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Connotations of ancestral home: An exploration of place attachment by multiple generations of Chinese diaspora

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Abstract

This paper explores the connotations of ancestral home by investigating how multiple generations of Chinese migrants sustain their place attachment to China. Based on 50 in-depth interviews with Chinese migrants from the first to the sixth generation, we unpacked the meanings of ancestral home from the "place" "person" and "process" dimensions, and identified three types of connections: personally attached to ancestral home, cognitively connected to a generic China and the Chinese culture, and spiritually connected to a symbolic China. Factors were identified in each type of place attachment in illustrating how Chinese diaspora members sustain their ancestral home connections. The personally attached group ground their attachment in strongly valued personal involvement with the physical and social ties. They are more sensitive to migration background, social relationships and home return mobility. The cognitively connected group, in contrast, is more aware of the influence of their own families and the Chinese communities and embed their connections in understandings, knowledge and Chinese cultural practices. The spiritually connected group maintain their connection through collective memories, sense of pride and appreciation for family ancestry, and interests in personal past. The findings suggest that the meanings of ancestral home are diverse and dynamic, reflecting both individual and family's migration history, personal experiences, cultural exposures, social relationships and mobility. This study offers empirical insights into diaspora members' experiences of engaging with their place of origin, and contributes to the understanding of place attachment by integrating a generational view.

Keywords: ancestral home; place of origin; place attachment; the Chinese diaspora; migrants; subsequent generations

INTRODUCTION

The number of international migrants grows rapidly over the last decade and has reached 244 million in 2015 (United Nations, 2016). The increased amount of global migration poses new questions about the meanings and roles of "ancestral home" in influencing migrants' daily lives as well as challenges to understanding the ways in which migrants relate to their places of origin (Gustafson, 2006; 2009; McHugh & Ming, 1996; Stedman, 2006). However, current studies on migrants' sense of place and attachment tended to concentrate their attention on recent generations who were considered to have strong physical and emotional ties (Boğaç, 2009; Moskal, 2015; Waite & Cook, 2011). How subsequent generations create meanings and get connected to their ancestral homes remain overlooked in this literature. Indeed, different generations of migrants may develop various types of bonds with places during their migration and settlements (Cohen, 1997; Safran, 1991). Their perceptions and feelings towards the place of origin may differ due to their migration background, the level of acculturation, personal experiences, and values (Hay, 1998; Deutsch, 2005; Shuval, 2000). In addition, the process through which migrants relate to their ancestral homes were still understudied, despite that only a few researchers started to explore the process and the mechanisms underlying different place attachment constructions (Maliepaard, Lubbers & Gijsberts, 2010; Moskal, 2015; Waite & Cook, 2011).

In order to fill in these gaps, this paper seeks to explore the connotations of ancestral home to different generations of Chinese migrants and examine how these members sustain their connections to China. The main research questions we tend to answer are: What are the

meanings of ancestral home to six generations of Chinese migrants; and in what ways these Chinese migrants sustain their connections to ancestral home. The paper applied a qualitative approach and analyzed semi-structured interviews with 50 Chinese migrants to generate meaningful types, themes and factors. Scannell and Gifford's (2010) three-dimensional framework was employed as a start point to examine the "person" "place" and "process" dimensions of place attachment that our participants constructed with their ancestral place. In doing so, three types of place attachment to ancestral home were identified with distinct features in each of the three dimensions. Significant factors that contribute to the maintenance of each of the attachment were justified with examples.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to better solve the research problems, this section first reviews theoretical perspectives of place and place attachment, with the highlights of current important studies on sense of place by migrants and diasporas, and then relates these discussions to the context of Chinese diaspora and their narratives of home.

Place and place attachment

Place attachment is considered as a fundamental human need and a natural condition of human existence with deep implications to one's subjective well-being (Morgan, 2010; Manzo & Devine-Wright, 2014; Scannell & Gifford, 2017; Li & Chan, 2017). The importance of places in the contemporary world may have grown, despite of the increased mobility and globalization (Gustafson, 2006). People make sense of places and develop

bonds with their meaningful places, through "an interplay of affect and emotions, knowledge and beliefs, and behaviors and actions" (Kyle, Graefe & Manning, 2005; P155). More importantly, places are not essences but processes through which the meanings and relatedness are continually produced and reproduced in interaction with the surroundings, the self and the others (Gustafson, 2001). Thus, places may be attributed to new meanings over a period of time and they do not necessarily mean the same thing to everybody (Massey, 1994).

