

TRANSNATIONALISM AND THE INTERNET:  
THE CASE OF LONDON-BASED CHINESE PROFESSIONALS



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*To my parents*

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# **Transnationalism and the Internet: The Case of London-Based Chinese Professionals**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the role of internet use in migrants' participation in, and articulation of, rising Chinese modernity. It explores the ways in which transnational subjectivity is produced through this process. It investigates how migrants' various uses of the internet construct and make sense of their connections with China. It demonstrates a new generation of subjectivity among Chinese transnationals that is tech-savvy, modern and triumphal – a subjectivity embedded in the exchange between the (macro) political economy of China's rise and the (micro) everyday practices surrounding the internet.

This is an ethnographic study focusing on an emerging population within the broader Chinese diaspora; that is, mainland Chinese professionals who migrated for higher education and professional training in recent years as a result of China's reform and economic power. This study locates its enquiries in three offline-grounded institutions – ethnic organisations, states and families. These institutions pre-date the internet but increasingly turn to the technology for transnational and local connections.

Regarding Chinese organisations, utilising the internet to build co-ethnic sociality is read as a symbolic practice that signals the users' belonging to a technologically-advanced, mobile and wealthy sector within the broader idea of the Chinese community. On the role of the state, internet use provides new modes of migrants' access to China's state-led development projects, thus opening up new spaces for the state's disciplinary power to be exercised. This digital governance is enabled by a discourse of Chinese triumphalism constructed by both the state and the migrants. Regarding families, the digitalisation of the gendered division of labour in transnational families provides evidence of the segmented nature of China's digital modernity and disrupts the triumphal portrait of transnational modernity constructed among the elite-stratum migrants.

Overall, this study develops a dialogue between two literatures. On the one hand, it adds to diasporic internet studies by introducing an offline-grounded, geographically-informed approach and by bringing transnational modernity into its research agenda. On the other hand, it draws on Nonini and Ong's (1997) theorisation of Chinese transnationalism as alternative modernity and further adds to this theorisation with a focus on internet technology and a discussion of the impacts of China's rise. It contributes to human geography by revisiting a key concept in this discipline – transnationalism – with a discussion of the interweaving impacts of information technology and the geopolitical shift of China's rising modernity.

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## **Chapter 1. Introduction: Internet use, transnationalism and the rise of China**

This study is positioned at the intersection between internet studies, transnationalism studies and human geography. It focuses on a group of well-educated, computer-literate Chinese professionals who view their internet use as a major way in which they participate in the rapidly rising Chinese modernity. It examines the functional and symbolic role internet use plays in linking the migrants to rising Chinese capitalism. The findings demonstrate how migrants' micro everyday practices surrounding the internet are intertwined with the macro geopolitical shift of China's rise. Furthermore, they elucidate how a new form of transnational Chinese subjectivity is produced through this interweaving process between the macro political economy and the micro everyday practices of internet use. That is, an emerging subjectivity among transnational Chinese that is tech-savvy, mobile and modern.

Using ethnographic methods, I immersed myself in two major London-based organisations for Chinese professionals, Xiyu and the Chinese in Finance UK (CFUK).<sup>1</sup> I investigated the ways in which these migrants utilised various up-to-date internet tools to access opportunities for investment, social bonding and career development in China and through China. By connecting themselves with the Chinese government, family members in China and Chinese professionals in London, several Chinese cities and other places around the world, their efforts to participate in rising Chinese modernity almost exclusively relied on internet use. This dependence on internet technology is partly because online communication builds transnational social

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<sup>1</sup> Both are pseudonyms.

ties at low cost. It is also because internet use itself serves as a symbol of modernity through which the migrants assure their position as a modern subject who comes from a place with developed technologies and lives in a city with an advanced technological environment.

This chapter will start with the formulation of the research question, positioning the research puzzle in a wider theoretical context. This study contributes to human geography by revisiting a key concept in this discipline – transnationalism. I re-examine this concept by assessing the implications of the geopolitical shift of China's rise and its interaction with the increasing use of communication technology in transborder settings. In so doing, I also develop a dialogue between diasporic internet research and the literature of Chinese transnational modernity.

I will then move on to the recent political economic context of China and Britain and link this current global context to the existing studies of the Chinese communities in the UK. I identify the need for more attention to the Chinese population I focus on in this research – professionals from mainland China, which is a group rapidly expanding under the recent geopolitical shift and less visible in previous studies of Chinese in Britain. Finally, I will provide chapter outlines for this thesis that specify key arguments of each chapter.

## **1.1. Migration and the internet**

### **1.1.1. An emerging research area**

The phenomena of growing migrant communities and the increasing importance of internet use are two key features of the global age. Globalisation has brought about

large-scale migration of people, capital and cultures. It also highlights the role of the internet, which connects global flows of ideas, cultures, money and social networks. It is argued that a network society emerges where connections are the key metaphor that describes our time (Castells 1996). Both global migration and information technology play significant roles in facilitating a border-crossing experience that characterises much of contemporary culture, sociality and the sense of belonging. In other words, both migration studies and internet studies focus on research objects that challenge earlier understanding about the global distribution of human activities.

In addition to addressing the internet and migration as two different research areas, academic attention from various disciplinary backgrounds has been increasingly paid to the intersection of internet research and migration studies. The internet is significant to migrants, a group that particularly requires transnational connection.

Because migrant groups' cultural, social and economic attachment is cross-border, they heavily rely on computer-mediated communication. In the UK, quantitative data indicate that, compared with the average population, ethnic minority groups are more technology-aware and enthusiastic consumers of computer-mediated communication services (Ofcom 2007).<sup>2</sup> The same data also show that compared with the average UK person, they spend less time watching television and more time using internet-related products (Figure 1.1, Figure 1.2). In studies conducted in several other European countries, including Denmark, Germany, and Sweden, it has also been found that ethnic minority groups are less likely to consume radio and television of

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<sup>2</sup> When asked, 83% of ethnic minority respondents said that internet-mediated communications technology is important to them. This compares to the UK average of 69%. In addition, 72% of respondents from ethnic minority groups said that they keep up with technology, compared with the UK average of 59% (Ofcom 2007).

the receiving countries, and more likely to participate in computer-mediated communication to obtain news, TV programmes and other cultural products from around the world (Christiansen 2004). With multiple sources of cultural affiliation, migrant groups turn to the communication technologies that guarantee a cheap and convenient transnational access to cultures with which they are more familiar, which increases the centrality of the internet in migrants' lives (Christiansen 2004; Hussain 2000).

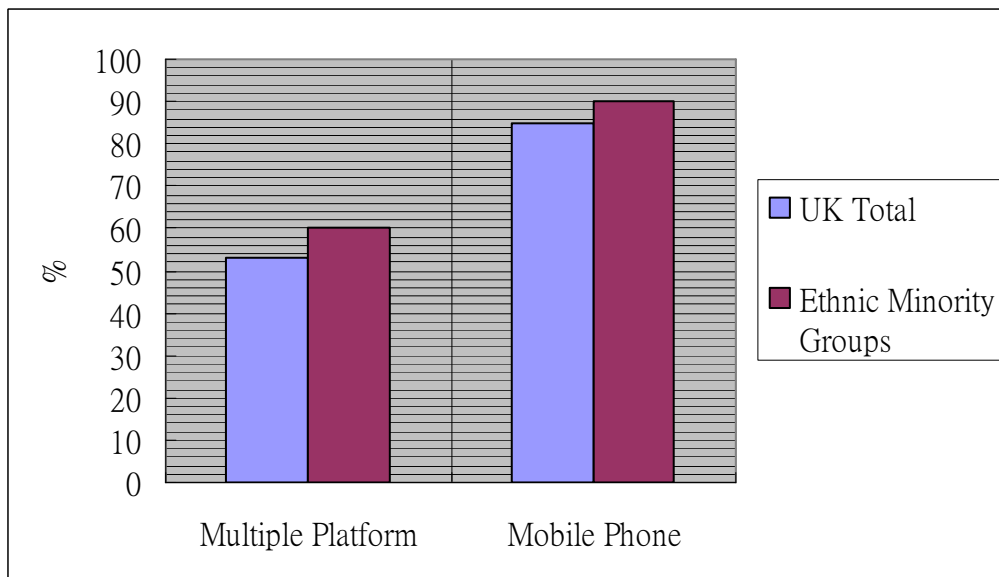


Figure 1.1. Adult (aged 16-44) access to media

Source: Ofcom 2008

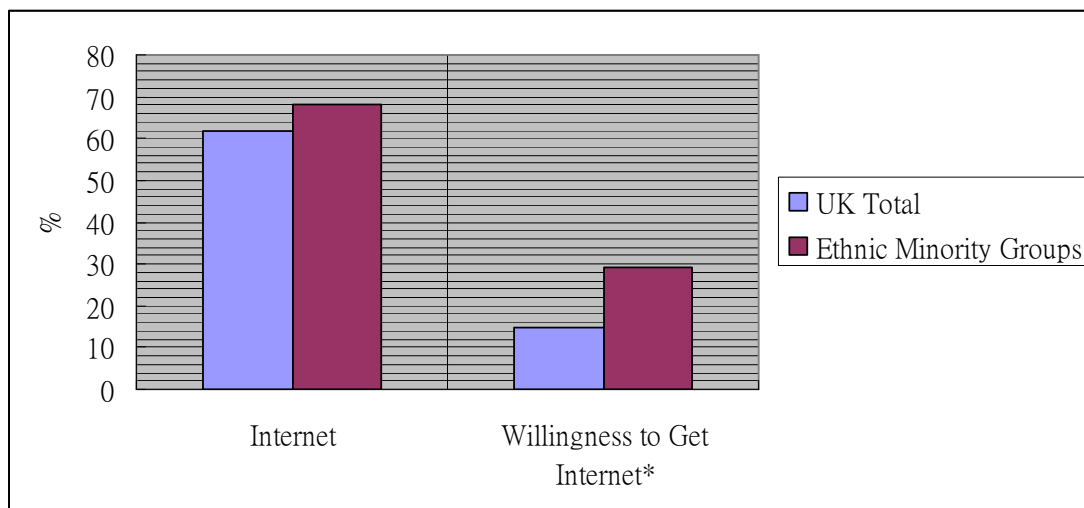


Figure 1.2. Adult (aged 16-44) access to the internet

Source: Ofcom 2008

Note: Willingness to get internet refers to those who currently do not have internet connection but plan to get it within 12 months.

