Return migration from New Zealand to China -- motivations, trajectories and identity

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Outline: beyond ‘elite return’

“Migration fever turned to homeward flights”

- Looking for a new paradigm which encompasses salient elements of recent transmigration

- A 3-year Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation funded project on 3 cohorts (PRC, Taiwan, HK migrants to NZ)
New Zealand: A social laboratory to examine migration

- **Small base population** – over 4 million
- **Bicultural society** – Pakeha & Maori
- **Entry criteria** – clearly stated & openly administrated
- **No political tangle between China & NZ**
  - China: never a direct political threat to NZ
  - NZ: free of the very bitter anti-Chinese history

*The trend of circulatory migratory movements best revealed over a longer time-frame, based on the lived experiences of migrants.*
*(pre-dating official elite return programmes)*
Chinese birthplaces 2006 census

Birthplaces of the Usually Resident Population Who Identify as Chinese: New Zealand 2006

- China 52.29% (77,157)
- Taiwan 7.21% (10,638)
- Hong Kong 4.54% (6,705)
- Malaysia 6.66% (9,834)
- Singapore 1.70% (2,505)
- Others 5.84% (8,616)
- New Zealand 21.76% (32,112)
- Other Asia 3.08% (4,545)
- Rest of World 1.87% (2,763)
- Not Elsewhere Included 0.89% (1,308)
## Conspicuous Absenteeism

Rates of Long-Term Absence of Migrants Approved for Residence Between 1997/98 and 2007/08

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source Country</th>
<th>Number of Approved for Residence</th>
<th>Long-term absent</th>
<th>% Long-term absent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>5,394</td>
<td>2,679</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>2,864</td>
<td>1,132</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>2,978</td>
<td>1,107</td>
<td>37</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>3,759</td>
<td>1,160</td>
<td>31</td>
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<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>4,031</td>
<td>1,204</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>8,902</td>
<td>2,593</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>12,078</td>
<td>3,511</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>58,415</td>
<td>14,868</td>
<td>25</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Project design:

Case Study Project design (for the understanding of trajectories and sense of identity)

- Focus groups (conducted in Shanghai, Beijing, HK, Melbourne, and Sydney)
- Multi-generational family interviews.

*Trying to avoid ‘snap-shot approach’*

*Aiming at comprehensive overview of big picture*
Methodological notes:

A. In-depth interviews with 27 returnee migrants of NZ in two mega cities: Beijing and Shanghai;

B. Key questions used in interviews:

1) Why did you return to China? Where are other members of your family?
2) Where will you be in the next 5 years and 10 years?
Reasons of returning:

1. Strength of the Chinese economy & huge potential Chinese market;

   “I really dislike being separated from my wife and children geographically, but if I drop my business in Shanghai and go back to NZ permanently, my life quality would decline dramatically … in Shanghai, more opportunities and huge market means more clients and more money.”

2. Higher professional satisfaction & better career development opportunities (e.g. one thousand talent plan);

   “... My current job is the most interesting & exciting job I have ever had. My specialty is finance. Even though my last job in NZ is highly related to this field, it was not challenging enough. This is a good opportunity for my career development. Therefore, I decided to leave NZ.”
3. Family reasons: To reunite with families & to take care of elderly parents in China;

- “It is not good to be separated from my husband and son for a long time. Now all of us have secured the NZ residency as our backup in the future, and I got my degree as well as working experience from NZ, a Western society. It is time to be back”
- “…my parents are aging. They really need me to be close to take care of them, and I am truly happy that I can do this for them.”

4. Going back to an old comfort zone of familiar surroundings;

- “To be honest, we can have a lot more in China than in New Zealand, both materially and spiritually. For me, the spiritual gain is more important. I have many friends here in China. My family is here, and my parents are here.”