Scannell and Gifford (2010) integrated three dimensions of "place", "person" and psychological "process" into their tripartite framework for a holistic understanding of place attachment. They perceived the "place" dimension by physical settings and presence of places such as nature, landscape, density, and proximity (Stedman, 2003; Peters et al., 2016), and social characteristics within places including sense of belonging, familiarity, locality, and social capital (Gieryn, 2000; Kohlbacher, Reeger & Schnell, 2015). The "person" dimension was referred to as individuals or groups who develop attachment to places. At an individual level, attachment occurs when the place is most related to one's personally important experiences, such as milestones, personal growth, career success, etc. (Manzo, 2005). When a place provides the historical, cultural and/or religious background for a group of people, it becomes meaningful at a collective level (Hay, 1998).

Scannell and Gifford (2010) discussed the "process" dimension with three psychological processes (affective, cognitive, and behavioral) through which individuals or groups become attached to a place. The affective element of place attachment can be manifested through positive affect of love, preference, and happiness, as well as negative affect such as

sadness and grief after displacement (Fried, 1963; Fullilove, 1996). By contrast, cognitive element represents the memories, beliefs, knowledge, and meanings that people create to faciliate their closeness to a place (Feldman, 1990; Proshansky, 1978). Finally, proximity-maintaining behaviours can also enable our closeness to particular places, for example, diaspora tourists pay effort to visit their ancestral home or pilgrims conduct trips to a holy land (Li & McKercher, 2016a; Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2004).

Scannell and Gifford's (2010) framework was adopted as a theoretical foundation for exploring the meanings of ancestral home and mechanisms of place attachment. More recent studies attempted to bring forward the "place" dimension by considering sense of place at different geographical scales (Li & McKercher, 2016b; Qian, Zhu, & Liu, 2011), and intangible features of places that related to one's ethnicity, religion and personal past (Casakin & Billig, 2009). Moreover, elucidating processes through which people foster and sustain their relations with meaningful places seem to be neglected by place researchers (Lewicka, 2011a). Little work has been done to integrate the dimension of time into the understanding of spatiotemporal experiences of migrants (Rogaly & Thieme, 2012). Therefore, this study attempts to meet the chanllenge by exploring different levels within the three dimensions of place attachment based on the experiences of how Chinese diaspora relate to their ancestral home.

Diasporas and their ancestral home

The migration and diaspora literature has portrayed the concept of ancestral home through investigations of the continuity of place attachment experienced by the first or

second-generation migrants (King & Christou, 2010; Waite & Cook, 2011; Maliepaard et al., 2010; Zhou & Liu, 2016). These studies argued that the quests for an ancestral home remained one of the most important issues in modern times. The place of ancestral home played a significant role in reinforcing migrants' self-continuity and rootedness. It is associated with one's origin, roots, ancestry, and identity, and was considered as the prerequisite to integrate various life experiences into a coherent life story (Sani, 2008; Lewicka, 2011a; Li & Chan, 2017). As such, migrants tend to seek a stable sense of place and identity through constructing different types of connections with their ancestral home, in order to assure a coherent life story and a stable sense of self (Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996; Liu, 2015). In some cases, place attachment was consistently related to the interests in one's family history which was found positively related to sense of coherence (Lewicka, 2011b). Individuals are inclined to maintain the continuity of place attachment through connections to their past to build their own coherent life story (Fried, 2000).

More importantly, numerous studies noted that individuals in different generational cohorts perceived their home place differently, and started to employ a generational apporach to examine subsequent generations of migrants and their sense of place (Liu, 2015; Moskal, 2015; Waite & Cook, 2011; Hammad, 2011). For instance, the second-generation migrants were believed to have weaker ethnic and religious attachment to ancestral home, and as a result, they were less engaged in ethno-cultural and religious practices compared to their parents (Maliepaard et al., 2010; Levitt & Waters, 2002). The physical and social ties of the migrants' children were reported turning weaker due to their short length of residence in ancestral home and higher level of acculturation to the host society (Ali & Sonn, 2010; Liu,

2015). Through accultration process, some migrants in subsequent generations may identify themselves as being "in-between" two cultures and stretch their sense of belonging between two places (LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993), while the others may identify completely with the host culture and create different meanings for their ancestral place accordingly (Bartley & Spoonley, 2008; Drozdzewski, 2007; Gordon, 1964).