Earlier studies have analysed the hypertexts produced by diasporic internet users and explored the online forms of diasporic lifestyles, from identity formation, political participation, public discussions, religious practices, to labor market performances (Bernal 2006; Brinkerhoff 2009; Enteen 2006; Franklin 2001, 2003, 2004; Ignacio, 2006; Kim 2003; Lieberman 2003; Mallagaprada 2006; Tynes 2007; Helland 2007; Lam 2006; Montgomery 2008; Parham 2004; Parker and Song 2006; Tsai 2006; Yang 2003, among others). Yet, diasporic internet use is still a young research area. There are still plenty of important aspects of it awaiting exploration.

This study adds to this literature in two ways. Firstly, the majority of the current diasporic internet studies are influenced largely by cultural studies in the ways in which they inquire into the dynamics of identity and diasporic experiences and adopt the online textual analysis approach to the internet. This thesis, however, does not

view what happens online as text but analyses the internet as a social artifact shaped by and used in place-based, geographically-informed contexts.

Secondly, this research is located within human geography. In addition to introducing a geographically-grounded approach to diasporic internet studies, it develops a dialogue between internet research and the discussion of transnationalism which is a key concept in geography. In particular, it draws on the body of work that investigates Chinese transnationalism through strategies of flexible accumulation in transborder family connection, state affiliation and co-ethnic social bonding (Ong 1999; Mitchell 2004; Ley 2010; Waters 2005, 2006). Geographers and other social researchers explore how transnational Chinese, often from a middle class or wealthy background, construct multiple linkages with different nation-states as a strategy to maximise capital gains and family prosperity. Some authors regard this transnational flexibility as ‘alternative modernity’ in which migrants create a third space where a new form of market logic and capital accumulation operates and where they evade the disciplinary power of a single nation-state (Nonini and Ong1997). It provides a geography of Chinese transnationalism that maps transnational migrants’ mobility, capital flows and intimate relationships around the globe.

By linking the two sets of literature, I add to diasporic internet studies with an institution-based approach and the research agenda of transnational modernity. I also contribute to the literature on Chinese transnationalism by proposing the concept of transnational Chineseness 2.0 that is digitised, modern and triumphal. As this literature rarely discusses internet use, I use this concept to revisit Chinese transnationality by highlighting the role of digitised transborder practices in shaping it.

Namely, I examine how this cross-border Chinese flexibility discussed in the existing studies is now built upon, performed through and sometimes regulated by, the various internet-related practices of these migrant users. I also use this second generation of conceptualisation of transnational Chineseness to position this study in a new set of global political economic conditions. This study revisits the ways in which Chinese transnationalism can be understood with the rise of mainland China intertwined with information technology and proposes a remodeled map of Chinese transnationalism and modernity. This re-centres the role of the PRC state and the mainland and thus challenges the claim of hyperflexibility of Chinese migrants to evade state power in the age of globalisation and digitisation.

This focus on Chinese modernity and migrants' relation with it inevitably means other issues critical to the informants' migratory experiences may not be included in the research scope. The ways in which the Chinese migrants develop relationships with contacts outside their homeland and friends and colleagues of other ethnicities are not the main focus in the formation of the research question although it should be acknowledged that they all have implications on how Chinese subjectivities are formed and performed among the informants.

## **1.2. Research questions**

The overarching research question is twofold. First, what role does internet use play in migrants' experiences of rising Chinese modernity? Secondly, what kind of transnational subjectivity is produced through this process?

I pursue the question in offline-grounded, institutional settings. I focus on three

institutional aspects of migrants' internet use, family, government and ethnic community. Institutions such as family, government and ethnic community are the key fields where migrants connect with their homeland and articulate the meaning of Chineseness. These institutions are grounded in social spaces wider than the networked environment but are increasingly mediated by internet use. Thus the two research questions can be elaborated as follows:

First, what do the informants do with the internet in these institutions? In ethnic organisations, what is the role of the internet in making and maintaining today's ethnic sociality both locally and transnationally? As to government, how do the migrants use the internet to contact the PRC state and, also, how does the state manage its overseas population via novel use of the internet? On family, how are transnational families maintained through internet-mediated forms of intimacy and care labour? And, what are its impacts on the formation and power balance in the family sphere?

Secondly, how is Chinese modernity imagined through this digitised process of accessing the social, economic, political and familial resources in China? Whereas the first question explores the functional role of internet use in accessing China, this second question centres around the symbolic role of it. What subjectivity then emerges through this process of digitised transborder connections?

### **1.3. The context: the political and economic structure**

Chinese migrants are a timely case for the research agenda of modernity.<sup>3</sup> Since the

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<sup>3</sup> I use the terms migrant group, migrants or migration to refer to recent immigrants. This is to be

late 1980s, mainland China has experienced a series of political changes with accompanying rapid economic development. Following the last decades of development, the past few years saw several major economic, political and cultural events through which China attempted to renegotiate its position in the world order. This effort to bring China into the ‘global core’ through events in recent year makes it a significant research object for the proposed research question.

### **1.3.1. Rising nationalism**

As a result of China’s modern history and its economic reform in the past two decades nationalistic sentiment has been growing. Since the early 1990s, the decline of communism and the end of the cold war has led to intensified Chinese nationalism in the form of anti-West sentiments (Li 1997; Zhang 1997). This nationalistic discourse is reflected in many cultural sources such as the popular book *China Can Say No* (Song et al. 1996) which calls for a collective antagonism towards America and the West among political elites and intelligentsia. This nationalistic sentiment has been widely theorised as a response to the wounded national pride in its modern history (Zhao 1998).

A decade later, rapid capital accumulation since the reform in the late 1980s has further brought about a sense of economic success which then leads to greater

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distinguished from the term diaspora which I adopt to refer to a broader theme. While some authors tend to use transnationals, diaspora and migrants synonymously, I use diaspora to discuss not only recent immigrants but also to include two to three generations after migration and also to imply relations not only with the home country but also with all others from that country wherever they are in the world. The key concerns and assumptions regarding the Chinese overseas are largely different in transnationalism studies, diaspora studies and ethnic and migration studies, although they are also intimately linked. In this sense, this is not a diaspora study but a study on migrants in transnationalism, which will be further discussed in chapter 2.

national confidence. The popular geopolitical discourse has shifted from the perception of China as resisting the dominant power of the West to one that positions China as a global power that threatens it. This perception of China and international relations is also increasingly prevalent in the Western academia and popular culture (see for example Jacques 2009; Peerenboom 2007).

This is the context where this study is embedded. This research is based on a year of fieldwork starting in the summer of 2008 when the Beijing Olympics took place and the Western-based financial industry was about to witness an economic downturn that is, according to many, most significant in the living memory. These events serve as a highlighter of the broader political economy of China's rise and of the above-discussed national sentiments shaped not only at present but through a longer-lasting historical process. The fieldwork is underlined by a Chinese optimism among the overseas Chinese about the power struggle with the West expressed through the informants' articulations of these events.

The year of 2008 was a nationalistic year among Chinese around the world. In the early summer, the earthquake in Sichuan province caught the attention of global Chinese communities. Fund-raising events and various related efforts were made not only within mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, but also involved ethnic Chinese communities in Western Europe, North American and Southeastern Asia. This perceived cohesion among global Chinese remained significant during the Summer Olympics in Beijing later in 2008. From the torch relay in London to collective game watching activities in pubs and other public spaces, the Beijing Olympics served as a binding element that brought together London's Chinese

communities which organised various gatherings and group actions both online and offline during this time period.

Globally broadcasted through a wide range of media including the internet, the Beijing Olympics became a field where Chinese nationalistic sentiments were carefully tailored into a demonstration of China's modernity. Research suggested that the media strategy of the PRC before and during the Beijing Olympics emphasised China as a modern state with advanced technology to sustain the world games in a digital and high-tech age (Ren 2008; Xu 2006). Moreover, this international sports event was turned into a channel by the People's Republic of China (PRC) to promote a modernised image of today's China not only to the world but also to Chinese in mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Tibet and other overseas Chinese. It is found that whilst both the international version and Chinese version of the official media releases tend to portray China as a modern state, the Chinese version is particularly about national pride and government efficiency (Xu 2006). This emphasis on media may serve as a device of governmentality to promote national unity and the binding force that brings together rather divided Chinese around the globe.

### **1.3.2. The economic downturn**

These sentiments about the confidence in the global stage were further highlighted by the failure of the global financial market. In the autumn of 2008, the leading firms in New York's Wall Street witnessed a major financial collapse, which then quickly spread to the banking and other industries around the world. Largely caused by predatory lending practices of the banking system and the deregulation of financial markets by governments, this financial crisis is widely read as a sign of a

malfunctioning capitalism. Global political leaders defined the crisis as a ‘crisis of capitalism’ in several international meetings, including the World Economic Forum (Weber 2009).

