

Australian-born Youth: Constructing Chineseness from Afar

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Abstract

Drawing on a doctoral research project on Australian-born Chinese (ABC) youth in a high-status school in Melbourne, this paper explores how the nation state, transnational and global imperatives mediate their ethnic and diasporic consciousness and construction of Chineseness in the context of Australia. Challenging critical thesis in diaspora studies that emphasizes historicity and Othered experiences of diasporan subjects, the findings highlight a different version of Chineseness constructed by children of the Chinese diaspora, when 'root' becomes the equivalence of 'route'. The theoretical significance lies in the argument that nation-state still plays a critical role against the transnational and global tide in the 'time-space compression' of today. National discourses of ethnicity embedded in the Australian version of multiculturalism and cohesion discourses shape ABCs' construction of their ancestral origin and their national identity. In addition, micro factors such as family orientation towards ancestry, Chinese diasporic communities and incoming ethnoscares contribute as well, if not less, to these ABCs' construct of Chineseness.

Introduction

Chinese diaspora has been widely researched in the transnational and global turn (Beal 2001; Fitzgerald 2001; Ip 2001; Louie 2004; Ong 1999; Ong and Nonini 1998; Pe-Pua et al. 1996). In the Australian context, a range of studies under the rubric of Chinese diaspora (Beal 2001; Choi 1975; Coughlan 1992; Fung and Chen 1994; Huck 1967, 1970; Hugo 2008; Inglis 1968; Marcus 1983; Ommundsen 2003; Ryan 2003; Shen 1998; Tan 2003, 2004, 2006; Wang 2000) contributes to an understanding of diasporic Chinese' experience. Generally speaking, this body of literature has provided invaluable knowledge about the established Chinese community and its function in Australia, the broad picture of the Chinese family structure, settlement patterns, socio-cultural status, and the diasporic Chinese's experience that can date back to the open-migration policy of 19th century. However, it scarcely touches the age cohort of teenage youth (with the exception of Birrell and Khoo 1995, Tsolidis 2001; Mathews 2002), although some research has focused on multi-generations of Chinese offspring (Tan 2003, 2004, 2006).

Drawing on a case study of the second- and multi-generation children of Chinese diasporas born in the mid-1990s in Australia, this paper focuses on how these youth interpret their personal identity in relation to their ancestry. Bringing in perspectives of migrant studies, ethnic/diaspora studies, this research situates in the field of Cultural Sociology of Education. It scrutinizes and problematizes the overemphasis by some critical diaspora studies scholars on historicity (Clifford 1994) and diasporas' experience of being 'the Other of the nation state' (Totolyan 1991) in shaping the Australian-born teenagers' diasporic consciousness. In particular, it probes the transnational and global possibilities that seem to reinforce a narrow version of ethnic nationalism and weaken the role of the 'country of residence' in national identity construction. Theoretically, this paper asks: how far can diaspora theories and the transnational/global turn go for youth?

This paper explores the salient discourses that inform these youths' interpretation of their Chinese ancestral root and their national identity. It also draws on one aspect of global cultural flows, namely ethnoscape (Appadurai 1996), to examine how their encounters with the Chinese international students in a high-status school shape their ethnic consciousness and understanding of Chineseness. In particular, it focuses on the dynamics of their relationships with the Chinese international students to highlight the youths' negotiations between their national identity and ancestral root.

The research question is unpacked in three sub-questions: how do the youth of Chinese ancestry relate to China and imagine China in Australia? How do they interpret and experience their minority status in Australia? How do they interpret their person identity in Australia? The first section briefly

introduces the major theoretical frameworks—diaspora and ethnicity—that are employed in this paper. It then shifts to the case study to elaborate the major debates concerning ethnic minority youth and finally raises some issues at conclusion.

I. Theoretical engagement

1.1 Understanding the notion of ethnicity within the Australian context

In Australia, the notion of ethnicity needs to be understood via its relationship with its British colonialism and international migration in its settler society history. From 1788, the development of Australian colonies as a white settler society began, which was linked to Britain as the early immigrants were largely from there (Castles and Vasta 2000). The Australian core—Anglo cultural heritage and the legitimacy of its political system—was established according to the British colonial model and in popular discourse. People of British origin in Australia are legitimized as the dominant group instead of being a specific ethnic group (Castles and Vista 2000).