However, how migrants beyond the second generation relate to their ancestral home become uncertain in current literature. The early studies overlooked the difference in perceiving their ancestral home between the second generation and further generations of migrants or in what ways the generation gap affects ties with their former homes. Further generations may be more different from the second generation in terms of gradually losing multifarious socio-cultural, economic and political links, and consistently experiencing senses of distance, invasion, mystery, and fear (Waite & Cook, 2011). They may, as a result, lose completely a connection or continue to long for a homely place in ancestral homeland to feel connected to their ancestors (Harvey, 1993).

Overview of Chinese migration history and the narratives of home

The Chinese have a long migration history (Pan, 1998). Since the Ming Dynasty, many Cantonese and Hokkien were sent by the government to reside in South Asian countries to engage in trade with local merchants. After the decline of the Qing Dynasty, three important migration waves emerged in Guangdong and Fujian provinces: the Gold Rush (1840-1900), Post World War II/Post China Civil War (1945-1978) and Post Open-Door Policy (1979-present) (Wang & Lo, 2005; Skeldon, 1996), which generated different types

of migrants and descendants. Nearly 4 million Chinese people living overseas are reported to have their roots in Jiangmen Wuyi region (Jiangmen Government, 2016). Despite its growing number, the composition of the Chinese diaspora is quite complex in terms of generations and geographical origins. This community is comprised of first generation migrants who arrived during waves of Post-China Civil War and Open-Door Policy, 1.5 generation who migrated with their families at a very young age, and the descendants of early migrants who voluntarily left home as merchants or were sold abroad to work in gold mines and rail construction sites in America, Australia and New Zealand (Zhou, 2015). A great number of them identify themselves as "laohuaqiao" who migrated during the Post-China Civil War period to the Open Door Policy, while most subsequent generations consider themselves as "huayi", most having their roots in Jiangmen Wuyi region (Mei et al., 2001).

The narratives of home are one of the perpetual themes in Chinese migration literature. However, this body of literature has a clear emphasis on educated and skilled new Chinese migrants (Liu, 2014; Lam & Yeoh, 2004), and the way in which this population negotiates sense of belonging and identity and manages emotional relations with the home space. These migrants left China with the introduction of China's Open Door Policy in 1978, when the central government permitted its citizens to move voluntarily to developed countries for a better life, employment opportunities and education for children. Most tended to be well-educated professionals (Skeldon, 1996), who grew up in mainland China with a solid sense of place and strong Chinese identity. They cared about the development of their motherland and strove to maintain their Chineseness after migration (Mei et al.,

2001). Unlike the new Chinese migrants, individuals who left China in the aftermath of the Chinese Civil War migrated due to political or economic reasons. Many of them moved initially to nearby Asian destinations such as Hong Kong, Taiwan and Vietnam for extended periods of time and afterwards moved to their final destination (Kemp & Rasbridge, 2004). Some raised their families in these intermediate locales, setting down some roots and desired to return home once the political situation stabilised (Li, 1998). Despite these notable waves of Chinese immigration (Ma & Cartier, 2003), few studies have investigated distant generations of Chinese descendants and their connection with ancestral home. This study attempts to fill the gap by examining multiple generations of Chinese migrants and how they maintain their ancestral home ties.

METHODOLOGY

The main purpose of this study is to understand the underlying rationale and mechanism behind Chinese migrants' connection to their ancestral home. The authors applied a qualitative method to explore the connotations of the connections, and to explain how the participants sustain their connections to ancestral home. Quantitative measures of place attachment might not do justice to the richness of the meanings entailed in a place (Patterson & Williams, 2005; Cresswell, 2007). As such, places cannot be described by means of analytic concepts or measures, and instead, the meanings of a place must be identified first in order to further perceive the rationale of place attachment (Lewicka, 2011a). Thus, this research draws upon the interviewees' own words of experiences, personal and group memories, views, values, multi-sensory feelings about and/or being in

their ancestral home to explore how they foster and sustain such multi-layered connection (Mack et al., 2005; Manzo, 2005).