This financial crisis is further identified as a failed Western capitalism by leaders from the developing world, including the Caribbean, Iran, Russia and many others (Weber 2009, The Times 2008). Leaders of the newly emerging economies attacked Western governments and their market logics and seized the opportunity to assert their role in global economy as key players. China was no exception. During the fieldwork period, G20 took place in London where China’s prime minister, Wen Jiabao reportedly identified China as a great power in today’s bipolar world order ‘with China and America the only two matter’ (The Economist 2009: 39). In the meantime, as labour markets elsewhere, Britain experienced a significant drop in employment, which led to a tightened approach to its immigration policy and border control. This, together with a strengthening Chinese nationalism, illustrates how a geopolitical shift is envisaged among the informants.

In summary, this study was situated in the year of highlighted Chinese nationalism and professional migrants’ uncertainty about Western labour markets. Yet I do not frame this research merely in the events of 2008. Rather, I position these events as a marker of a wider, longer-existing global political economy and individuals’ perceptions of it. This study of Chinese migrant professionals in London is grounded in a context where they become more confident in China’s economic performance and increasingly unsure and insecure about their position in the labour market in Britain. This declining confidence in Western modernity is particularly significant, for many

informants worked in banking and finance industries in London during the financial crisis that was first initiated in the banking system across the Atlantic.

As illustrated by the findings of this research, these migrants express an increasing desire to sustain social, economic, political and family ties with China, a place they increasingly turn to for a promising career and relatively stable labor market. The informants found themselves constantly negotiating with the changing world geopolitical order in various transnational settings, from their mobility in global job markets to decisions about places of settlement. As a result, what it means and what it takes to be a Chinese professional working in London are rapidly changing. The subjectivity and identity of the Chinese migrants are often caught in the tensions of the recently destabilised relations between Chinese and Western modernity.

#### **1.4. Chinese in Britain**

The migratory patterns of ethnic Chinese in Britain and around the world are also shaped by the changing context of global political economy. The 1990s saw the beginning of a major transformation in Chinese emigration. Whereas Hong Kong-born migrants used to account for the majority of emigrants from greater China, the number of emigrant mainland Chinese has been rising significantly since the late 1990s.

In the case of Britain, according to the Annual Abstract of Statistics, since 1997, mainland Chinese have replaced Hong Kong migrants and become the largest group to be accepted for settlement among all ethnic Chinese in the UK (Luk 2006).<sup>4</sup> This

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<sup>4</sup> Although, in the 2001 Census, Hong Kong is still the birthplace of most ethnic Chinese in Britain.

changing nature of the Chinese migrants can be found not only in Britain but also in other popular destinations, including North America and other European countries.

This shifting pattern of migration has several reasons. On the one hand, the number of migrants from Hong Kong has dropped since 1997, which is a function of the regime shift in Hong Kong that further loosens the migratory tie between Britain and Hong Kong. On the other hand, the significant growth in migrants from mainland China is shaped by its economic and political transformations. First, increasing emigration in mainland China is a political consequence of PRC's policy towards a more liberal state (Xiang 2003). The reforms began in 1978 when the emigration law in China was liberalised. Moreover, since the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, the PRC has adopted a more progressive strategy to integrate itself to the world economy. The increasing volume of the border-crossing capital and population can be seen as a direct result of this approach (Dai 2003).

Secondly, the new economic approach of the PRC has led to the growing number of a certain types of emigration from mainland China to Western countries. In the context of the UK, earlier mainland Chinese were largely migrant workers and undocumented labourers from Guangdong and Zhejiang. The new wave of migration from mainland China includes well-educated professionals who largely emigrated from the wealthy coastal areas and, at first, came to the UK for higher education. This is often understood as a result of the fact that the wealthy families in the coastal areas benefit most from the Chinese economic growth and start to be able to afford to send their children to a Western country for education (Liang and Morooka 2004). Moreover, the

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Among those identifying themselves as Chinese in the 2001 Census, 29% are Hong Kong born, 25% are England born, 19% are born in mainland China, 8% Malaysia, 4% Vietnam, 3% Singapore, 2.4 Scotland, 2% Taiwan, 0.9% Wales and 0.1% Northern Ireland.

PRC government also encourages its citizens to receive higher education in the West through various policies that intend to facilitate the emigration of labour in high-technology sectors to the West and its return – in the hope that they enhance the international exchange of capital, technology and knowledge (Dai 2003; Luk 2006).

Thirdly, in the receiving country, multinational corporations, free-flowing capital and closer commercial connections between countries have led to large-scale migration in recent decades. Policies released by the states that attract foreign human capital to supply the local labour market have become a common theme in the era of globalisation. In the UK, before the 1990s, the majority of Chinese migrants were those from Hong Kong who migrated through their pre-existing kinship and family networks in the UK with concentration in the catering industry, which is largely a result of the colonial connection between Hong Kong and the UK (Cheng 1996, Parker 1994). The labour market was largely closed during this time period.

Under the Labour Government of the 1990s, the UK labour market was reopened to highly skilled immigrants to meet skill shortages and to increase the competitiveness of the British economy (Salt and Clarke 2005, Luk 2006). It is since this time that the large recent volume of Chinese migrants has sought advanced studies and participation in the white collar labor market, particularly for the mainlanders who, compared to their counterparts from Hong Kong, previously lacked the colonial ties with the UK as a migratory route. As a result, there has been an influx of Chinese migrants from the mainland increasingly concentrated in the middle class strata particularly among this group (Luk 2006).

This changing face of Chinese migrants, from Hong Kong Chinese restaurant workers to students and white-collar mainlanders, is also reflected in the landscape in London. It is estimated the total population of Chinese in Britain is over 400,000 and almost one third of them concentrate in London (ONS 2006). Just like the landscape of Chineseness in Vancouver where the old Chinatown has been joined by other neighbourhoods in which a fleet of high rise towers represent Canadian Chineseness (Ley 2010), London's space of Chineseness is diversifying. The Chinese 'ethnic urban space' has long been associated with Chinatown where Chinese shops, restaurants and other economic activities are boasted in largely ethnicised buildings (Figure 1.3). Chinese workers in the foods and catering business have concentrated in this area for decades, the majority of whom are of Hong Kong Chinese descent.<sup>5</sup>

Recently, in addition to Chinatown, Chineseness is increasingly associated with a different urban setting in London. Canary Wharf is such a space (Figure 1.4). A financial centre with skyscrapers boasting several European headquarters of banks, professional services firms and media companies, the urban space of Canary Wharf symbolises a modern capitalism and professionalism which is symbolically and functionally distinctive from Chinatown. During the collapse of property markets in 2009, China Investment Corporation, a sovereign wealth fund of China, became one of the two main shareholders of Songbird Estates, which owns 60% of commercial property in Canary Wharf (Guardian 2009). It is also reported that compared to ever-popular property in upmarket areas of Kensington and Chelsea, Chinese buyers invest largely in property in Canary Wharf, around a quarter of who are buying for their own use for around 100,000 Chinese students in the UK (Evening Standard

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<sup>5</sup> Although, it should be noted that Chinese is the least residentially concentrated group in Britain and in London (Guardian 2008). According to the 1991 Census, they also lived furthest from where they worked.

2011), A significant number of these students migrate as a result of mainland China's recent prosperity and these mainland Chinese students eventually become professionals and integrated into the city-job industries (Figure 1.5).

This changing urban geography of Chineseness is evident in the mobility pattern of the informants in this research, professionals who first arrived as students and mostly work in the financial industry and other commercial services firms. While also socialising in London's Chinatown, these Chinese migrants largely live, work and spend leisure and social life near Canary Wharf.



Figure 1.3. London Chinatown

Source: [home.comcast.net](http://home.comcast.net)



Figure 1.4. London's Canary Wharf

Source: [http://themccoeysoflondon.blogspot.com/2010\\_06\\_01\\_archive.html](http://themccoeysoflondon.blogspot.com/2010_06_01_archive.html)

## **1.5. The informants: why this group**

### **1.5.1. An invisible group**

This research focuses on migrants from mainland China working as white-collar professionals – the demographic recently emerged as a product of the opened up Chinese economy, its closer interactions with Western capitalism and the immigration policies and economic strategies of the UK.

Yet it is a less visible group in the earlier literature on the Chinese population. Key texts on Chinese in the UK, mostly published before the late 1990s, tend to focus on those from Hong Kong who were the majority of this group before the rising number of migrants from the mainland. Moreover, previous research tend to focus on Chinese migrants in less skilled industries partly because it has long been associated with the catering business and small manual jobs since the first influx in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In studies based in the UK, Chinese migrants are more often constructed as a group of underprivileged workers seeking citizenship in a Western country to advance their deprived economic condition, which leaves the professionals less examined.

On the one hand, studies often focus on workers in the catering business and portray them as village residents coming to a global city for better income (Benton and Pieke 1998; Cheng 1996; Lynn 1982; Ng 1968; Pieke et al. 2004; Watson 1977). On the other hand, although census data include white collar Chinese, they usually do not include data on Chinese students whose stay is considered only transitory (Luk 2006). In fact, the rate of Chinese students studying in the UK returning to China is reported to be low. A large number of this group takes up employment in Britain after the completion of their studies as part of the results of UK's policy on highly skilled immigrants in recent years (Luk 2006).