The immigrant history in Australia is a history of inclusion and exclusion judged by immigrants' ancestral origin. The racist nature of immigrant policies manifested in White Australian Policy is deeply embedded in the Australian notion of ethnicity until the 1970s when this policy was officially withdrawn (Castles and Vasta 2000). Now in Australia, the common practice is to use people's birthplaces and the birthplace of their parents as a 'surrogate' for 'ethnic group membership', where the country of ancestral origin and the birthplace sometimes do not match (Castles and Vista 2000:118).

The serious definition of ethnicity appeared in the 1982 federal government policy document *Multiculturalism for all Australians* (Castles and Vista 2000:124). Strongly influenced by sociologist Jerzy Zubrzycki, the federal government's approach to ethnicity identifies culture as the central issue, an 'ethnic group model' that sees Australian society as composed of 'ethno-cultural' communities (Castles and Vista 2000:124). A primordial notion of ethnicity is propagated that sees the culture of ethnic groups as 'coherent, homogeneous and intact'. In so doing, culture was 'largely reduced to static forms of folklore, tradition, costume and cuisine (Castles and Vista 2000:124). Likewise, the culture of ethnic group is similarly reduced to peculiarities of food, and the open attitude to ethnic food is an important feature of Australian multiculturalism (Jamrozik et al 1995.). As the Australian ethnic policies shift from different versions of multiculturalism to the discourses of social cohesion, the primordial notion of ethnicity is not changed.

The discourse of 'Asianization of Australia' appeared in 1983 and resurged in 1996, which is considered as the threat to Australia's 'social cohesion' (Ang 2001). However, the National Policy on Languages adopted in 1987 aimed to encourage the learning of Asian languages of economic and strategic significance (Castles and Vasta 2000).

The deployment of ethnicity can be understood in multicultural policy in 1989 OMA National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia which identified three dimensions of multicultural policy: cultural identity, social justice and economic efficiency. It is made clear the 'right of all Australians, within carefully defined limits, to express and share their individual cultural heritage, including their language and religion' (Castles and Vasta 2000:126). Here again, the ethnicity is narrowly interpreted as cultural heritage, in particular in the form of language and religion. At this stage multiculturalism was not 'defined as cultural pluralism or minority rights' relating to social justice for minority groups, rather, it was deployed as rights linked to citizenship (Castles and Vasta 2000:126). It is seen as a shift from an 'ethnic group model' to 'a citizenship model' (Castles 1997).

However, in 1999, this multicultural trend was checked by 'Australian multiculturalism', which places 'Anglo-Australians centrally within the multicultural identity' and therefore 'accords a privileged status to Anglo-Australians within multicultural history and identity' (Forrest and Dunn 2006: 205), documented as

The British and Irish heritage, which includes our democratic system and institutions, our law, the English language, much of our humor and our oft-quoted distinctive values of the fair go, egalitarianism and mateship, together provide the foundation on which Australian multiculturalism has been built. (NMAC, 1999: 4) (quoted in Forrest and Dunn 2006: 205)

Therefore, Australia's previous struggle to 'disengage from a legacy of Anglo privilege and cultural dominance' by Keating Government has been shifted back to the 'ethnocultural or assimilationist perspective', replacing 'a civic nation approach' (Forrest and Dunn 2006:209). This shift to 'the new integrationism' as a 'dismantling of multicultural strategy' withdraws from state's former endorsement of the limited rights of cultural minorities, the conditional multiculturalism (Anderson and Taylor 2005:466), attention to social inequities experienced by migrants, and questions the need for the maintenance of migrants' culture and language (Harris 2010: 575-576).

