosocial existence of wives in families thus dispersed, in marriages thus separated. The Chinese counterpart of the English word 'astronaut' is made up of two Chinese ideographs: *tai*, referring to 'wife', and *kong*, meaning empty, lonely, solitary, hence wanting or lacking in something, unfulfilled. The term 'astronaut family' explicitly denotes the existence of an unaccompanied wife and young children.

Although a newly coined term occasioned by the mass emigration of Hongkongers, the word 'astronaut' has rather quickly found its way into the everyday vocabulary and discourse of Hong Kong as concerns migration. It is a familial and marital phenomenon linked with a host of 'social problems' or 'issues' (see Lam 1994; Skeldon 1994c). Spousal infidelity is one. Prolonged separation, distance from the ever-vigilant, normative moral constraints of family and marriage, and the new freedom of being unwatched and unattended in a not-yet-integrated immigrant community overseas challenge the ability of either spouse to confine sexuality within wedlock; the so-called emptiness of marital life and the attendant vulnerability to occasions of 'sin' (read, infidelity) applies equally to husband and wife. Extramarital affairs in the workplace and the use of prostitutes' services have never failed to capture the attention of the journalists who are accustomed to feeding a society in flux with sensational news of scandals.

Changes in parental supervision of young, growing children are another. Hong Kong migrant families typically want to avail themselves of educational opportunities in the West. Children are thus left to the care of one parent (usually the wife) in the adopted country. As a result, many ‘astronaut families’ have in fact been split into two: a female-headed, single-parent segment in one place, a lone father in another. The wives are thrown into circumstances where they are required to play substitute father and mother at the same time, or at different times, thus inevitably compounding the stress of relocation and resettlement. Lastly, Chinese often rationalize emigration to the West in terms of a parental, or paternalistic, desire to procure a better education, a better job, a better future prospect, eventually a better life, for their children, though, arguably, there is little evidence of the children having been consulted prior to such a momentous family move. Ironically, it stands to reason to suggest that some children, given a choice, may desire otherwise—to stay put. The scanty literature on second- and third-generation American-born Chinese children is beginning to serve notice that some such children are expressing feelings of ambivalence over these migration moves, while others are simply becoming resentful and angry—they are thrown into a destiny not of their own volition, forced into a resulting identity crisis that they must resolve.

The contemporary Hong Kong ‘astronaut families’ bear a certain resemblance to the dispersed Chinese families of the early 1900s in that husbands by themselves, alone, are to eke out an economic existence, though in reverse (wives and families are now at the destination, husbands back in Hong Kong). This circumstance sets in motion a host of familial and marital problems that require coping and adjustment. However, more so than their predecessors, the Hong Kong ‘astronaut families’ of today have adopted family dispersal and marital separation largely as a voluntary, anticipatory, purposive strategy to procure a better future life for all, in spite of present hardships. Family dispersal is discussed, deliberated upon, anticipated, and adopted as a migration strategy. Rationally factored into the migration calculus,

the idea of the family agreeing on a dispersal in which the wife and children move to the new country first precedes and launches migration. It is thus no longer simply a case of migration forcing family dispersal, *but also* of the family, paradoxically, anticipating a temporary rupture in togetherness to procure a desired, projected family future. As such, the dispersed migrant family is the social psychologist’s delayed gratification *par excellence*, purposive and conscious.

Envisioned in such terms, the family in its physical, tangible sense is dispersed so as to realize, to make real, ‘the family’ as idea, ideal, or project. The ideal of ‘the family’ has thus become a source of motivation and energy setting forth the family dispersal strategy. The sociologist sees family dispersal, like migration and relocation themselves, as largely a voluntary, positive act (Wickramagamage 1992): it is progressive, anticipatory, and future oriented; it is enabling.