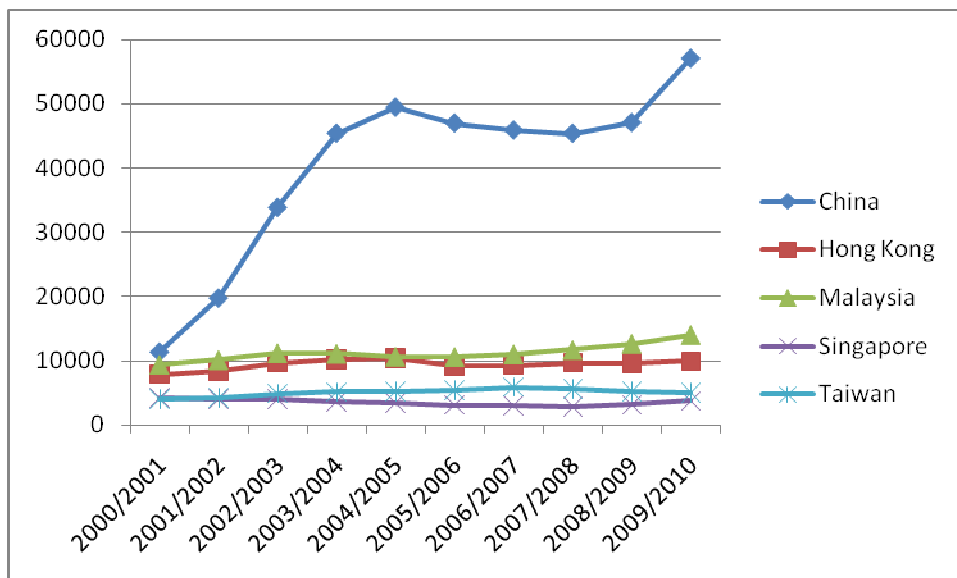


Figure 1.5. Students of Higher Education in Britain by Place of Domicile

Source: HESA

### **1.5.2. The technological environment**

I focus on the mainland Chinese professionals not only because they are less visible in existing Chinese studies but also because it is a group of significant internet users for their dependence on the internet and advanced digital literacy. These migrants are well-educated, mostly graduated from a good UK university and filling up ‘city jobs’, including IT, accounting, banking, law, consulting and many others. They are mostly under 35, considering the liberalisation of emigration in mainland China is only recent. Their advanced digital literacy can be seen as a direct result of the training in UK’s higher education and their everyday technological uses in workplace.

The informants are immersed in an environment of a variety of advanced internet technologies. The findings of the fieldwork indicate that this technological environment can be characterised in three ways. First, the adopted internet tools are primarily those of the Web 2.0 generation.<sup>6</sup> The most often used internet tools include emails, social networking sites, blogs, instant messaging, online telephone and video conferencing. The online environments they are immersed in are largely interactive and characterised by the features of Web 2.0 tools; that is, user sharing, user generated and user autonomy.

Secondly, the informants’ internet use can also be understood as blurring the physical boundary of internet-mediated experiences. They tend not to limit the idea of internet use to a personal computer at home but discuss uses of portable devices when I

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<sup>6</sup> Web 2.0 is a term that is used widely in internet research to describe the new generation of World Wide Web that, compared with their predecessors, serve as a more open platform to enhance creativity and encourage collaboration and interactions among users (O’Reilly 2004).

enquired about their daily use of the internet. This fieldwork is grounded in an environment where the popularity of wireless connection and the rising use of smartphones in the UK have redefined the geography of internet use. In 2007, a survey shows that among those who had access to the internet in the last three months, 18% of the interviewees had used wireless connection and laptops to go online, 18% of them had access the internet by mobile phones (via either 3G or GPRS), and 4% had used other handheld computers (i.e. PDAs and palmpods) (National Statistics 2007). This renewed geography of internet use engenders a new articulation of the relation between place and internet use among the migrants.

Thirdly, these tech-savvy migrants' internet use is transnational. They not only utilise the internet to build connections within Britain but also rely on it for cultivating transnational ties with China and places around the world. The internet becomes the primary tool for the Chinese migrants to connect with China-based friends, family, business partners, officials and others. This transnational communication on the internet is made possible partly by China's policy of 'informationisation'.

The Chinese government initiated programmes that promoted ICT development as part of its attempt to pursue scientific and technological modernisation two decades ago. Since the early 1990s, the project of 'informationisation' in parallel with industrialisation has been the key project in Chinese government's economic policies; namely, a project promoting the growth of the information industry and the modernisation of its domestic market (Dai 2003). As part of the government's project of modernisation and development, ICT application, IT industries and digital literacy are enhanced particularly among the coastal commercial areas where the majority of

the informants are from.

Right before the fieldwork started, China overtook the US and became the country with the world's most broadband users (Wray 2007). This rapidly developing technological environment in China enables the informants to build and maintain social contact with friends, families and business partners in their homeland, particularly among the young, male users. Although, it should be noted that there are still limitations of the informationisation and significant digital divide in China that structure transnational communication using the internet, which I will further discussed in later chapters.

### **1.5.3. Scope**

In summary, I examine internet use of migrants with the scope specified as follows. Firstly, by Chinese migrants, I refer to mainland Chinese professionals who have largely been absent in earlier generations of the Chinese population in Britain. Secondly, on internet use, I did not limit the observation to wired computers in offices, homes and internet cafes, but include networked devices that allow mobile use of the internet, including laptops, palmtops, PDAs and mobile phones. The internet tools I include in the interviews and I focus on in my daily fieldwork observations highlight the fact that the research is conducted in an era of Web 2.0. Except for email, the internet tools the informants discussed with me are mostly applications that emerged in recent years, including weblogs, video sharing sites, social networking sites and other web platforms.

## **1.6. Chapter outlines**

The thesis includes the following chapters. Chapter 2 offers a literature review that identifies the study's theoretical position in the current discussion of transnationalism, modernity, and internet and technology. With the interdisciplinary nature of this research, this chapter draws on theories and empirical studies from a wide range of disciplines, and synthesises discussions from various research areas, thus highlighting the theoretical location of the study.

Chapter 3 discusses methodology. It starts with an in-depth examination of the ethnographic methods adopted in existing internet research and how this research fits into this literature. I will then reflect on my access to the field, the composition of the informants and my own positionality.

Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7 demonstrate the main results of the research, with Chapter 4, 5, and 6 discussing three institutions respectively, and Chapter 7 offering the geography of the informants' transnational practices around the internet. Chapter 4 draws on Wittel's (2001) concept of network sociality to discuss guanxi practices among Chinese knowledge migration in order to theorise the internet-embedded associations for Chinese professionals. It illustrates how the Chinese migrants view the internet as a symbol of modernity and utilise it to build social ties within co-ethnic networks that provides access to the rising Chinese economic prosperity.

Drawing on Foucault's (1991) conception of governmentality and biopower, Chapter 5 explores the strengthened connection between the Chinese government and its

overseas population as the government and the Chinese migrants start to use the internet to maintain contact with each other. On the one hand, it discusses several novel ways in which governmentality is extended across border. These novel uses of the internet by the Chinese government to attract overseas human capital highlight how China's relation to Western capitalism is envisaged. The PRC state constructs a celebratory discourse of modern Chinese nationalism underlying its digital platforms for overseas talent. On the other hand, the informants' accounts of their relation to Chinese and Western modernity can be identified through their diverse uses of the internet to contact the Chinese government.

Chapter 6 deals with the critical role of internet use in maintaining today's transnational families. It demonstrates how the exclusive use of the internet to contact transnational family members has challenged the structure of existing gender norms and kinship system. Because of digital divides, some family members are less likely to be included in a digitally-networked modernity. This chapter offers an example of how the internet, as a tool and a symbol of modernity, is unevenly distributed between the genders and generations in a transnational setting.

After discussing three institutions and before concluding, Chapter 7 offers an in-depth account of the geography of being a modern transnational subject digitally. From contacting family members, socialising with co-ethnics to connecting with government officials, this chapter aims to map these internet-mediated transnational practices, and delineate a space of such practices that is not limited to online environments but demonstrates innovative ways in which the distinction between online and offline world interacts. In so doing, I again highlight the theoretical

perspective underlying the approach of offline ethnography and argue for attention to this method in the literature on migration and the internet.

Finally, Chapter 8 summarises the findings in previous chapters and links them with the key argument of this research. That is, an emerging form of a subjectivity of modernity among transnational Chinese professionals – a subjectivity that is primarily performed, produced, and regulated through internet use in the settings of various transnational institutions.

## **Chapter 2. Migrants' internet use: An interdisciplinary research area**

The research topic of migration and the internet has been explored in a wide range of literatures, from migration studies, internet studies to media and cultural studies. These research areas are interdisciplinary and include works from a variety of social sciences and humanities. In this chapter, I will begin with a discussion of the emerging literature on diasporic internet use, revealing what we know so far and examine its key findings, debates and methodologies. I will then discuss different approaches to migration studies and identify the perspective that is least adopted in diasporic internet studies; that is, a transnational approach.

Secondly, I will discuss the contribution this study seeks to make to the literature on diasporic internet studies – by bringing in the research theme of transnational modernity and by adopting a geographically-grounded approach. I will bring to the discussion of diasporic internet use the literature on transnational Chinese modernity that is largely rooted in human geography, positioning this study in the theories of alternative modernity and transnational Chinese capitalism. Finally, I summarise the ideas of an offline-grounded perspective in relation to the theorisation of networked technology in geography and wider social sciences.

### **2.1. Diasporic media use: what we know so far**

It has been suggested that media are useful in constructing a collective sense of belonging. Earlier studies have found the critical role of print media in producing a simultaneous imagination of time that enables a shared sense of national belonging

(Anderson 1983). More recently, the role of satellite TV, films, VCD and radio in mediating collectiveness and identity has received attention as a result of their popularity in contemporary societies (Billig 1995; Gillespie 1995).