The complexity of multiculturalism in Australia demonstrates class dynamics and reaction of policy-makers to the broader global trend in economic terms (Forrest and Dunn 2005: 211). The rise of multiculturalism in Australia is concurrent with the 'onset of global economic restructuring' from the mid-1970s. According to Forrest and Dunn, with declining manufacturing sector where a lower and middle-class 'Anglo' dominates, a 'new managerial-professional class' rise in the 'new knowledge economy'. The rise of this new class, termed as 'cosmo-multiculturalists' by Hage (1995: 44), changes the notion of 'Anglo dominance' in class terms (Forrest and Dunn 2005; Stratton 2009). The mainstream Australian core shifts from working-class Anglo-dominance to middle-class sector

(Stratton 2009).

In addition, the complexities in multiculturalism discourses can also be understood as the product of 'nation-state building' which 'takes their character within a series of nested *geographies*: the global regimes of colonization, modernity, transnational migration and world regional contexts' (Anderson and Taylor 2005: 471). According to Anderson and Taylor, 'these scales need to be conceived relationally, so as to clarify how the processes of nation building interact across a wide range of surfaces' (Anderson and Taylor 2005: 471). This perspective helps break the 'container theory of society' and facilitates the positioning of Australia in its 'in-between' (Anderson and Taylor 2005: 462) relationships with Asia and Europe. I will come back to this point later.

The benefit of nation-building politics perspective also 'promises to move the understanding of inclusion/exclusion beyond a binary frame of racism toward or against 'others' – typically an Anglo-Celtic majority versus a range of non-white minorities' (Anderson and Taylor 2005: 471-2).

Actually the boundaries between white and non-white have been under debates. The 'decline' of 'Anglo-whiteness' and emergence of 'Australian whiteness' is captured by Hage (1998), who theorizes the Australian notion of whiteness in relation to retreating multiculturalism and national identity discourses as a 'capital'. He proposes the notion of 'national cultural capital' into which certain physical attributes—fairness as a capital while 'third-world-looking' as a deficit, the knowledge of English, and the right accent can be converted. Hage (1998) also points out that the Australian whiteness is no longer 'Anglo-whiteness', as other minority groups such as those from South Europe can also 'pass' as white. This 'cultural capital' approach to Australian whiteness disturbs the 'moral and ontological claims of a core national white culture in Australia', and Anderson and Taylor further reveal the 'changing inflections of, and fragilities within Australian whiteness' by locating the 'racialized whiteness' as a 'mobile cultural formation' through scrutinizing the 'Australian nation-building process within the global and historical circuits of colonialism and transmigration' (Anderson and Taylor 2005: 461).

The nation-building politics offers a new perspective to look at the construction of ethnicity and racism in Australia. As Anderson and Taylor point out,

'Thinking of racism within a unitary national frame tends to rehearse the binary fix of a (nationally conceived) majority and its 'others'. It risks holding intact a certain narrative of the world within which an unnamed whiteness is anchored as the core culture of settler societies like Australia (2005: 472).

Anderson and Taylor posit that nation-building politics has the theoretical potential to understand 'ethnographic accounts that critically link the contested claims of groups and institutions to space and place at the local level, to projects of national identity and belonging that do themselves exceed a national frame' and 'move beyond theorizing such local conflicts within a problematic', ultimately challenging 'a too neat and flawed opposition of the domestic/foreign' (2005: 471).

1.2 The definition of diaspora, ethnicity and Chineseness

The commonality of diaspora and ethnicity is that they are categorical words, referring to a group of people and separating them from the rest. They both point to the ancestry or origin of a 'people', biologically, geographically, culturally and historically. The ancestry or origin may or may not geographically exist as a nation-state.

The predicament of diaspora lies in their affiliations with both 'here' and 'there'. With the advent of the transnational turn, 'the language of diaspora is increasingly invoked by displaced peoples who feel (maintain, revive, invent) a connection with a prior home'. Even when diasporas are studied in 'here', the central aim is to look at how they will benefit 'there'. Therefore, in the case of Israel, diasporas as 'transnational communities' are labelled 'the paradigmatic Other of the nation-state' (Tololian 1991: 5). This link of diaspora with nationalism towards country of ancestral origin is sarcastically termed as 'transnational nationalism' by cultural critic Ang, (2001: 82) and neutrally termed as 'long-distance nationalism' by migration scholar Glick Schiller (2005).