In order to reach a diverse sample from the Chinese immigrant community, three fieldtrips were conducted from February to October 2013 in four cities based on China's migration history. Jiangmen[1] in South China was chosen as a start of the fieldwork for Jiangmen Wuyi region's significant migration history as the most notable ancestral hometown of Chinese migrants. San Francisco and Los Angeles in the United States, and Vancouver in Canada were selected as popular destinations for both recent and distant Chinese migrants (Wang & Lo, 2005; Skeldon, 1996). Snowball sampling techniques were used by making initial contacts with Jiangmen Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (OCAO), and five volunteer Chinese immigrant associations in the USA and Canada[2]. Then the identified participants introduced their association members, friends and relatives who belong to the Chinese diaspora community to participate in the study (Atkinson & Flint, 2001).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore each theme in depth and enable participants to construct their own narratives according to their interpretation of experience in socio-cultural contexts. Interview questions were carefully designed according to place attachment qualitative measures and questions (Lewicka, 2011a), with the purpose of exploring interviewees' feelings and perceptions toward their place of origin. An interview protocol was finalised covering three topical themes (1) participants' family migration

[1] The participants recruited in Jiangmen include Chinese migrants to Asia who came to Jiangmen to attend the Overseas Chinese Carnivals.

[2] These associations include Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Associations (CCBA) in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Vancouver; Head Tax Association in Vancouver; and Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (OCAO) in Jiangmen Wuyi region (Xinhui, Kaiping, Jiangmen).

background; (2) perceptions, feelings, and emotions to ancestral home; (3) personal experiences related to fostering of such attachment or connection. For better rationale and effectiveness, all the questions had been tested by two academic peers and three Chinese migrants, all of whom were excluded from the final sample. All in-depth interviews were conducted in the participants' preferred language, including English, Mandarin and Cantonese, each lasted between one and two hours and was recorded and then transcribed before further analysis. Names of interviewees were changed to pseudonyms in order to ensure confidentiality. The determination of sample size of this study followed Kuzel's (1992) principle of looking for disconfirming evidence or trying to achieve maximum variation. Data saturation was considered to occur when possible categories of respondents, themes and explanations have emerged and few new themes have emerged infrequently afterwards (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006). A total of 50 Chinese migrants have participated in the study. 46 were currently living in North America (Canada and the USA) and 4 were living in Asia (Japan, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Hong Kong). 24 were China-born first or 1.5 generation, and 26 were foreign-born subsequent generations (the second to the sixth generation). The sample consisted of more male participants (32) than female (18), aged from 20 to 79.

The directed approach of qualitative content analysis was employed to interpret interviewees' perceptions toward ancestral home through identifying place attachment patterns, and significant themes and factors in fostering such attachment pattern (Mayring, 2002). Systematic coding process was conducted based on the initial dimensions and themes synthesised in Scannell & Gifford's (2010) framework. Employment of these

elements during analysis assists in revealing how the participants' home attachments are spatially and temporally transformed with empirical evidence from levels within each dimension (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The transcript texts were examined intensely for the purpose of classifying participants' responses into effective categories (Weber, 1990). Each has been revisited for several times by two authors independently until the finalisation of codes. Then conceptual labels were placed on the responses of participants' emotions and perceptions about their Chinese attachment, for example, "feel desirable to return" and "return frequently" were two codes to interpret participants' behavioral element of "process" dimension. Coding discrepancies were resolved by full discussion between authors while the unnecessary codes were reduced until arriving at the final typology discussed below.

In order to ensure trustworthiness of a qualitative research, the criteria addressed by Lincoln & Guba (1985) were used to address credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Firstly, instead of making generalisation from the researched population, this study aims to make in-depth explorations of the notions of place attachment. Through Chinese immigrant associations in different locations, we collected the data from multiple Chinese migrant populations in Asia and North America. Secondly, adequate details of the research context, instruments, data collection and analysis methods were justified for the readers to apply the findings of this study to other contexts. Thirdly, Boyatzis's (1998) coding criteria was applied to achieve coding consistency and reliability through peer reviews, multiple codings, and the utilization of audio resources and transcripts. Moreover, self-reflection about the authors' own predispositions was conducted throughout the research to ensure that their personal experience (e.g. the first author's own migration

experience within China) will not influence the data collection and analysis results and all the findings are the result of the participants' own experiences and perceptions (Lewis, 2015).

Limitations in the research design should be acknowledged. First, the scope of the present paper is Chinese migrants' attachment to their ancestral home. Instead of investigating participants' attachments to current homes, this study focused on the connections to China. Second, the participants were aware of their Chinese ancestry despite of different levels and strengths of their Chinese attachment. This prerequisite might exclude some of the population who have fully assimilated to the host culture. Third, in terms of sampling, Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (OCAO) in Jiangmen was contacted as a start point. After building the connection, five other Chinese immigrant associations were introduced to the leading author through OCAO's own networks. Although the final sample consists of participants originated from different regions of China, most of our participants have connections with Jiangmen Wuyi region which may cause geographical bias.