Media are particularly important for diasporic users for their potential of border-crossing transmission. They reconstruct the definitions of geography and boundary by way of mobile privatisation, a mechanism that allows one to stay at home while going abroad (Moore 1993). Empirical studies have examined diasporic media use from a wide range of perspectives. Some studies analyse the representation of diasporas in mainstream TV in the host countries and the reception of the audience who articulate identity and belonging through the viewing process (Alia and Bull 2005; Cottle 2000; Gillespie 1995; Karim 2003). Several authors also explore diasporas' own media platforms, such as each ethnic group's TV channel, ethnic newspapers and other small media including DVD and VCD. Naficy (2003) analyses the multi-lingual, cosmopolitan and multicultural contents of Middle Eastern TV channels consumed in Los Angeles. Santis (2003) similarly investigates the infrastructure of transnational TV channels, focusing on how the Latin American cable systems capitalise on the Spanish-speaking viewers in the US.

Compared with TV, VCD and DVD, the emergence of internet use has further engendered various forms of cultural experiences and identities among diasporic individuals. Many studies have emerged in recent years to discuss the significance of internet use in a transnational setting. These studies on diasporas and their internet use are often referred to as digital diaspora studies or virtual diaspora studies (Brinkerhoff 2009; Laguerre 2010). They generally examine the emergence of online interactions

among users who have no or little social ties outside the virtual world, thus illuminating the social patterns the internet has brought to diasporas and transnationalism. In a review article on the concept of digital diaspora, Laguerre (2010: 49) wrote,

By virtual diaspora, I mean the use of cyberspace by immigrants or descendants of an immigrant group for the purpose of participating or engaging in online interactional transactions. Such virtual interaction can be with members of the diasporic group living in the same foreign country or in other countries, with individuals or entities in the homeland, or with nonmembers of the group in the hostland or elsewhere. By extension, virtual diaspora is the cyberexpansion of real diaspora.

These studies on diasporas' internet use centre on several different themes. Firstly, a predominant number of studies view diasporic online community as a central field where these individuals manage the crisis of identification brought by the migration of people, ideas and cultures (Bernal 2006; Brinkerhoff 2009, 2010; Chan 2010; Chopra 2006; Enteen 2006; Franklin 2001, 2003, 2004; Gajjala 2010; Gibau 2010; Ignacio, 2006; Kim 2003; Lieberman 2003; Mallagaprada 2006; Mandaville 2003; Mitra 2005, 2006; Odumosu and Eglash 2010; Oiarzbal 2010; Plaza 2010; Tsaliki 2003; Tynes 2007; Qiu 2003 among others). They analyse online texts and images through which diasporic users interact with other members in the same virtual community, such as diasporic websites, newsgroups, forums and other forms of online spaces.

Diasporic experiences are characterised by the conflict between the sense of belonging to some place(s) they are from and to other place(s) where they settle down (Clifford 1997; Cohen 2008; Gilroy 1993). Situated between sending and receiving places, diasporic cultures are constantly caught in tension between home and abroad,

and the local and the global. These studies discuss how users' discussions and interactions construct the meaning of being diasporic, users' postcolonial experiences, the pains brought by being away from homeland, and their experiences of integrating into the host society.

These studies find that diasporic identity formed and performed within the online space both strengthens a sense of belonging to the home culture and facilitates an identity that hybridises their home culture with the cultural tradition in the adopting country. Online websites and newsgroups bring together geographically dispersed diasporic individuals who are otherwise disconnected (Bernal 2006; Brinkerhoff 2009; Chopra 2006; Franklin 2001; Ignacio 2006; Mallapraga 2006; Mitra 2005, 2006). Discussions in online diasporic spaces also function to integrate a home identity with a cultural identity of the adopting culture (Brinkerhoff 2009; Franklin 2001).

Some of these authors have identified a postmodern formation of identity in the narratives of members of diasporic online communities. While identity is often associated with long-term sense of belonging and group solidarity (Hogg 1992; Hogg and Abrams 1993), several recent cultural trends, such as consumerism and globalisation, have destabilised the relation between social groups and individuals. It is argued that, in the late modern era, identity has come to be viewed as dynamic, temporary, and fragmented (Baudrillard, 1988; Hebdige, 1989; Jameson, 1991; Thompson 1992). This disrupted stability of identity is found significant in the online discussion of diasporic status among users (Ignacio 2006).

These studies also found that several key elements are intertwined with the formation

of a diasporic identity, including race, class, and gender identities (Ignacio, 2006; Gonzalez and Rodriguez 2003; Nguyen 2003; Varghese 2003). That is, for users in diasporic virtual communities, being a diasporic individual online simultaneously assigns a specific gender role, a class consciousness, and a racial category to the user.

A second research agenda in the existing literature of diasporic internet use has focused on the role of the internet in increasing group cohesion and strengthening solidarity among diasporic individuals. Unlike the individualistic communicative mode offered by TV, VCD, and DVD that allows only one-way communication, it is suggested that the internet brings together the users/audience and enables mutual communication among them, which produces a sense of community and strengthens group cohesion among geographically distant members (Rheingold 1993).

By applying this theory of social cohesion of online community to diaspora studies, empirical studies suggest that diasporas' use of the internet produces greater solidarity, reinforcing the in-group cohesion of diasporas and bridging diasporas with those in their homeland in several social arenas. On the solidarity of migrants' economic lives, migrants from the same origin are found to use co-ethnic online communication to establish social ties that enhance social and economic capital by facilitating job searching and participation in the labour market of the host countries (Montgomery 2008). On religious solidarity, networked environments are also used by diasporic individuals for collective religious activities, such as long-distance ritual practices, cyber pilgrimages, and other religiously motivated undertakings (Helland 2007).

Thirdly, closely linked to Rheingold's conception of virtual community, diasporic

internet studies also explore nation-building practices on the internet, particularly among marginalised groups. This is evident in the proliferation of social grouping among internet users not able to form their own countries (see Alonso and Arzoz 2010 for the Basque diaspora; Bernal 2010 for the Eritrean diaspora; Shichor 2010 on the case of Uyghur; King 2003 for the case of the Rhodesian diaspora; Santianni 2003 for the Tibetan diaspora).

For these ‘nations without states’, there are no political institutions that help develop diasporas’ identity. This leads to the rise of an internet-mediated activist commons where ‘a digital diaspora can transform into a political community and incite the uprising of more engaged political communities by means of activism’ (Alonson and Arzoz 2010:71). A digital diaspora without state goes beyond contributing to discussion of identity and nationalistic sentiments and forms a cybernetic activist commons.

Fourthly, besides building nation and nationalism, several studies further link diasporic internet use to more general political actions and discuss the concept of public sphere. As Appadurai (1996: 10) wrote,

[T]he work of [electronic communication] is not only a cultural fact. It is deeply connected to politics. ... The diasporic public spheres that such encounters create are no longer, marginal, and exceptional. They are part of the cultural dynamics of in most countries and continents.

Diasporic internet studies have adopted two different theorisations of the online political participation of diasporic individuals. Parker and Song (2006) examine how the Chinese diaspora is politicised by internet use to engage with political affairs in

Britain. This study demonstrates how internet use serves to bridge this geographically dispersed group, enables collective discussions of their lives in Britain, and thus enhances political awareness among one of the least politically active groups in the UK. While Parker and Song adopt a national scale framework and focus on migrants' political participation in the receiving society, other authors adopt a transnational perspective that looks at diasporas' participation in political affairs in their homelands or at a global level. Yang (2003) examines portal sites and Bulletin Board System (BBS) visited by both the Chinese in mainland China and in North America, exploring the formation of an online 'transnational public sphere'. The Chinese diaspora's use of the internet to intervene in mainland Chinese politics is relatively free from the PRC's constant surveillance of media and political issues. It is also used in politicising Chinese around the world to intervene in the marginal status of Chinese in Southeast Asian countries (Ong 2006). This transborder synergy of users who are politicalised to participate in public discussions is also evident in the case of the Haiti and Eritrean transnational communities (Bernal 2006; Parham 2004).

Studies that adopt the two different approaches, national scale and cross-border scale, tend to agree on the fact that diasporas' online discussion of public issues are highly democratised because participants have a high degree of control over the direction of discussions (Bernal 2006; Parham 2004; Parker and Song 2006; Yang 2003). However, it should be noted that, as a result of diverse linguistic practices within a diaspora, there is still potential limitation in the internet's democratising potential in terms of communicative efficiency and exclusion. For example, in certain diasporic online forums, the discussions posted in English serve to exclude non-English speakers and produce unbalanced power relations between diasporic individuals with differentiated

English proficiency (Parham 2004).

Finally, an emerging literature explores how the internet aids in migrants' everyday adaptation in the host society. Focusing on Chinese migrants in Singapore, Chen and Choi (2011) adopt the concept of computer-mediated social support (CMSS) to examine how exchanges on the internet among international migrants plays a key role in assisting their integration. They identify four types of support: (a) informational support that offers advice online; (b) emotional support that soothes the feelings of being diasporic through online discussions; (c) tangible support which advertises tangible needs on the internet and seek exchange of materials; and (d) companionship support which seeks a feeling of getting together. This approach examines emotional and material adaptation in post-migration lives with the use of online interactions.

In summary, the existing diasporic internet studies centre on four key aspects of diasporic online communities, from the online discussions of identity and what it means to be diaspora, co-ethnic religious and social cohesion, nation-building initiatives, general political actions to social support for adaptation. These studies analyse texts and images in networked communities and largely adopt an online-based approach. This present study adds to this literature by adopting an offline method and by introducing another research agenda into the discussion of diasporic internet use; that is, the digital formation of modernity.