5. Emotional link with China as home.

- “Anyway, home is calling. Here is my home. That’s all. Hamilton (New Zealand) is my home away from the home, but my real home is in Shanghai.”
Further movement intentions & mobility

1. Educational prospects for children in NZ;
   “I’ll be with my son in Auckland for his high-school education after he finishes his intermediate in Beijing. Once he enters into university, I will be free. I want to go to Australia … I can also go back to Beijing to be with my husband.”

2. To enjoy a quality of life in NZ after retirement;
   “Let me say that I’ll give myself at least 20 more years in Beijing. My career is here, and I like to be here now… NZ is a beautiful country which is good for long-term residency. People enjoy the natural environment there, and so do I. I’ll return NZ after retirement for sure.”
3. To return to the NZ ‘home’;

- “I’ll be in New Zealand after 10 years because my home is there. Three people in this family are there now, but me. What I am doing is all for being with them.”

4. Further movements to other places depend on which place can offer greater career development potential;

- “I am young, and now I have the mobility to travel around the world. After I have accumulated some working experience, I’ll go to another country, depending on where I can earn more and where I can have a better life. Perhaps I can return NZ as well”.

5. Strategic further movements to meet every family member’s needs at different stages of one’s life cycle.

- “Within 2 or 3 years, I’ll be still in Shanghai… Next year I’ll go to the New York Branch of the company to work. At my age, I need a place full of excitement and energy, like Shanghai and New York. But for my parents, they need a quiet, clean and safe place to live, like NZ. It’s better for them to stay in NZ now”.

6. Further movement plan goes with one’s shifting aims at different stages of one’s life course.

- “I’ll be with my son in Auckland for his high-school education… Once my son enters into university, I can be free and do what I really want to do. I want to go to Australia because one of my best friends is in Melbourne. He needs me to help with his business.”
Key findings & implication:

1. Some novel trajectories of those return Chinese migrants:
   - ‘double return’ journey;
   - returning to China/NZ could be another temporary move which stays upon variety of reasons;

2. The consideration of the family members’ different needs at their different life stages is important in the decision making;

3. A contradiction to the traditional explanation of return migration;
Sense of Identity: surprise findings

- The sense of ‘being Chinese’: strong even among NZ-educated migrants
- ‘Where is your home?’
- ‘I am Chinese’: strong among the younger age group.

Findings indicating more nuanced in depth studies necessary.
Possible effect of host Country education

Sense of Identity of Interviewees WITHOUT host country educational qualification

- Identify with host country: 7% (5 out of 74)
- Identify with home country: 65% (48 out of 74)
- Hybrid: 24% (18 out of 74)
- N/A: 4% (3 out of 74)

Sense of Identity of Interviewees with host country educational qualification

- Identify with country of origin: 44% (7 out of 16)
- Hybrid: 44% (7 out of 16)
- N/A: 12% (2 out of 16)
Identity & Chineseness

Sense of Identity by age group

- NA
- Identify with host country
- Hybrid
- Identify with home country

15-44:
- 3 NA
- 17 Identify with host country
- 44 Hybrid
- 11 Identify with home country

45+:
- 2 NA
- 3 Identify with host country
- 8 Hybrid
- 11 Identify with home country
What implications?

– The sense of being Chinese would have strong effect on the transmigrants future trajectories
– Having ‘returned’ to China, the identity might ensure a longer term stay.
– It would also affect the choices of their children

The vision of a China where they might play a positive role could be a draw for many Chinese migrants currently overseas.
Transnationalism re-examined

- Transnationalism does not imply ‘unsuccessful integration’.
- Re-location of the 2nd generation could be the utilisation of social & cultural capital.
- Different generations often have divergent mobility trajectories.

- Irrespective of the migrants’ physical location, their sense of ‘Chineseness’ remains strong.

Never ‘uprooted’, thus not needing ‘transplanting’.
A flexible link to China

- Not bound by citizenship
- Not strongly influenced by length of stay in host country
- Not strongly influenced by education in New Zealand

Possible influences (beyond official discourse):
- Family, economic opportunities, cultural pride,
- Ethnic links, the ‘China rising’ factor.
Thank you for your attention!

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