The difference between 'here' and 'there' causes 'rupture' for diasporas in relation to their 'past' there and 'present' here. This experience connotes that these people are 'cut off from direct access to their past' which has 'a profound difference of culture and history' from that of where they are currently placed (Hall 1990: 227). For diasporic subjects, 'the boundaries of difference are the continually repositioned in relation to different points of reference' (Hall 1990: 227). Diasporas are thus defined against 'the norms of nation-states' (Clifford 1994: 307).

Diasporas' allegiance to country of ancestral origin manifested in their 'ongoing support' of and 'desire for eventual return' to it, which is on the one hand, driven by 'pull' factors such as 'myths', 'memories' of 'homeland', and a 'collective identity' anchored in it (Clifford 1994 305). On the other hand, there are 'push' factors from the nation-state of displacement, such as their experiences of alienation, resistance and suffering in the host country (Safran 1991, Hall 1990, Clifford 1994). In a strange line of logic, in their descriptions of diasporas, there is an assumed relationship between the 'push' and 'pull' factors. That is, 'push' factors are transformed into the result of the 'pull'

factors. Put simply, the experience of being Othered in host country drives diasporas towards the 'longing' for country of ancestral origin.

The wholesale diasporic historicity is interpreted as diaspora's shared history of collective suffering, victimization and experiences of being Othered in 'host country', which becomes a 'trauma' that make it impossible for diasporas to fully assimilate in their host country (Clifford 1994: 307). The spectre of traumatic historicity will always haunt.

This essay detects four assumptions about diaspora, namely, the link between diaspora and sentimental attachment towards country of ancestral origin, the link between diaspora and nationalism towards country of ancestral origin, the relationship between 'push' and 'pull' factors, and the unassimilatable nature of diasporas because of the traumatic historicity (Clifford 1994:307).

To address these issues, it draws on a case of a study of a group of Australian-born youth of Chinese ancestral in an elite secondary school in Melbourne, which examines how they construct the notion of Chineseness in the context of Australia. The school where I recruit my participants is located in a middle-class suburb, and charges \$20000 of yearly tuition fee for each student. My participants are all from middle-class family background, which is categorized in terms of family income or parents' educational background. The method I use is interview, which I read as a presentation constructed within the dynamics between the interviewer and interviewee (Fontana and Frey 1994:370).

II. Constructing Chineseness and China in Australia

I extract data from my interviews with 2 parents and 6 students in the school who can be roughly called Australian-borns with (part) Chinese ancestral origin. All identify with themselves as Australians, except one who reportedly doesn't feel any nationality. None of the student participants have kept any transnational ties with mainland China.

2.1 Relating to China: diasporic consciousness

Walter is a boy of 16 years of age. Both of his parents were ethnic Chinese born in Malaysia and raised in Southern China. They came back to Malaysia with their respective families and stayed there for a couple of years before migrating to Australia at the age of 16 for her mother, and at the age of 18 on her father's case, where they settle down ever since. Both his parents have received

tertiary education in Australia and his dad has a master degree. They now live in a middle-class suburb in Eastern Melbourne. He gives me an account of his family history as follows,

‘Well, my mum’s family, because we have this red book which we keep, you know the family tree where everyone writes a paragraph for each generation, which is pretty cool. My mum’s family, they spent a lot of time in Southern China. But ...I think they are sort of nomad people they start from the northern China, they slowly moved down until got her generation re-founded in this country. So sort of all round China, my dad’s family are from Southern China’.

When asked about his views about China, he mentions that people ‘have to start to pay attention to China’ because ‘that’s where the money comes from in business sense’. As he continues, citing from his newspaper reading about this sort of thing that interests him,

‘Well I think the whole reason for the boom in Australia, the mining boom is because Chinese require so many resources from Australia and it is very beneficial for Australia at this moment. I am just worried what will happen when China slows down. I don’t know what will happen to all our resources...Maybe a shift to India. But at the moment China is very influential on how Australian’s economy is going, you know it is one of the reasons why Australia didn’t really go into the recession because China sort of kept Australia afloat by purchasing our irons or metals’.