### **2.2.A transnational perspective**

Studies of diasporic internet use have been underlined by different perspectives of migration. The international movement of people has been discussed in a number of

intimately linked scholarships each of which have its key concerns and its own imagery regarding the experience of cross-border movement – diaspora studies, transnationalism studies and ethnic and migration research.<sup>7</sup> It is often maintained that these bodies of work distinguish from each other for the different bounded entities their scopes focus on. This research, however, not so much views diaspora, transnational communities and ethnic groups as distinct entities but views them more as different analytical angles, or, as Brubaker (2005) suggests, different idioms, stances and claims.

### **2.2.1. Ethnic minority studies**

In this sense, this is not an ethnic minority study. One approach to studying today's transborder movement of people is to focus on their integration to the host society. The integration approach is primarily rooted in American ethnic and migration studies that at first sought to understand how migrant groups eventually become part of the mainstream culture of the receiving country (see for example Park 1928; Warner and Srole 1945; Gans 1973; Gordon 1964; Sandberg 1973). More recent studies in this tradition have identified multiple possibilities of migrants' adaptation and no longer portray them as assimilating into one single mainstream culture. From educational achievement, social mobility to food, music and culture, it is found that migrants may not adopt a linear pattern of integrating into the mainstream but instead acquire social, economic and cultural skills from the co-ethnic community in the destination country

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<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that the boundary between these bodies of work is never clear-cut. These scholarships are intimately linked. For example, diasporas are largely transnational. Diasporalists examine each ethnic/cultural group dispersed and yet linked across the world. The linkages between diasporic individuals are thus transnational in nature. The literature on diasporas has been developed in close relation to the discussion of postcolonialism, transnationalism and globalisation (Tololyan 2006). However, many still maintain a solid distinction between the scholarship of transnationalism and that of diaspora studies as their subjects, key concerns and the imageries of being away and belonging significantly differ from each other (Vertovec 2009).

(Portes and Zhou 1993; Alba and Nee 1997; St-Hilaire's 2002). Yet, the core research questions in this literature continue to adopt a national-scale framework that understands migration as a domestic affair.

### **2.2.2. Transnationalism**

This present study does not adopt a national-level framework but draws on the literature of transnationalism in conceptualising moving individuals. The narrative on integration starting from initial relative poverty, hard work and steady upward mobility exercises considerable sways in the US and elsewhere (Ley 2010). According to Ley, arrival is no longer linked to a linear progression from struggle, settlement to assimilation into the middle class sector of the destination country. Migration is now characterised by its temporary stay and strategic mobility decisions which often leads to rapid monetary gains and global circulation of capital. Like the ways the concept of arrival has been challenged in recent years, the word return, in a similar vein, has been increasingly disassociated from long-term settlement but serves also as a flexible tactic to succeed in the global age (Ley and Kobayashi 2004). In 2005 the UN's Global Commission on International Migration identified a new trend: whereas the former paradigm of migration indicates permanent migrant settlement, this is now giving way to a new pattern of temporary and circular migration.

Since the 1990s, with neoliberal market logics and advanced communication technology and transportation, there has been increasing academic attention paid to various forms of contact between migrants and the people, institutions, and cultures of their home countries and of other parts of the world. The literature on transnationalism rises to explore the cross-border dimension (Basch et al. 1994;

Hannerz 1996; Guarnizo et al. 1999; Landolt et al. 1999; Schiller et al. 1992).

Compared with ethnic and migration studies, this literature adopts a transborder framework which examines migrant groups' cultural, economic and social practices beyond the territorial boundary of a nation-state. These studies problematise the focus on the host country and argue that immigrants should not be understood merely as static citizens in one single country. They are builders of networks across the globe where nodes and flows are dynamic. This literature not only examines transnational linkages through multinational companies and capital flows. It also explores transnationalism from below, thus investigating how individual moves and utilises cross-border social networks under the global structure of capitalism (Portes et al. 1999) and how individual's flexible use of citizenship and cross-border non-governmental organisation may undercut the authority of the state (Ong 1999; Smith 2001).

Whereas the early studies of transnationalism emerged from the discipline of anthropology that predominantly focuses on migrant communities, the concept of transnationalism has broadened to construct a second wave of research focus. From transmigrants, global religious networks, multinational business operations to translocal terrorism networks, transnationality is now associated with a wider spectrum of border-crossing organisation of people, culture, work and capital (Rogers 2005; see also Blunt 2007).

Geographers play a key role in the formation of the literature on transnationalism. As space and place are the central elements in transnational practices, social and cultural

geographers engage with various forms of border-crossing flows, from the migration of people, trans-border activities in global cities, to the international trade, investment and networks of corporations.

The cases of China and the Asia-Pacific have been discussed in geographers' works. It is found that the landscape of cities in South East Asia and in coastal China, due to the PRC's economic reform, is largely transformed by trans-border flows of capital, culture, and people (for the case of Malaysia see Bunnell 2004; on Shenzhen Cartier 2002; Southern China Cartier 2001; IT industry in coastal China Coe et al. 2003).

Geographers also explore the transformation of Western cities that are popular destinations of migrants and capital from China. The built environment of Vancouver, for example, is shaped by networks between Hong Kong and Canada. Investigating economic activities and governing practices in both Hong Kong and Vancouver, studies have found that transnational business elites from Hong Kong invest in the real estate industry in Vancouver reconfigure the local racial and cultural structure and link the state of the receiving country closely to that of the sending one (Olds 2001; Ley 2010; Mitchell 2004).

Geographers also explore another form of the spatial formation of transnationalism and locate it in the setting of family. Waters (2002) examines the 'astronaut family' as a migration strategy among Hong Kong and Taiwanese transnationals where one parent, mostly fathers, stays in Asia earning and the other parent and children are relocated abroad to receive education. This is because Western higher education is widely read as cultural capital that may potentially contribute to the children's and the

families' accumulation of capital in the global age (Waters 2006, 2007).

In summary, this study draws on the approach of transnationalism in geographical and other social scientific studies. This study analyses not only cultural practices within the territorial borders of the UK, but also explores how they are connected to events, communities and social ties that are organised transnationally. This transnational approach is useful in studying the arena of digital technology uses of migrants, for transnationality is the central feature of these technologies.

Moreover, transnationality is particularly significant for studies of highly-skilled migrants. Instead of seeking permanent settlement in an adopting country, it is portrayed that their border-crossing movement is a mere strategy for individuals to enhance their career path and for corporations to maximise profits in the global era (Beaverstock 1996; Iredale 2001). In the case of the outflows of highly-skilled migrants from the Asia-Pacific region, state policies also contribute to mobility among this group as attracting overseas professionals back to their home countries becomes a critical strategy to battle the global brain drain (Iredale 2000). As a result, these professionals move between countries, build transnational networks and bring capital and knowledge to different locations, thus foregrounding the centrality of transnationality among this group.

### **2.2.3. Diaspora studies**

While focusing on transnational affairs, this study distinguishes itself from a diaspora perspective. The literature on transnationalism is increasingly linked with diaspora studies and is often adopted by scholars of diaspora to explore the global connections

within a diasporic group. They are increasingly used interchangeably in many works. However, there are reasons why the literature on transnationalism can be distinguished from a diaspora perspective. First of all, whereas a transnational perspective focuses on flexibility, temporality and circulation, diaspora studies emphasise one group in dispersal with strong shared linkage to the homeland.

A diaspora approach, although examining transnational affairs, focuses on one national group scattered all around the world. It stresses not only its connection with co-ethnics in the homeland but also the similarities and solidarity with group members in other parts of the world. In this sense, this study is not a diaspora study which often focuses on emigrants as two or more generations after migration and as a group in dispersal who, despite the diverse contexts of the receiving societies, can be understood as one analytical unit.

Secondly, the literature of transnationalism has expanded to address not only migrants and their offspring away from the homeland but include a wider range of globally mobile subjects and objects – global terrorist networks, transborder business practices, world religious networks, NGOs, globally circulated cultures and capital in a city and so on. The keywords and central issues in transnational studies – flexibility, multiple linkages and transient junctions are by no means synonyms of those in diaspora research, which are return, homeland, cross-border ethnic solidarity and belonging.

In his widely cited work, Safran (1991) defines diaspora as an expatriate community in dispersal from one centre or two or three regions, that believes a full acceptance or assimilation into the host society is impossible and that collectively constructs the

homeland as the ideal place to return (see also Dufoix 2003; Tololyan 2005). Like Safran's works, the earliest studies on diasporas centre on the idea of home and homeland and emerged as a response to the US-based ethnic and migration studies that pays little attention to the cases and contexts of diasporic and exile communities. Diaspora is a term rooted in the Greek concept of the scattering of people who are in exile and away from their ancestral land. It was first applied to the experiences of the Jewish population and then gradually expanded to include a wider variety of dispersed groups.

Later studies on diasporas sought to broaden this research agenda and include a wider variety of what it means to be diasporic. Cohen (2008) develops a typology that divides the concept into the classic notion of diaspora (Jewish), victim diaspora (African and Armenian), labour and imperial diasporas (British and Indian), trade and business diasporas (Chinese and Lebanese). The idea of diasporas has thus developed from a result of a traumatising historic event to include different categories of people – expatriates, expellees, and refugees. More recently, neoliberalism has further widened the variety of diasporic groups, including guest workers, transborder entrepreneurs, business expatriates and students.

