

Shifting Perceptions of Home Among Second-Generation Chinese Immigrants in Japan: Experiences During Visits to Hometowns in China

Research Overview

This study examines how visits to hometowns in China shape second-generation Chinese immigrants' perceptions of home and their future plans in Japan. The results show that emotional belonging and practical considerations about future life, influenced by family ties, living conditions, and unequal social structures within China, lead to varied return, settlement, or transnational orientations among youth.

Purpose of Study

Chinese people currently constitute the largest ethnic minority group in Japan, with their numbers showing strong growth over the past decade. Scholars have explored how second-generation Chinese immigrants seek a sense of identity and belonging between China and Japan (Liu, 2016; Shimizu et al., 2021; Zhang, 2018). By examining second-generation Chinese's experiences during short-term visits to hometowns in China after their settlement in Japan, this study aims to describe the transformation of their perceptions of home across Japanese and Chinese societies, as well as how these second-generation immigrants perceive the possibility of returning to their hometowns in China in the future.

In immigration studies, *home* can be considered as “a meaningful relationship with place, hence as a situated and interactive endeavor, rather than as a physical structure out there” (Boccagni, 2017, p.2). For immigrants, home is not a choice between the

country of origin and the host country, but rather a fluid concept that evolves over the course of one's life. Existing research indicates that second-generation immigrants' experiences traveling to their parents' country of origin influence their sense of belonging and identity, as well as perception of home (Huang et al., 2016; Kibria, 2002; Miura, 2014). However, these studies generally focus on the second generations' linguistic, cultural and emotional experiences in the country of origin. Research indicates that a key element in the construction of home is the ability to control one's own future within a specific setting, a capability influenced by the potential for utilizing the capital one possesses (Boccagni, 2017). This implies that changing social environment and economic structures in both the country of origin and the host country may have an impact on the construction of home, since these factors influence how confident immigrants are to control their future in both countries. This study focuses on how second-generation youth experience changes in the social context of the country of origin during their visits to hometowns, which helps to depict the dynamic process by which they construct their perceptions of home and sense of belonging.

Research Methods

Adopting a transnationalism perspective (Levitt & Schiller, 2004) as its theoretical framework, the author conducted semi-structured interviews with 9 second-generation Chinese youth aged from late 10s to early 20s during October 2022 to December 2023. At least twice interviews were conducted with each participant regarding their migration and hometown visit experiences. All participants had experienced mobility between China and Japan during their childhood and had regularly visited their hometowns in China after arriving in Japan. The analysis followed a combined deductive and

inductive coding approach. Initial open coding focused on narratives of transnational experiences during childhood, followed by focused coding on key categories such as hometown visits, comparisons between China and Japan, etcetera. Through iterative coding, relationships between categories were identified to enhance explanatory depth.

Results and Discussion

The results indicate that while the majority of second-generation youth in the study maintain a strong sense of belonging and attachment toward their hometowns in China, only a small minority express a willingness to return to their hometowns in the foreseeable future. Although visiting their hometowns strengthens the emotional ties between them and their relatives and friends, it may also reinforce the impression that their hometown is unsuitable as a starting point for career development. A tendency has been observed for a distinction to emerge between a “home where they feel a sense of belonging” and a “home where they can envision their future” (Liu, 2016). While the second-generation youth feel emotional ties to their homes in China, they may choose homes in Japan as the foundation for their future lives instead. Specifically, two shifts in perception related to the changing social context in both Japan and China have a significant impact on their perceptions of home, which are (1) differences in living environments and lifestyles between China and Japan, and (2) realistic perceptions of the labor market and career opportunities.

This study highlights that perceptions of the social structures and social mobility in both the country of origin and the host country may influence how the second generations form different views towards their homes in both countries, particularly regarding the

possibility of returning to their hometowns in China. Specifically, this study clarifies the following two points. First, visits to one's hometown, while holding emotional significance, also provide the second generation with a practical reference framework for future decisions. Second, the second generations' views towards home are influenced by factors such as regional disparities and labor market structures within the country of origin. These findings not only deepen our understanding of the transnational lives of the second generation of Chinese immigrants but also demonstrate the importance of incorporating the internal structure of the country of origin into the scope of immigrant educational research.

Keywords: Chinese immigrants, second generation, home, transnationalism, Japan

Reference

- Boccagni, P. (2017). Migration and the search for home. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-58802-9>
- Huang, W., Ramshaw, G., & Norman, W. C. (2016). Homecoming or tourism? diaspora tourism experience of second-generation immigrants. *Tourism Geographies*, 18(1), 59–79. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2015.1116597>
- Kibria, N. (2002). Of blood, belonging, and homeland trips. *Changing face of home*, the (pp. 295–311). Russell Sage Foundation. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7758/9781610443531.17>
- Levitt, P., & Schiller, N. G. (2004). Conceptualizing simultaneity: A transnational social field perspective on society. *International Migration Review*, 38(3), 1002–1039. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-7379.2004.tb00227.x>

- Liu, H. (2016). Hishūjū chiiki ni okeru zainichi chūgokujin nyūkamā no hōmu ishiki: Chūgoku to no kankeisei no fuzai ni chakumoku shite [“Homes” of Chinese newcomers in a less concentrated area of Chinese residents: With a focus on the absence of the relationship with China]. *21seiki Higashiajia Shakaigaku*, (8), 92–106. https://www.jstage.jst.go.jp/article/easoc/2016/8/2016_92/_article/-char/ja
- Miura, A. (2014). Futatsu no “hōmu” no aida de—nyūkamā 1.5-sei no kizoku ishiki no henyō to shōrai tenbō [Between two “homes”: Transformation of a sense of belonging and future prospects among 1.5-generation newcomers]. *Ibunkakan Kyoiku*, 40, 18–33. https://www.jstage.jst.go.jp/article/iesj/40/0/40_18/_article/-char/ja
- Shimizu, M., Kojima, A., Tsunogae, H., Nukaga, M., Miura, A., Tsunota, K. (2021). *Nihon shakai no imin dainisedai: Esunishiti kan hikaku de toraeru “nyūkamā” no kodomo no ima [Second generation immigrants in Japan: The current state of "newcomer" children through ethnic comparison]*. Tokyo: Akashi shoten.
- Zhang, W. (2018). Chūgoku ni rūsū o motsu nyūkamā no kodomotachi no bunkateki aidentiti [The cultural identity of Chinese newcomers' children in Japan]. *Shakaigaku Zasshi*, 34, 146–167. <https://doi.org/10.24546/81011713>