Diasporas are termed as the ‘other’ of the nation-state (Totolian 1991:5). Walter’s case draws us again to the question of national allegiance and the old question arises: ‘who is Us’ and who is Other (McLeod and Yates 2003: 29)? Walter has already given us the unambiguous answers when he speaks about Australian resources as *ours*. His instrumental view of China is delivered from the point of view of an Australian national. His interest in China is in the interest of Australia. From Walter’s account, we can detect the role Australia plays in constructing the image of China in relation to Australia in its media and how this has an influence on him. That is what Anderson and Taylor refer to as the Australian geopolitical discourse in relation to ‘Australia nation-building’ (Anderson and Taylor 2005). He is familiar with China as it is represented as an important business partner of Australia. He sees the Chinese language as a form of capital which is in line with Australian government’s emphasis on the mastery of ‘Asian language’ of ‘economic and strategic significance’ (Castles and Vasta 2000:126).

Walter also mentions his trip to China for sightseeing in Beijing, where he expects to have a taste of the Chinese ‘culture’, and anticipates standardized and credible service. Walter judges China as ‘disgusting’ on the moral ground based on his unpleasant encounter with one ‘dodgy’ Chinese tour-

guide. His desire to look at 'culture' is also a product of cultural representation of Australia which positions it culturally in opposition to the rest of Asia. Walter's attitude manifests the ambivalence and 'in-between' of Australia's positionality in Asia is that it on the one hand embraces Asia out of economic considerations (Anderson and Taylor 2005), and on the other, it distances and distinguishes itself from Asia in relation to a national culture. In the meanwhile, contemporary Australia is 'struggling' to assert an Australian identity that disengages itself from 'a legacy of Anglo privilege and cultural dominance' (Forrest and Dunn 2006: 208).

Therefore, Walter's construction of the China image is sourced by Australian media representation of China as an economic power, geopolitical discourses of China and Asia in Australia's strategy of existence, and Australia's assertion of a national identity in cultural and political terms. This image of China does not translate into the longing and belonging sentiments towards China as the ancestral origin, rather, China is mobilized on and beyond Australian national levels as a nation-state, which is interpreted as instrumental, rather than sentimental entity.

How the later generations see their ancestral roots and their imagination of the 'homeland' are a central focus for scholars of diaspora (Louie 2004; Clifford 1994, 1997). Unlike the case by Louie (2004) that some American-born Chinese-American youth go back to search their ancestral roots in their ancestral landscape, in this case Walter's construction of China as an ancestral country of origin, and as the number one business partner of Australia in the moment of global economic recession cannot be simply dismissed as his diasporic consciousness, or sense of national belonging, or national allegiance, as this case reveals a more nuanced and complicated understanding, views, and feelings towards China. Even though Walter acknowledges his family root which originates in geographical China, the emotional link between the family root, the 'cool' red book of family history and the visit to China does not exist. China in Walter's eyes, is just a 'space', rather than a 'place', where there is no emotional or sentimental attachment involved (Louie 2004). Therefore, national allegiance and sense of national belonging cannot capture the full picture of views towards the ancestral country of origin.

2.2 Experiencing the ethnic label in Australia

For the group of Australian-born youth, 'Chinese' alerts them more as an ethnic label than a diasporic label, for they see themselves more as ethnic Chinese in Australia, rather than the 'scattered seeds' of People's Republic of China (PRC). Two themes emerge when I document how these youth experience their ethnic label, namely, questions of belonging and Chinese stereotypes.

2.21 Questions of belonging: partially accepted

The tension over national belonging is said to capture the race relations in Australia today (McLeod and Yates 2003). However, my data draw me to the complexity of this argument. Race relations do not just centre on the question of 'who belongs and who does not'. Instead, my data lead me to the question of 'who'—who is involved in questioning the Australian-born ethnic Chinese the right to belong to Australia and why?