When the husband–migrant of hypermobility is straddling places, leapfrogging geographic and political boundaries—being the ‘transilient’—he finds himself necessarily mindful of work or business opportunities wherever they are, both in Hong Kong and in the West. He might one day finally pack his bags and leave Hong Kong to reunite with his family in Canada, the United States, Australia, or wherever; not finding suitable work there, he might re-migrate back to Hong Kong, joining many, many others in ‘return migration’ (Chan 2012b; Chan and Chan 2012). Traversing these different zones of time and space, often many times over, in hypermobility, blunts and blurs the distinctions between place of ‘origin’ and ‘destination’, between ‘exit’ and ‘entry’, in his mind and in the realities of his experience. In a sense, culture becomes a portable substitute for place. Dichotomies become less sharply demarcated—his mobility orbit is thus cast in a *circulatory* international system of migration (Skeldon 1994c; Chan and Chan 2010; Chan 2011) or in what Rouse (1991) calls the ‘transnational migrant circuit’, where people, money, goods, and information circulate, while his existence is articulated in the structure of his dispersed family. The home, thus imagined, no longer takes the form of a fixed physical entity,

nor does it necessarily ground itself in a particular soil. The dispersed family, fashioning itself in a duality, or, rather (in the future, if not now), a plurality of places, provides him with a structure, form, and context to articulate his multiplicity of selves and identities, in motion, ‘in the cracks’ between psychologies, ethnicities, cultures, and civilizations, touching all. It is this motion, grounded in the phenomenology and anthropology of his migrant experience, that has given his existence a distinctive transnational, dynamic, ever-changing character—the consequent ideal for him is not one fixed, eternal, pure ethnicity but a somewhat integrated conglomerate of ethnicities that is most authentic and feels most comfortable in between boundaries, on the margins, at the peripheries. It is a hybrid identity that uses the dispersed family as an arena. Being post-modern, such a genre of Chinese ethnicity is inadvertently precarious, provisional, indeterminate, tentative (Ang 1993; Ngan and Chan 2012; Chan 2012a).

Chinese Cosmopolitanism as Emergent Chinese Identity

Wang (1991) has identified five different types of Chinese identity in terms of variant orientations of overseas Chinese to China, the various host countries in the West such as Canada and the United States, and differential meanings attached to one single Chinese word *gen* (roots) (Wang 1993). They are *yeluo guigen* (fallen leaves return to the roots, the soil), or the classic, ‘old-fashioned’ sojourner mentality; *zancao chugen* (to eliminate grass, one must pull out its roots), or total assimilation; *luodi shenggen* (settle down or ‘sink roots’ in a foreign land and accommodate to the host society), or accommodation; *xungen wenzu* (search for one’s roots and ancestors), or ethnic pride and consciousness; and *shigen lizu* (lose contact with one’s roots and ancestors), or the uprooted, the alienated, the ‘wandering intellectuals away from their roots in historic China’, in exile.

In addition to these five types of Chinese identity, the identity of the Chinese transilient,

the new Chinese overseas, the new middle class, the transnational Chinese bourgeoisie that has been characterized thus far in this chapter, may well represent a sixth, new, emergent type. He has long since overcome or exorcised his desire to search for and sink his roots back in ancestral China. He may or may not go back; he has a choice; he has always made efforts to strive for integration, *without assimilation* or acculturation, in whatever country of abode he happens to find himself; strictly speaking, he is not really experimenting with accommodation in the host society either because he cannot see himself settling down and sinking his roots in any one single place or because his consciousness is not tied to one origin, one ethnicity, but to many. Neither is he the classic, much-caricatured ‘uprooted’ migrant, sad, unhappy, spiritually dispossessed, disgruntled, alienated, disheartened with the present *and* the past because he finds both dissatisfying and unacceptable, thus suspended in the air, rootless or uprooted, unable to go home again, psychically and physically speaking.

