A transnational bicultural place model of cultural selves and psychological citizenship: The case of Chinese immigrants in Britain

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ABSTRACT

The transnational bicultural place of Hong Kong (HK) Chinese immigrants in United Kingdom (UK) comprises bicultural social networks of UK British and UK Chinese connected transnationally by a third network of home compatriots (HK Chinese). Through demonstration that these networks supported immigrants' dual (British and Chinese) cultural selves along ethnic lines (UK British network supported British cultural self, and Chinese networks supported Chinese cultural self), the present survey ($N = 272$) contributes to research on migration and transcultural identities. Further it confirmed as predicted that dual cultural selves formed the mental basis of psychological citizenship that was affected by (1) the transnational HK Chinese network mediated via Chinese cultural self and (2) the UK British network mediated via British cultural self. The predicted effect of UK Chinese network was non-significant. Unexpectedly Chinese cultural self decreased with the UK British network, possibly because immigrants did not feel fully accepted in UK.

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1. Introduction

Place is a central concept in humanistic geography, sociology, and environmental psychology. As a spatial concept it refers to a territorial location made up of buildings, landscape, and so forth, and may vary in scale from home, neighbourhood, community and beyond (Tuan, 1977). Here place is taken to refer to the phenomenal space located and experienced by individuals, a setting of social rootedness that ties together interpersonal interactions, and is constructed through social relations between people. This view emphasizes place:

"as 'open crossroads', a meeting place rather than an enclave of rest, a location with 'interactive potential' […]. Whereas place understood as a stable, bounded and historically continuous entity corresponds to a traditional, conservative view of society, the concept of place as a source of potential social interactions better describes the features of the globalized world spaces of today" (Lewicka, 2011, p. 210).

In a similar vein, Canter (1991) moved beyond the individual representation of place and its physical setting toward the notion of place as a social process that involves group-based behavioural rules (see reviews by Agnew, 2011; Lewicka, 2011).

This social perspective of place sheds light on immigrants' experience in carving out a *bicultural* social space made up of a social network of host nationals and a second social network of host compatriots in the place of residence. Using transnational connectivity between place of residence and place of origin, immigrants may enrich the bicultural social space through connection to home compatriot networks forming a *transnational* bicultural place. The transnational bicultural place of Hong Kong (HK) Chinese immigrants in United Kingdom (UK), for example, would consist of UK British, UK Chinese, and HK Chinese networks. Given the spread of globalisation and ease of long-distance travel and communication, immigration nowadays has become less a clear break from home and more a form of living and working in which transnational connectivity between destination and home plays an increasingly prominent role (Dahinden, 2009; Vertovec, 1999). The model of transnational bicultural place to be developed below captures this modern transnational element as compared to earlier models that

focus only on social networks in the place of residence (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2013). Applying the model to Hong Kong Chinese immigrants in Britain, who are a significant part of the British ethnic minority population (Office for National Statistics, 2009), the present study offers a fuller account of the impact of immigrants' overall social networks on their dual cultural self-concepts (i.e. British and Chinese cultural selves) and sense of being a citizen of Britain. In doing so it also advances the field of psychological citizenship (Sindic, 2011; Weeks, 1917) beyond monocultural assumptions to reveal immigrants' sense of transcultural citizenship.

1.1. Transnational bicultural place

Chinese immigrant communities have been traditionally perceived to be well-dispersed in the place of residence. Population dispersal was required to avoid market saturation when the predominant trade of Chinese immigrants was food takeaway businesses (Owen, 2006). Chinese immigrants have been shown to retain a distinct Chinese cultural identity (Chau & Yu, 2001), and often remain in separate enclaves from the host community (Zhou, 2009). One explanation for this is that within Chinese culture, the family is considered the cornerstone of society (Chi, Chappell, & Lubben, 2001). Caring practices are perceived to operate predominantly at the family level, with mutual help at the community level to be at a minimum (Chan, Cole, & Bowpitt, 2007). One place that draws the Chinese community together is Chinatown, an ethnic enclave made up of local Chinese businesses, restaurants and food shops that remind immigrants of home (Anderson, 1987). In the UK, Chinatowns are present in all major cities with a large Chinese immigrant population, for example, London, Manchester and Liverpool.