Some interviewees mention that their assertion of being an Australia is often challenged by parents and 'Asian' background people and schoolmates, rather than by the 'Caucasians' in the school. Walter talks about how his father used to call him Chinese. This inter-generational discordance mentioned by Walter reveals that the central dispute is around the construction of Chineseness. Walter's father holds on to a primordial 'Chineseness-as-race' discourse and therefore call Walter Chinese on the ground of his Chinese ancestry and Chinese-looks, while Walter's assertion of being an Australian emphasizes his birth, upbringing and citizenship in Australia, which echoes his understanding of 'Australian multiculturalism' and civics education. The reason why Asian background people tend to challenge these youth's national identity may be that they hold primordial views of their own ancestral origin based on their respective cultural traditions.

The interviewees say that their 'Caucasian' schoolmates' in the school 'accept' them 'where they are' without bothering about their ancestral origin, which can be interpreted as the end result achieved by Australia's multicultural policy which has been carried out for three decades, although there is a shift to 'social cohesion' discourses from late 1990s (Harris 2010). In addition, in a country where among every four persons there is one overseas-born, who bothers to ask the question of 'who belongs'?

However, some interviewees mention that in their former schools, their Chinese background is not readily accepted. They were ignored or joked about in their former schools for being 'different' and 'weird', which is associated with their Chinese ancestry. Their former schools are state schools and some are located in lower socio-economic suburbs. The varied attitudes shown by students from schools of various socio-economic backgrounds towards questions of national belonging of the ethnic Chinese demonstrate class dynamics in their acceptance of multiculturalism policy in general (Forrest and Dunn 2005: 211). Those from lower to middle-class background 'Anglos', rather than the middle to upper middle 'cosmo-multiculturalist' 'Anglos' suffer from the 'white decline' caused by declining manufacturing sector where a lower and middle-class 'Anglo' dominates at the 'onset of global economic restructuring' from the mid-1970s (Hage 1998). The

decline of 'Anglo dominance' became the most intense in the late 1990s and brought a new round of anti-Asia turbulent.

However, whether the question of who belongs still can capture of ethnic/racial tension of the Australian society does not have a straightforward answer. Mary's case is that a Chinese surname also spells the inability to 'belong'. Mary is a third-generation part Chinese whose grandfather migrated to Australia from Hong Kong a long time ago. By looks, it is hard to tell that Mary has any affiliation with a Chinese ancestry. But her surname (after her grandpa) 'betrays' her. She has been approached so many times by 'local' people, asking about her surname, for judging from her looks, she should not have had any connections with such a Chinese surname. She is even suggested to add a letter to her surname, because that can make an Australian surname, then no one will show any curiosity towards it.

This is the most interesting case one's ancestral origin has been awakened. For Mary as a third generation part 'Chinese', the 'where are you from' question has never ceased to 'bother' her. Because of her looks that 'pass' her as an Aussie (McLeod and Yates 2003), such questions are more often than not blatantly delivered to her. If there is an expectation for people looking Chinese to demonstrate some Chinese traits, such as language (Ang 2001), Mary's case also reveals a parallel expectation for people who do not look Chinese to distance themselves from something Chinese, such as the surname that indicates such affiliation. The surname now becomes the racial 'marker' that constantly keeps Mary conscious of her Chinese ancestral root. A 'white' surname signals the 'right' national cultural capital which decides whether one belongs or not.

2.22 Experiencing the Chinese ethnic—the construction of Asian/Chinese stereotypes

The ethnic labels are experienced by these Chinese-Australian youth more as Chinese stereotypes than questions of belonging. That shifts the race/ethnicity tension from the debates of 'who belongs' to cultural difference based on race/ethnicity. The cultural difference takes the form of ethnic stereotypes, as the findings reveal that there are some positive Chinese stereotypes circulating in this school regarding the Chinese-Australian youth's academic performance, and maths in particular. Some interviewees find them quite 'untrue' and oppressing. The Chinese stereotypes they relate to fall into two types—inter-group stereotypes and intra-group stereotypes.