One may call this sixth emergent type of Chinese identity *zhonggen*, or multiple rootedness or consciousness. The Chinese word *zhong* has three meanings: first, multiple, not singular; second, regenerative, as in ‘born again’; third, to treasure, to value (one’s many diverse roots). It conjures up an image of a succession of sinking roots as process and multi-stranded roots as outcome. It is akin to what Lee (1991) calls ‘Chinese cosmopolitanism’. Himself calling the term a loose epithet, Lee (1991, p. 215) further explains it as ‘one that embraces both a *fundamental intellectual commitment* to Chinese culture *and* a multicultural reciprocity, which effectively cuts across all conventional national boundaries’. It is, in other words, ‘a purposefully marginal discourse’. To a Chinese cosmopolitan, again in Lee’s words, ‘the boundaries are again not so much geographical as intellectual and psychological’ (1991, p. 219). Of course, one is aware that, in a certain discourse, roots or *gen* always means ground, earth—the antithesis of trans-locality. There is thus the potential paradox of a trans-local, indeed transoceanic, rootedness—a decidedly mixed image.

As a sixth, new, emergent type of Chinese identity, he is perhaps the first, 'old-fashioned' sojourner type deconstructed, reconstructed, and brought 'back in vogue, in a rather more respectable form' (Nagata 1985). The new cosmopolitan is not the nineteenth-century sojourner, forever yearning to return to China, to go home, in mind or in body. The new Chinese overseas *may or may not* go home, just like his Jewish contemporaries, muttering quietly and privately to themselves, 'Next year in Jerusalem, *every year*'. He is forever crossing, traversing, mixing, translating linguistically and culturally (Clifford 1993). Yet, at any one given time and place, he is also sojourning, not intent on eventually going home to China, but, rather, willing to go anywhere, everywhere, provisionally. *It is his provisionality that seems particularly salient* and needs to be foregrounded. He makes a chronicle of brief appearances in a succession of geographic places, but always on the world stage. He has a suitcase at the door, always ready to go.

Lest this be mistaken for or confused with the romantic idealist's notion of a true, ultimate cosmopolitan, internationalized man with absolutely no physical, materialist anchorage—the *wugen* (the rootless), the one who does it all *without* (*wu* in Chinese) roots, transcending it all, who may or may not empirically exist—the 'sixth' type being all too briefly sketched here is one in whom 'a certain *elemental* awareness of Chinese identity at its *most basic* seems to *persist* uninterrupted beneath the surface (emphasis added)' (Nagata 1985, p. 22). He may or may not 'spontaneously invoke a Chinese identity in context'. Or, as Ang puts it, 'sometimes it is and sometimes it is not useful to stress our Chineseness, however defined. In other words, the answer (to the question why still identify ourselves as 'overseas Chinese' at all?) is *political*' (1991, p. 14).

Of course, the emergence of this new, 'sixth' type of Chinese identity necessarily takes place, negotiates, and articulates itself within an evolving global structure, a transnational trade environment wherein economies are intricately intertwined, those involving the Chinese capitalists included. Economists and sociologists are now casting their futuristic eyes on the emergence of a Chinese diaspora economy (Lever-Tracy and

Ip 1996). As observed by Ma Mung (1993), Chinese entrepreneurs in Paris, through trade expansion and diversification and through the creation of 'upstream enterprises' that involve trade *outside* the community formerly monopolized by non-Chinese businessmen, have been articulating their business networks and economic arrangements within a larger, global diaspora economy. By expropriating 'spatial resources' in a transnational space, Chinese entrepreneurship in Paris has taken on an *extra-territorial character*. The otherwise amorphous structure of such a diaspora economy, however, is given substance by the many nodes or poles that constitute non-local networks, be they in New York, Singapore, Bangkok, Jakarta, Shanghai, Hong Kong, London, or Toronto. One may want to add that this extra-territorial business character has its personal counterpart in our sixth-type Chinese cosmopolitan.