FINDINGS

Three types of connections to ancestral home were identified from the participants' narratives and the analysis of their stories (as shown in Table 1). The following section reports the meanings of ancestral home with relation to each type of place attachment and the factors emerged in analysis that contributed to the maintenance of such connections.

Insert Table 1 here

Personally attached to ancestral home

Twenty-six participants perceived their “ancestral home” as a generic term “Jiaxiang” or “Laojia”, a personally important place in their life which they referred to as one or a series of important places in China, such as their paternal hometown (Zujidi), place of birth, or family’s previous place of settlement, etc. Their attachments to ancestral home were embedded in strong and abundant physical and social ties, and were manifested through strong affections denoted by expressions of how important, unique and irreplaceable it was and why they want to stay close to the place. Moreover, they were willing to conduct actions to maintain the proximity to their ancestral home, for example, to conduct regular home return travel to their ancestral village or the home region.

The formation and maintenance of such type of attachment were attributed to these participants’ migration background, personal experiences, and other socio-demographic factors. To start, they were born in China and spent their formative years in ancestral hometown before their migration. Despite of different waves they migrated in between the 1920s and 2000s, ancestral home was the place where they had experienced their memorable moments, milestones, and personal growth. In addition, most of these participants left their hometown because of poverty or political reasons, and they were not able to return freely for a long time after their relocation. They reported experiencing physical and psychological hardship during the early days of their immigration. As a result, they maintained strong sentiments of nostalgia and a pressing desire to return to the place that they had to leave.

In addition, home ownership and social relationships in ancestral home emerged to be two significant factors here that helped the participants sustain their home attachment. Most of

the participants in this group reported that they owned property in their ancestral home. They were proud to talk about the location and shape of their house in China and referred to it as one of their homes that they could stay and spend quality time with their friends and relatives. More importantly, they still maintained close relationships with friends and relatives who were living in ancestral home area, and such relationships provided them with a strong sense of belonging to the home community. In many cases, the participants explained that the Chinese traditional values affected their attachment to China. For example, the Confucian values treasure the extended family and encourage Chinese to maintain social networks (Guanxi) in ancestral home. As such, they still perceived ancestral home as "my place" and considered themselves as part of the home community by identifying themselves as "Wuyi Ren" (people who originated from Wuyi region). It is worth noting that return mobility and the capability of return played an important role in facilitating these participants to maintain their personal and social ties to ancestral home. Many reported conducting frequent return to China and engaging in various social and leisure activities.

For instance, Chandler is a typical case in this group. He left his hometown Xinhui to Hong Kong in 1976 and stayed for four years before he left Hong Kong to settle down in Los Angeles. He commented on how he perceived his ancestral home and in what ways he sustained his attachment to the place:

> *"I illegally migrated to Hong Kong in 1976. I had to leave to pursue a better life. It was impossible to make a living in Xinhui in 1970s. [At first] I worked in a restaurant in Chinatown. It was very tough… After 20 years, I started to work in*

Chinese migrant associations in the US to fight for Chinese immigrants' rights… I will never forget the truth that I was forced to leave… Xinhui is the most important place in my life, [and] I try to go back as often as I can. In most instances, I would stay in my home in Xinhui for two to three months… for some other times, I bring some overseas Chinese leaders [qiaoling] to Jiangmen or Beijing to attend some events. " (male, 55, LA)

Another example is Grace, whose parents passed away many years ago and cousin was still living in ancestral home Zhongshan. She maintained her place attachment through a very close relationship with her cousin's family. She explained:

"My grandfather came [to the US] in 1928. He left his wife and my mother in Zhongshan village. My mother grew up, married my father, and had me. I was born in China… In 1951, the US Immigration Office allowed my mother to come. I did not leave China until 1953… My father only has me, one girl. That's why we [me and my cousin] are so close to each other. Because the Chinese traditional thinking is 'we should keep it closer when there is only a few in our family'. So my cousin is like a son of my father… I try to make as more contacts as I can. I almost go back every year. I feel like Zhongshan is where my roots are." (female, 62, LA)