While touching on more diverse contexts, it is generally agreed that the term diaspora refers to a number of key characteristics – dispersion around the world, homeland as a source of identity and value and boundary maintenance between this group and their host society (Brubaker 2005). This serves to depict groups with diverse composition as collectively longing for one destination. This position is hence problematised in the way it imagines culture, identity and ethnicity. As Ang (2001:30) in *On Not Speaking*

*Chinese* wrote, 'Chinese identity becomes confined to essentialist and absolute notions of Chineseness, the source of which can only originate from China, to which the ethnicized Chinese subject must adhere to acquire the stamp of 'authenticity'.

This study does not adopt a scope that brings together Chinese around the world nor does it conceptualise the Chinese community in London as part of a wider, global Chineseness. In this sense it is not a diaspora study which adopts a somewhat deterritorialised perspective to portray the Chinese professionals in London as bonding closely with other Chinese who have been contextualised and localised in other parts of the world.

#### **2.2.4. The stance of digital diaspora research and its account of Chinese communities**

The literature on diasporic internet studies or 'digital diaspora studies', as termed by its key authors, has largely been dominated by a diaspora approach as its name suggests. From identity building, the articulation of the pain and difficulty in integrating into the host society to a cross-border political synergy, these online discussions surround the conceptualisation of the users as a dispersed group of the same origin who are now able to reunite with the aid of the transborder technology of the internet. It coincides with the central thesis of diaspora studies that inquires into the identification and in-group solidarity among an ethnic, cultural or religious group scattering across geographical distances.

The perspective of national-scale ethnic and migration studies informs relatively few studies in the literature of travelling groups and their internet use. The CMSS approach that examines how migrants seek social and material support to adapt to the

host country is an example (for example Chen and Choi 2011 on Chinese migrants in Singapore). Another example is Parker and Song's (2006) examination of how the Britain-based Chinese migrants are politicised to participate in the local public affairs through co-ethnic online interaction.

Both Chen and Choi (2011) and Parker and Song (2006) examine the context of Chinese communities. Other studies on overseas Chinese and the internet adopt a diasporist perspective and argue for a 'diasporic public sphere' online among Chinese in different locales, contexts and nation-states (Chan 2010). The online space is perceived as a technologically-enabled opportunity for the previously disconnected and yet strongly cohesive group to form political solidarity. Chan's work envisions a public sphere for world Chinese to engage with the same political actions collectively. These concepts again highlight cohesion and solidarity among ethnic Chinese around the globe, reifying the homogenising power of the concept of diaspora.

Ong's (2006) work further explains why a diaspora approach is popular in the literature of migrant groups' internet use. It examines how the political oppression of Chinese in Southeast Asia receives attention and aid online from Chinese around the globe. Focusing on the website for this activism, Global Huaren, Ong highlights how 'information technologies play a big role in engendering feelings and channeling desires for a grand unifying project of global ethnicity' (p. 60). Cyber platforms allow anonymous users around the world with vastly diverse histories and migratory roots to gather and identify with the same roots, thus explaining the popularity of the diaspora perspective in studies of migrant groups' internet use.

Yet, Ong warns about the risk of the use of diaspora in a digital age. The online-united cosmopolitan Chinese around the globe are predominantly from an elite stratum – venture capitalists, financiers, entrepreneurs or other knowledge workers. To form an online solidarity among this stratum risks constructing the offline ‘natives’ in the home country as the Other and silencing them in the digital age, as the event on Global Huaren suggests.

A need for a new perspective thus emerges as a result of this risk, together with the fact that existing studies on internet use of migrant groups are predominantly underscored by a diasporist discourse, and, to a lesser extent, a national-scale approach. Thus this study seeks to add to the literature of diasporic internet studies with a perspective of transnational affairs and transborder linkages. Yet it does not unite Chinese users around the globe and, by being immersed in the London-based Chinese migrants’ daily city lives, it avoids depicting co-ethnic users as a globally-cohesive group on the internet. In so doing, this study provides an alternative to the binary portrait of the internet-using, cosmopolitan elites free flowing around the globe versus the excluded ‘natives’.

### **2.3. Subjectivity**

The literature on diasporic internet use has been built upon the concept of subjectivity. Subjectivity often refers to conscious and unconscious emotions in migrants’ various social settings. It evokes the idea of the positioning of the ‘self’. As Woodward (1997) wrote, ‘the concept of subjectivity [that] allows for an exploration of the feelings which are brought and the personal investment which is made in positions of identity and of the reason why we are attached to particular identities’ (p.39).

The discussion of subjectivity in diaspora studies often centres on a 'double consciousness'. In the context of the African diaspora across the Atlantics and the Asian diaspora in Britain, subjectivity comes from being 'in but not of the West' (Gilroy 1993; Gillespie 1995: 17). As a result, any diasporic culture is always in the process of hybridisation, synchronisation, and creolisation. As Gilroy (1993) wrote in a key text in diasporic subjectivity research, *The Black Atlantic*, 'preoccupation with the striking doubleness that results from this unique position – in an expanded West but not completely of it – is a definitive characteristic of the intellectual history of the black Atlantic' (p. 58).

Subjectivity is often understood as formed through and conditioned by social structure – a conceptualisation that is adopted in this research. Particularly highlighted by poststructuralists, the idea of subjectivity and the production of the self is understood to be inseparable from social power beyond the individual. As Michel Foucault (1980) suggests, 'power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives' (p. 39). This challenges the conceptualisation of subjectivity as a given – something that one spontaneously generates. Rather, the production of the self and one's subjectivity is understood to be inseparable from power beyond the individual.

This perspective is adopted to explore subjectivity in transnational settings in a number of case studies. Ong (2004, 2006) adopts a Foucauldian perspective and explores how subjectivities of Chinese in North America and South East Asia are

formed and complicated through trans-Pacific networks and governing techniques of both the sending and receiving states. Outside the scholarship of overseas Chinese studies, this Foucauldian approach to transnational subject formation has also been applied to the analysis of Americanisation through transborder flows. Grewal (2005) illuminates how the transnational circulation of people and goods and international practices of human rights have functioned as 'instruments of governmentality' that shape the relations between the West and the non-West and, hence, the mobile subjects between the two. In a similar vein, Mitchell (2006) explores the ways in which immigrant and ethnic minority subjectivity is formed through discourses of citizenship, multiculturalism and social belonging used in educational institutions. Focusing on the key institutional settings in migrants' daily life, this study examines the ways in which the 'technology of citizenship' is utilised to produce normalised immigrant subjectivity.

The formulation of my research question is inspired by this conception of subjectivity that highlights its vulnerability to power, social structure and wider global order. Although I do not view my research as a Foucauldian study, this research foregrounds the multiplicity and plasticity of subjectivity and identifies social forces that play a key role in migrants' subject making. The central thesis in this study explores the ways in which an emerging Chinese subjectivity is coined through a transnational process, and views the internet as opening up a field for these transnational encounters and border-crossing power struggles that reconfigure transnational subjectivity. In particular, it illustrates how a Chinese transnational subjectivity that is tech-savvy, modern and confident about its homeland is produced and embedded in the process of internet-centred transborder encounters with family, state and co-ethnic bonding.

## **2.4. Linking subjectivity to modernity**

This research illuminates the ways in which transnational Chinese seek to articulate, perform and position the self in relation to China's rising visibility as a global power through their various internet practices. In so doing, it links subjectivity to the political economy of China's rising modernity where the subjects are situated. Thus it links subjectivity to the research agenda of modernity.

Modernity is a key concept in this thesis. This research elucidates modernity not in a macroscopic fashion. Neither is it a study of the global structure of capitalism. It examines the micro-level everyday experience of modernity among transnationals.

While theories of modernity mainly take a macroscopic structural examination of what constitutes the modern, this study adopts a microscopic approach to modernity; namely, the subjectivity, articulation and lived experiences of it. I highlight Pred and Watts's (1992) approach to modernity and the everyday experiences of individuals situated in it that explores 'some form of cultural contestation, some form of struggle over meaning deriving from the experience of new material circumstances and new power relation embedded rules, from the experience of disjunction and discontinuity, from the experience of the modern shockingly displacing the traditional, in a word, from the experience of modernity' (p 73).

The seemingly macro, objective political economy of rising China is absorbed into the very micro everyday subjective living experience of the transnationals. The subjectivity of being a Chinese transnational professional is being reconfigured,

reworked and sometimes contested through their daily encounter with Chinese modernity at work, in leisure settings, in family communication, through their contact with states and so on.

I focus on the internet-mediated forms of these encounters as today's transnationalism is largely built upon digitalised linkages and digitally-bridged apartness. This research views the informants' internet use as symbolic practices and cultural experiences through which they make sense of Chinese modernity and positioning themselves in it. Imageries of the home country, the world and the self are thus produced, negotiated and performed through internet-related practices.

## **2.5. On many modernities**

Classical theories of modernity emerged early last century as Western Europe first saw industrialisation and a rising capitalism. As a synthesis of a wide range of social phenomena, modernity is discussed in classical social studies in different ways. According to Max Weber, modernity can be found in societies where the scientific replaces the sacred and bureaucracy substitutes for preexisting social organisations (Tambiah 2000). Following Weber and other social theorists, discussions of modernity developed in the 1950s. A broader account of modernity refers to 'industrialization, urbanization, and technically advanced communication media; capitalist market economy; the formation of modern nation-states and national collectivities; and an accompanying cultural program and patterning' (Tambiah 2000:165).

Among these works, there seem to be an implied geography. The world systems theory developed predominantly by Marxists is an example. It seeks to map the world

and divide it into an industrialised, democratic core, the underprivileged periphery, and the in-between semi-periphery countries with preliminary development (Wallerstein 1979). The non-Western areas in this theorisation are understood to follow the lead of the modernised states and will eventually develop into advanced industrial economies and rational cultural entities like their Western counterparts.