Stereotypes from inter-groups

Dory, born in Australia, is the only child to her parents who are from Shanghai. Before migration her mum worked as a nurse and dad was a mechanic engineer. They now work in take-away shop,

selling fish and chips, and working six days a week from 11 am to 7pm. She came to this school at Year 5. She talks about the experiences in her former Catholic school,

‘Like it’s kind of joking, not that serious, and you can laugh about it. Before if I do well in maths, they would go ‘if you are Chinese, you have to be well in maths’. People just expect me to be good at everything, good at academics,...people just thought that I was different, you know, and people didn’t talk to me because I am Chinese, you are weird...people just joke about it, if you don’t get an A for maths, you don’t have rice tonight (laughing).

Although these racist remarks are communicated to Dory in ways of joking, ‘the other Chinese kind of know that they are doing it on purpose, just make you upset’. Dory’s case draws us to Chinese as ethnic label that is read as the inter-group ‘difference’, in the form of stereotypes that are racist in nature at some points. Choi (1975) and Price (1974) investigate how the discourses of Chineseness in Australia originate from merely cultural differences of early migrants as sojourners, evolving and later are laced with racialized content from a historical perspective. These stereotypes resemble the anti-Chinese residual as demonstrated in the historical anti-Chinese riots during gold rushes over a hundred years ago and anti-Asian upsurge in the late 1990s. These historical discourses of Chineseness aimed for exclusion can still find their resonance in contemporary Chinese experiences.

In this case, stereotypes based on ‘ethnic success’ of Asian background students (Mathews 2002) demonstrates the new competing ground for the ‘mainstreams’ and ‘ethnos’—academic performance in the site of schooling. The ‘ethnic success thesis’ originated in the Australian context in the 1980s has been buttressed in the result made public by the government report Second Generation Australians in 2002 (Windle 2004). Competition is played out in racist encounters in the daily lives of the Chinese background youth.

In addition, the Chinese-Australian youth are expected to speak Chinese and have some knowledge of China-related topic from both their local peers, Chinese community in Australia and international students from China. The Chinese-Australian youth feel the pressure to live up to other’s expectations as ethnic Chinese. The ethnoscaples, mostly the Chinese international students challenge their Chinese-Australian counterparts’ inability to speak Chinese. My interviews with the Chinese international students reveal that they think the Chinese-Australians are ‘different’ from Chinese because they are born in Australia and they are ‘Australians’. Still, these Chinese international students see the local born Chinese background youth as one of ‘Us’ ‘Chinese’, and expect them to acknowledge their Chinese ‘root’, at least their efforts to retrieve it, and show respect for it.

Ang's (2001) arguments in her piece 'Can One not Speak Chinese' interrogates how the racial marker of 'looking Chinese' invokes people's expectations for people of Chinese ancestry to be able to speak 'their' own language. Sometimes the feeling of inadequacy as an ethnic Chinese turns out to be indignant feelings. The association of Chinese looks with the mastery of Chinese-related knowledge implies not only a primordial notion of ethnicity deeply embedded in people's mind, but also the false expectation that ethnic members should maintain their languages because the Australian multiculturalism *allows* them to. That's how feelings of 'shame' and 'unfairness' co-exist.

Stereotypes from intra-group

Actually stereotypes attached to ethnic Chinese are also constructed by intra-group members, or other members of the Chinese community in Australia. As John Fitzgerald points out, this internal differentiation among Chinese communities drawn among themselves works no less than that by the White Australians' invention on their behalf (2007: 3). Therefore, what other Chinese are like is mobilized as a form of Chineseness by these students. Although resisting these stereotypes, unwittingly or not, the student participants get involved in producing them and applying them to other Chinese-Australians and Chinese international students.

The intolerance of cultural difference can be interpreted as neo-racism in relation to culture grouping (Jameson 1993). The cultural difference accorded to the Chinese in Australia can date back to over a hundred years ago. However, in my case study of the group of youth of Chinese ancestry, their attitudes to such cultural differences and ethnic stereotypes vary and are complicatedly embedded in their assertion of an Australian identity.