Cognitively connected to generic China and the Chinese culture

Sixteen individuals reported maintaining cognitive connections to a generic China despite of their varied migration histories. Their families migrated to the host countries one to three

generations ago. Some had ancestors who migrated during the Gold Rush period, which dated back to the 1880s. Unlike the previous group, these participants were born and had their formative years in the host countries. They reported feeling connected to China and the Chinese culture on a cognitive level and believed that these connections derived from their understanding of China as the place where their families came from. Such cognitions were also found to have been incorporated into their self-definition. They saw themselves as being both Chinese and Westerner. Most of them were familiar with some typical Chinese traditional practices such as the Spring Festival, Mid-Autumn Day, and Qingming Festival, etc. As such, specific meanings associated with China and the Chinese culture were created by them during their exposure to home culture.

Factors that emerged in their maintenance of such connection include the strong influence from their family, the cultural influence from the Chinese communities in North America, as well as personal learning, travel and interaction experiences. All of the participants in this group had different degrees of exposure to the Chinese culture, for example, have grown up in Chinatown, have studied in Chinese language school, and/or spent their childhood with family members who had strong Chinese characteristics. As such, they can speak some Cantonese/Mandarin and understand Chinese cultural practices.

Kaley is a third-generation Chinese Canadian from her mother's side. She demonstrated how her father's Communist sentiment influenced her cultural ties to China:

> *"Chinese culture is a completely different and abstract thing. I would not have learnt Mandarin if my father hadn't been such a strong influence…My mother was*

not born in China, neither was my grandmother. But my father was born in China. He didn't come [to Canada] until 1948. So he is very different from the culture of my mother. He was highly attached to China and the Chinese culture. My mother was less so…My father was very interested in China, and he opened a Chinese Communist book store [here]… I can sing the Communist songs in Mandarin. I can sing 'Beijing Tiananmen'. We were taught by the Communist Youth Group." (female, 52, VA)

More importantly, these individuals have experienced a process of realizing, understanding and accepting their Chinese heritage during their adolescence, progressing from a stage of "feeling confused about who I am" to "becoming more appreciative of my home cultural heritage". When they understand why their ancestors left home and came to North America, they finally understand what their ancestral home means to them. Therefore, personal experiences and interests are vitally important in increasing their knowledge and understanding, constructing the meanings of ancestral home, and strengthening their beliefs. Many expressed that they had keen interests in exploring their Chinese ancestry in libraries, through social networks, or by travelling to China to trace their roots. Their interests in their own family history and curiosity about China have to some extent connected them to the place on both a cognitive and behavioral level. For example, Cara is a fourth-generation Chinese Canadian. She illustrated how she was fascinated by the Chinese history and her own family history:

"To me, the history of China is really interesting. It is still a part of one's personal history even though you are not born or raised there. You are curious. I think that's

true for a lot of people… I really want to trace my family history. I have talked to the public library of Vancouver. I even attended their courses about genealogy." (female, 60, VA)

Kaley has conducted home return travel to trace her roots. She described her travel as "different" and "eye-opening" as it has not only facilitated her learning of the culture but also helped to confirm the meanings of China. She narrated her experience:

"My identity shifted on what my age is. I was Chinese in Canada, but I did not quite understand what Chinese in Canada meant until I went to China. [When I was in China], I realised there was a whole population of Chinese people living in somewhere. I have never been among so many Chinese people. That's very different for me to be a part of majority than a part of minority." (female, 52, VA)

Spiritually connected to symbolic China

Eight participants from America and Canada demonstrated a spiritual connection to a symbolic China despite that they were deep rooted in their current place of residence. Their ancestors first arrived in North America four or five generations ago during the 1860s and the 1890s. They have fully assimilated to the host society and identified themselves as Westerners. Their ancestral home was seen as a mythical place with symbolic meanings of the past, associated with their roots and ancestry. Interestingly, their cases showed some affective and cognitive elements in their connection to China, for example, feeling very proud of having Chinese heritage and witnessing the great changes made by the country.