Chinese immigrants in the UK form local social network ties with UK Chinese and UK British. In doing so, they move beyond making "bonding social capital" from ethno-linguistically homogeneous UK Chinese to forging "bridging social capital" with ethno-linguistically heterogeneous UK British (Putnam, 2000), thereby transforming the place of residence into a bicultural social world. Research so far has focused on these two host networks and rarely considered the significance of the social network of home compatriots (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2013). A similar oversight is evident in research on international students (Henderick, Rosen, & Aune, 2011). Given the spread of globalization, instantaneous internet communication and affordable air travel between the UK and Hong Kong, Chinese immigrants are able to keep alive their network of Hong Kong compatriots, whom they have found helpful when they resettle back in Hong Kong (Waters, 2008). Therefore, it is timely to investigate all three networks, which collectively constitute immigrants' transnational bicultural place, a social space that links the near-by and the remote environments for meaningful social engagement that would shape their dual cultural selves and transcultural sense of citizenship.

1.2. Psychological citizenship

Immigrants expect to "have a better life" more earnestly than to become citizens in the host country. However, their sense of being (or not being) a citizen of the host country is just as important as their individual betterment from the point of view of immigration policy, national identity and societal cohesion (Gilchrist, Bowles, & Wetherell, 2010). This sense of being a citizen has been referred to as "psychological citizenship" (e.g., Sindic, 2011), in contradistinction to civic, political, ecological and other forms of citizenship that have received research attention from sociologists and political scientists (Condor, 2011). According to Sindic (2011), a central feature of psychological citizenship is a sense of community belongingness and membership:

"Conceptually …, if citizenship is a status accorded in virtue of belonging to a specific political community, then it follows that people need to see such community as actually corresponding to *their* community if their objective status of citizen is to have any psychological resonance. That is, it implies the feeling that the scope of the institutions of citizenship corresponds to one's community, and that one is a legitimate member of that community (i.e. the community is part of one's self-definition)." (p. 203, original italics)

A second defining feature of psychological citizenship is keeping permanent or long-term residence as opposed to sojourning. Residence length has been extensively studied by environmental psychologists and found to be reliably correlated with community and place attachment (Boğaç, 2009; Hummon, 1992). For some researchers, residence length has been a key or sole measure of the attachment to place (Lewicka, 2011). It can also differentiate long-term stayers (whose attachment is based on social reasons and reflects loyalty) from sojourners or seasonal visitors, who may still claim attachment, but whose attachment is based more on the attractiveness or memorability of physical features of the community/place (Jennings & Krannich, 2013). For these two reasons, residence length is an appropriate attribute for defining psychological citizenship. Together these affective (community belongingness) and behavioural (residence length) elements provide a useful basis for understanding that part of psychological citizenship that is common to host nationals and immigrants, but on their own underplay features that are relatively unique to the experience of immigrants.

Research on migration and transcultural identities has shown that for immigrants, becoming psychological citizens of the host community does not have to mean monocultural assimilation, for they have the option of transcending monoculturalism (Mirdal & Ryynänen-Karjalainen, 2004). In the UK, "Appeals to an over-arching, or inclusive, 'Britishness' generally have little traction in these situations. Especially when couched in terms of multicultural citizenship, this model of nationality overlooks the evident discrimination and disgruntlement experienced by many communities … [and] many people subscribing to dual or hyphenated identities, such as Welsh Muslim, black British or Scots British." (Gilchrist et al., 2010, p. 35). A vivid description of a similar mentality can be found in an early book entitled "The psychology of citizenship" (Weeks, 1917, p. 186):

"It is necessary that parochialism and provincialism be done away with, and that a ruinous patriotism, out of which conflicts and hatreds rise, be dispossessed by world consciousness."

The mentality of citizenship described by Weeks (1917) is a sense of humanity that transcends parochialism and embraces transnationalism, which can provide immigrants with a wider range of alternatives for life in their new country. One such alternative is "transnational integration or 'integration' into two societies," in which immigrants combine "cultural maintenance with constructive contacts with both their host country and their country of origin" and through which "they may develop a sound form of biculturalism or bicultural competence" (van Oudenhoven & Ward, 2013, p. 90). According to LaFromboise, Coleman, and Gerton (1993), biculturalism may take various forms such as fusion, hybrid, blended and alternating biculturalism. Of these, the blended and alternating forms of biculturalism are especially relevant here. Blended biculturalism is the construction (or