Such a global economic system has its internal as well as its external principles of social organization. The observed gradual shift from a reliance on ethnic resources to a reliance on class resources among the *new* overseas Chinese has given this Chinese diaspora a new dimension (Chan and Ong 1995). Examples of ethnic resources, the result of internal sociocultural characteristics of an immigrant group or community, include ready access to start-up capital available at rotating credit associations within an ethnic community and a supply of cheap, dependable, loyal family, or co-ethnic labour. The more intangible ethnic resources include ethnic solidarity and in-group loyalty. Class resources are more formal in nature and have to do with educational qualifications, job training and skills, and expert knowledge of markets and industry. Class resources are the 'normal cultural and material endowment of bourgeoisies' (Light and Rosenstein 1995). On the material side, class resources include private property, human capital, and money to invest. The bourgeoisie also have their vocational culture, which includes occupationally relevant values, attitudes, knowledge, and skills acquired in the socialization process (Light and Rosenstein 1995).

Another vital source of the global system's economic energy will probably come from the much-speculated-upon emergence of a putative Chinese economic zone in Asia comprising East

and Southeast Asia. Lim (1992) has documented recent increases in trade, investment, and government economic links among the region's otherwise disparate nations, links which are often overlaid by an ethnic dimension; merchants of Southern Chinese descent, mainly Hokkien, Teochew, and Cantonese, have 'familial, clan and other ethnic links and networks which stretch across political and geographical boundaries' (Lim 1992, p. 43). One expects a freer flow of capital and credit between family, kin, and co-ethnics (Cohen 1994, p. 21); 'an intimate handshake of ethnic collectivism' is at work here. Within the Chinese diaspora, yet another principle of social organization, another source of cohesion, in addition to the now well-known familial and clan ties, is religion—important and vital, but little studied. In her analysis of religion's role among the Chinese in Southeast Asia and Canada, Nagata (1985) turns her attention to how Chinese Buddhists, Confucianists, and Christians are attempting to exert a global influence through their systems of internationally intertwined institutions.

Conclusion

Migration disperses families, splits marriages. Yet the very act of migration is often preceded by the deliberate contemplation on the part of the family and kin groups of family dispersal as a migration strategy. The family concerned must undertake a calculative process to decide who is to go, who is to stay, when, and how—a rational choice in the name of the family, of safeguarding family continuity and well-being, while simultaneously bringing maximal benefits to all individuals, who otherwise will gain less and lose more, in the long haul, when acting alone.

Although family members are physically set apart from each other, the 'family' as collectivist emotion, sentiment, idea, or ideal provides a transnational source of unity. The concept of 'the family' is *binding* upon individual family members, while also *bonding* them. There is no binding without bonding, and vice versa. A familial contract is more enduring and binding partly because it is also based on emotions, which makes

it, as a contract, unique. Understood in this sense, family functions not only as an agency of bonding, solidarity, and intimacy, but also as an apparatus of bondage, confinement, and control.

Family dispersal is arguably as old as human migration. Human beings have always been moving, or moved, but now in greater numbers and at greater speed. More resourceful, the Hong Kong 'astronaut families', when taking a *long* view, are but one example of such dispersed families worldwide, Chinese or not Chinese. Thus, any attempt to 'pathologize' family dispersal as a family form is ahistorical and short-sighted; it fails to recognize the changing, increasingly prevalent and massive realities of international human migration and their impact on family forms.

In a modern-day, circulatory international migration system underpinned by a massive number of dispersed families as strategic nodes and linkages, the 'family compass' is invariably stretched further and further so that work and business opportunities begin to multiply themselves precisely because the work field has been expanded. In such a field expanded continually, globally, a new type of Chinese identity emerges: the transilient, the cosmopolitan, who, having been thrust into and later having chosen provisionality and multiplicity as a mode of existence, is best seen as a cultural hybrid. Home does not have to be here, or there, but is, tentatively, potentially, everywhere. This so radically alters the meaning of home (and homelessness) that the search for a new vocabulary becomes a priority. Hybridity is by nature multi-stranded and heterogeneous; it does not respect the primacy of centre over periphery, origin over destination, exit over entry, or vice versa. As ideology and reality, it revitalizes and renews the ideal of cultural diversity, relativity, and pluralism.

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