These individuals sustained their connection through group memory and oral histories that were passed on from generation to generation. For example, Melvin, a fifth-generation Chinese American shared his family legend of how his great-grandfather came to America with great-great-grandfather:

> *"As far as we know, my family's migration is an unusual story. We believe the family group came in its own boats sailed by themselves… My family legend is six boats started [to sail] and we think probably from Macau, around 1850-1860. It is said three boats were never heard from again. Only two of the boats arrived where my family began in the United States, Monterey California, a very famous Chinese fishing village 'Alones'. We believe we were farmers [in China], so when we came here, we had to convert and became fishermen." (male, 74, LA)*

As opposed to the other two groups, these individuals have neither had much chance to expose themselves to the Chinese culture, nor spent time with those who were strongly attached to China. Nonetheless, they presented personal interests in exploring China and the Chinese culture, a sense of appreciation for both cultures and lifestyles, and strong desire to develop a solid understanding of what kinds of family they start with. All these senses play roles in constructing a spiritual connection to China.

For example, Martin, a sixth-generation Chinese American, expressed strong interests in exploring his ancestry and some of his experiences helped to build his special connection to the place:

"Before I returned [to China] with my family, my family history in America is all I understood. After going back, I started realizing my Chinese heritage. When I was older, I became more mature and thoughtful. I chose to participate in a 'roots program' in San Francisco (1996). The program taught me a lot about my Chinese background, culture and language. We went to Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and my ancestral village for six weeks. At that time, I started identifying who I am as a person, and who I am to the culture, and to the society… These trips really stimulated my interests and allowed me become more thoughtful about what my family heritage really was… I wanted to know more about China and explore more about my family history." (male, 43, SF)

Clive, a fifth-generation Chinese American, visited his ancestral home area Zhongshan for the first time in 1980. His spiritual ties were fostered in the form of appreciating both heritages. He made such comments:

"I think it is very important to know my history… By going there [to China], I can actually see in person than just imagine how things happen. It gives me much solid understanding where my family set up with. My trips to China increased my feeling of proudness about my Chinese heritage. I saw the changes that China made. I realised that China did not only have wars or poverty. China can change, move forward and become like the rest of the world…When I saw the life in China in 1980s and compared it to what I had in the United States, I felt more appreciated what I owned. I treasured both cultures." (male, 73, SF)

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

This paper explored the experiences of Chinese migrants of relating to their ancestral home, and how they sustain their different types of connections. The narratives collected from different generations of Chinese migrants and descendants facilitate a deep understanding of the patterns and mechanisms of their place attachment. The emphasis was on the exploration of these different patterns of attachment, with a specific aim to capture the complexity of place meanings, construction, and transformation over generations.

The meanings of ancestral home were revealed to be quite diverse and complex, involving different factors that play a role in the maintenance of such connections. For instance, the personally attached group perceive ancestral home as a personally important place where they have abundant social and physical ties. They directly relate the place to themselves through strong emotions and actions (Cuba & Hummon, 1993; Low, 1992; Janta et al., 2015). In their cases, place attachment is interpreted from a strong sense of belonging to the home community, a clear personal identity as Chinese or mostly Chinese, and a strong desire to return (Kohlbacher et al., 2015; Sixsmith, 1986). These individuals are more sensitive to the reasons for and process of migration. Especially those who involuntarily left China are more desirous to keep their connections alive and solid (Fullilove, 1996). Personal experiences and profound social ties in ancestral home emerged to be more critical here in maintaining such bond other than cultural connections. They value the close ties

they maintain with their friends and relatives and are pleased to travel back to further renew such attachment (Gustafson, 2009; Van der Klis & Karsten, 2009).

By contrast, the cognitively connected group maintains strong cognitive and cultural ties to a generic China. Such connections contain strong cognitive elements, including their understanding about China and the Chinese culture, knowledge of Chinese traditional practices, and some traditional Chinese values, all of which were incorporated into their self-definitions as Westerners with Chinese characteristics (Twigger-Ross & Uzzell 1996). Through these cognitions, they attribute meanings to ancestral home and connect these meanings to themselves, which have facilitated closeness to their ancestral home (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). These individuals are more aware of the cultural influence from their families, friends and different Chinese communities. Cultural exposures emerge to be a predominant factor here in creating place meanings and relatedness in the absence of personal ties (Hay, 1998).

The spiritually connected migrants represent very distant generations of ethnic Chinese, who maintain their connections to a symbolic China at a spiritual dimension. Their physical and social ties are gradually fading away through the process of acculturation. However, their spiritual ties emerge to be emotionally strong, implying that the absence of material ties may make the connection grow even fonder (Van der Klis & Karsten, 2009). Differently, their connections are rather abstract, grounded in collective memories, family oral histories and some Chinese traditional values that have been passed down from one generation to another (Hay, 1998). Their connections are attributed to a growing sense of respect and pride for their ancestral home by acknowledging it as the place where their

ancestors came from. They also show a sense of appreciation to their Chinese ancestry, and interests in seeking for their personal past. This illuminates the basic human need of questing for a sense of rootedness and individual self-continuity, which is considered a prerequisite of integrating various life experiences into a coherent life story and enabling smooth transition from one identity stage to another in the life course (Hay, 1998; Lewicka, 2011a).