2.3 Interpreting an Australian identity

For the Chinese-Australian participants, roughly three broad themes appear when relating to their Australian identity and their ethnic heritage. Walter strikes a dichotomy between Chineseness and Australianness, claiming that an Australian identity needs to say no to Chineseness. Walter uses 'well-rounded' to describe the typical Australian student identity. This well-roundedness is mobilized to contrast the 'studious' students of Chinese ancestry who are forced by their 'pushy' parents to give up everything except their study and grades. However, Walter's deployment of 'Asian' and 'normal Chinese' to keep himself aloof and description of himself as 'different' is quite blurred as his interpretation of the bright side of the Chinese culture is also sketchy, like

'I guess the good side of the Chinese culture, well, I like the food sometimes, ...some of the values they have are good, like be good to your parents, respect the elders, and you look after your parents when they are old'.

Walter's understanding of Chinese culture resembles that of the narrowly defined one in Australian multiculturalism, positioning 'Chinese' culture in the domestic/ foreign duality in the cohesion discourse looming large in the late 1990s, reducing it to food and essentialized values (Jamrozik et al. 1995).

Dory tends to believe she benefits from the goodness of both Chineseness and Australianness, simply equating Chineseness to the hardworking work ethic and Australianness to being relaxed sort of lifestyle. Mary as a 3-generation part Chinese-Australian, severs her 'Chinese' part totally while constructing an Australian identity.

To sum up, their different attitudes to Chinese culture or values vary and there are many reasons behind it. The length of stay in Australia, family socio-economic conditions and parenting styles all count. One thing they have in common is their assertion of their Australian membership in terms of national allegiance and birthplace.

Conclusion

On the whole, my findings reveal that none of my participants have regular contact with China, and their visit there is even rarer. Only one out of the six student participants shows interest in Chinese media. Dory watches some Chinese TV programs along with her parents, but she also engages with Japanese culture. That is, her transnationality is leveled by her 'global' approach of cultural consumption. There is no transnational and global connectivity that influence these youths' national identification with Australia. They unambiguously identify themselves as 'Australians' on account of their birthplace and their upbringing here.

The findings also demonstrate that the Chinese-Australian youth's construction of Chineseness and imagination of China are contextualized in the Australian context, rather than narrowly determined by a collective diasporic past of Chinese in Australia. Their parents do talk to about their experiences of discrimination in Australia on account of their background, which are far from a 'traumatic' one, but these accounts are mobilized to urge their children to excel in school, and to achieve upward social mobility. It never serves to drive the Chinese-Australians to China or their ancestral origin.

By asking why the old diasporic historicity is not salient now, it examines the salience of new race/ethnicity relations in contemporary Australia manifested in Australia's nation-building politics and new geopolitical discourses. National tensions around Anglo-privilege are to some extent eased and diverted by Australia's geopolitical politics and its positionality in Asia. In addition, class divisions in Anglo-privilege exist. Lastly, decades of 'Australian multiculturalism' policies and the recent 'social cohesion' discourses serve to dilute the salience of Anglo-Whiteness, easing racial and ethnic tensions by according citizenship rights to its ethnic groups.

The major ethnic tension takes the form of the circulating Chinese stereotypes bottled in discourses of cultural difference regarding the Chinese work ethic and lifestyles. The relationship between Chineseness and Australianness is interpreted in varied ways. There is no close correlation between the students' cultural identification and claims of national affiliation. For Australia-born youth of Chinese ancestry, they see their 'roots' in Australia, and are not keen to expand their 'routes' to include their ancestral 'root'.

With reference to the research findings, I argue that the construction of diaspora in relation to the nation-state of ancestral origin and the construction of diaspora as an *ethnicity* in relation to the nation-state of residence/arrival/birth is a two-way process. It is inadequate to look to the diaspora's collective past of victimization in the nation state to understand their construct of diasporic consciousness in the children of the diaspora. There is no one timeless and homogenized past because the new history and new race/ethnicity relations intervene. The nation-state of residence, in this case, Australia, is the major factor that shapes the Chinese-Australian youth's sense of belonging, and their imagination of their ancestral root.

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