This research is among the first to track down six generations of a diaspora and to examine the place attachment of both the first and subsequent generations of migrants. The findings, to a certain extent, are supported by earlier empirical research (Drozdzewski, 2007; Waite & Cook, 2011; Maliepaard et al., 2010), in addressing how migrants and their children maintain ties to ancestral homeland. The findings contribute to current literature in migration and place in the following perspectives.

Firstly, this study is in line with the previous work of Tuan (1975), in suggesting that direct phenomenological experience can convert abstract spaces into personally meaningful places. It is worth noting, though, that some of Chinese diaspora members also created personal meanings associated with their ancestral home based on their desires and needs although they did not have much direct or deep experience living there. They consider their ancestral place to be important and meaningful in spite of limited personal experience or social and physical ties there (Lewicka, 2011a).

Secondly, the findings enrich the previous place attachment frameworks by proposing a generational view to understand the attributed meanings of place. The stories of these

generational migrants help to provide a temporal dimension to further understand the transformative nature of place attachment and to capture the complex meanings of ancestral home. The study also incorporates a distinction in the "place" dimension by arguing that "attachment to what" may also contain different geographical scales of place, as well as cultural and symbolic meanings of ancestral home (Stedman, 2003; Fried, 2000).

Thirdly, the present study seeks to explore the process through which connections to ancestral home are sustained by different groups of migrants. As claimed in Lewicka's (2011a) review, "process" was still a neglected dimension, as we know very little about how people become attached to places. The findings show that fresh migrants sustain their connections by reflecting their migration processes and personal experiences, through maintaining their social relationships and personal involvement in home and host countries, and of course, frequent home return visits (Li & McKercher, 2016a; Janta, Cohen, & Williams, 2015). Whilst the subsequent generations are more likely to be driven by group memories, values, and personal interests to create meanings for home and to pursue coherent life stories for both their ancestors and themselves.

Overall, the results suggest that the meanings of ancestral home are diverse and dynamic, and they could be a result of individual and collective migration histories, personal biography (Lewicka, 2011b), different interactions with people (self or others), and place (physical or social characteristics; different geographical scales of ancestral place) (Gustafson, 2001). They may transform over generations from a personal and specific sense to a collective and symbolic sense. More importantly, individuals will relate to ancestral home differently according to their own purposes and needs.

This research invites further studies on subsequent generations of migrants and their sense of place to fully understand the mechanisms of place attachment construction. Future research avenues may need to include investigations of placelessness of migrants and the relationships between their sense of place, mobility and subjective well-being.

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Table 1. Place attachment to ancestral home by the Chinese diaspora

Place attachment dimensions	**Personally attached to ancestral home**	**Cognitively connected to a generic China or the Chinese culture**	**Spiritually connected to a symbolic China**
Attached to what? (the "Place" dimension)	Strong ties to multiple places in ancestral home area, e.g. birth place, ancestral hometown, or/and first migration destination	Connection to a generic China and Chinese culture	Connection to a symbolic China
What constitutes the connection? (the "Place dimension")	Strong and abundant physical and social ties	Weak physical or social ties Strong cultural ties	Weak physical or social ties Some cultural ties and strong spiritual ties
Who are attached? (the "Person" dimension)	Attachment occurs at individual level	Attachment occurs at family level	Attachment occurs at ethnic group level
How did they sustain their connection? (the "Process" dimension)	Through strong affections and behaviors	Through cognitions of understandings, values, beliefs and cultural practices Through behaviors of occasional return	Through cognitions of collective memories, e.g. Chinese migration history and family migration legend
Why did they sustain such connection? (the "Process" dimension)	- Short migration history & reason to migrate - Length of stay and experience in ancestral home - Home ownership - Strong social networks in ancestral home - (Capability of) return mobility	- Family migrated one to three generations ago - Cultural influence from family and home community in the host countries - Personal experiences and interests - Occasional return experience	- Very distant generations - Collective memory - Sense of appreciation - Interest in family history and ancestral roots - Occasional return experience
Sample size	26	16	8