In these theorisations, it is implied that the mode of modernity, first beginning in Western Europe, is the only mode of modernity and will be gradually adopted by the rest of the world. Non-Western areas are often depicted as places where development is hindered by their traditional, non-Western cultural paradigms, and can pursue modernisation only through westernisation and relinquishing tradition. For example, on Chinese modernisation, Weber (1966) argued that the cultural tradition of Confucianism obstructs the development of capitalism in the area which implicitly assumes that modernity cannot be obtained unless disenchantment – the elimination of the traditional cultural logics – is achieved.

In addition to the classical modernity theories and the neo Marxists' take on it, the more recent approach, the theories of late modernity, also largely presumes the above geography of modernity. Giddens in his *Consequences of Modernity* (1990) provides compelling accounts of the (Western) late modernity. This work envisages 'modernity is inherently globalizing' (p. 63). It implies a binary theorisation of the global and the local by describing the relation between globalisation and modernity as oppositional dynamics. That is, globalisation across time and space leads to the anxieties on local identity and the arrival of (Western) modernity is conceptualised primarily as suppressing the local nationalism. Globalisation is thus portrayed as modernity

spreading from the West into a global scale.

This implied geography in the theories on the globalisation of late modernity is criticised for its lack of attention to culture (e.g. Thrift 1996). Whilst Giddens's work examines the socio-institutional aspects of modernity on a global scale, it rarely provides an in-depth discussion of each 'Other' culture where the Western culture arrives through everyday banal cultural encounters which cannot be reduced to one generalised pattern of the decline of localism (Robertson 1992).

This monolithic thinking about modernity is challenged by geographers who argue for attention to the variation in space and time regarding the arrival the modern. Taylor (1999) analyses the spatiality and temporality of modernity by delineating a geohistorical account of it. It uses a plural thinking in understanding modernities and identify three prime modernities; namely, 17<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century Dutch merchantile modernity, 18<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century British industril modernity and 20<sup>th</sup> century American consumer modernity. Each of them, according to Taylor, is developed to spread beyond the borders of its country of origin through force or through political or economic 'non-coercive leadership based on social emulation' (p. 40). This attention to the spatial and temporal variations provides an analytical perspective that distinguishes different modes and logics within the blanket concept of modernity. Yet, it should be noted that the focus of this theorisation is still on a Western-based geohistorical setting. It is unclear how and where the 'other' modernities – the non-prime modernities – are positioned in this theory of the spatiality and temporality of modernity.

The implied geography of a focus on the West and a binary distinction between the West and the rest has been increasingly problematised in recent decades. Gilroy (1993), like Taylor, also challenges the singular thinking of modernity but further argues for the inclusion of the non-white, non-Western histories. In *The Black Atlantics*, he calls for a re-writing of the theory of modernity by subverting a linear progress of modernity based on the white, Western history.

Economies such as the Caribbean, East Asia, Latin America and East Europe also emerged with their own unique trajectories, each of which mix their modernising projects with the local historical and cultural contexts. Authors have identified these emerging areas as ‘alternative modernities’ or ‘multiple modernities’ to highlight the fact that the pattern of modernisation is never singular (Ong 1999; Eisenstadt 2000; Feenberg 1995; Gaonkar 1999; Tambiah 2000; Tu 2000). They argue that the case of the alternative modernities demonstrates that modernisation does not necessarily coincide with either assimilation to the West or the resistance to it. It also does not necessarily mean that scientific knowledge will inevitably replace traditional culture and dominate people’s understanding of the world.

## **2.4 Chinese transnationalism as modernity**

Alongside the research of the Hindu India, Islamic Middle East and Buddhist Southeast Asia, the theorisation of alternative modernity is widely applied to discuss the Confucian China and East Asia and its diasporas. A literature of modernity among the Chinese transnationals has emerged to apply the concept of alternative modernity to a transnational setting. From petty business persons, skilled professionals to tycoons of multinational firms, these Chinese transnational subjects seek to maximise

their capital gains through flexible linkages to multiple nation-states (Hamilton 1996; Ley 2010; Mitchell 1997, 2004; Olds 1998; Ong 1999; Nonini and Ong 1997; Waters 2005, 2006 among others). This is conceptualised as ‘Chinese transnationalism as alternative modernity’ (Nonini and Ong 1997) or ‘overseas Chinese capitalism’ (Hamilton 1996). Chinese transnationals function to sustain modernity that has its own logics, histories, patterns and cultural traditions and that disrupts the Westerncentric imagery of modern subjects.

This thesis draws on this scholarship and explores transnational Chinese as modern subjects. Yet, it distinguishes itself from this body of work in several ways. Firstly, I seek to add to the literature of Chinese transnationalism as alternative modernity by foregrounding the role of the internet. The need to reconnect with the homeland among the overseas Chinese centralises the role of digital technology. Transborder connections with the mainland are bridged more efficiently with the internet – a technology that becomes ever more important in accumulating capital among the transnationals.

The literature of overseas Chinese capital accumulation and Chinese transnational modernity written in the 1990s rarely touches on the role of the internet. This is in part a result of its less prevalence at the time. More and more conventional transnational linkages are being digitised – family communication, co-ethnic social ties and contact with the state. The map of Chinese modernity is now mediated by internet use, which has implications on distances, locations and disassociations. This study thus seeks to contribute to the literature of Chinese transnational modernity not only by remodeling the concept with an examination of the impacts of mainland

China's rise but also by focusing on the intervention of the internet which has not yet explored in this body of work.

Secondly, it should be noted that many of the key texts in the literature of overseas Chinese capitalism are rooted in the global political economy more than a decade ago. The geography of Chinese transnational modernity – the centres and peripheries of it – has undergone transformations.

While previous studies on the overseas Chinese economic success highlight the case of Hong Kong, Taiwan and their expatriates and explore less the role of the mainlanders (e.g. Hamilton 1996; Ley 2010; Ong 1999), the rise of mainland China has shaped the dynamics of modernity in the context of Chinese transnationalism.

In many studies in this literature written in the 1990s (Hsing 1997; Liu 1997; Ong 1996; Yang 1997), leaving mainland China and becoming transnational is portrayed as modern while staying signifies lack of mobility and lack of opportunity to participate in capitalism and economic success. This may be accurate in the 1990s – a decade after mainland China's economic and political reform and 'opening up'. Yet, the ideas of leaving and its relation to mobility and modernity has changed among Chinese transnationals as mainland China has increasingly been seen as a site of economic prosperity.

Overall, there is an implied map of Chinese transnational modernity in the literature which positions modernity within the transnational migrants and within those from the more advanced economies in the Pacific Rim in particular. This study revisits the

geography of Chinese modernity in the context of the rise of mainland China.

Mainland China has received growing visibility in the discussion of modernity and rising capitalism. Countering Nonini and Ong's map of Chinese modernity, Martin Jacques (2009) reworks the map with the mainland as the core which incorporates wider geopolitical spaces as its periphery. Drawing on China's centuries-old tributary logics, it argues that a sense of superiority will be positioned in the mainland, the core of the 'Middle Kingdom,' while 'Other' sectors of Chineseness are integrated as part of China but periphery to Chinese modernity.

This popular territorial imagery of Chinese modernity is sometimes reaffirmed in the informants' articulation of Chinese modernity and their discursive practices surrounding. The findings of this research suggest a changing imagery of the map of Chinese modernity. Instead of 'Chinese transnationalism as modernity', this research demonstrates how the informants view 'transnationalism as a way to access the rising modernity in mainland China', thus revisiting the conception of modernity, Chineseness and transnationalism with the rise of mainland China.

In so doing, this research revisits Nonini and Ong's argument of hyper-flexibility in the 'third space', and problematises the triumphal discourse about transnationals' ability and willingness to evade and detach itself from the power of nation-states. When theorising 'transnationalism as alternative modernity', Nonini and Ong (1997) identify the site of the development of an alternative modernity not in the West nor in the homeland. There is a third space of modernity. They maintain that modernity may be multi-locale and not fixed to a territory. Nonini and Ong focus on transnational

Chinese who occupy multiple localities and travel constantly as a flexible strategy to accumulate capital.

Each nation-state, in this theorisation of 'ungrounded empires', serves mainly as a disciplinary technology which transnational Chinese seek to evade by building flexible linkages and temporary connections to them (Nonini and Ong 1997; see also Zhou and Tseng 2001). Chinese transnational modernity is not bounded by geopolitical borders according to this theorisation. It suggests that transnationals with multiple geopolitical linkages and bases serve as key actors in modernity and should be explored as deterritorialised – not a modernity in China nor one in Britain but a third space of modernity.

The discourse of a rising mainland Chinese modernity and economic power among the transnationals, although not as evident in the 1990s when the literature of Chinese transnational modernity emerged, has largely challenged this theoretical focus on flexibility and third space. This thesis proposes that Chinese transnationals construct a triumphal discourse about the economic prosperity in mainland China and assert their role and opportunities in it. This discourse underscores an increasing willingness to submit themselves to the disciplinary power of the PRC state among the Chinese transnationals, coupled with their changing attitudes towards return, belonging and settlement and juncture to mainland China and the PRC state.

This discursive construction of mainland Chinese modernity disrupts the focus on the flexibility in the third space in the discussion of modernity and Chinese transnationalism. What it means to be Chinese and modern has therefore changed.

In highlighting this discursive practice of transnational bonding with China, this research draws on the perspective that challenges the often exaggerated agency of migrants in studies of transnationalism. Huang (2008) argues that many articles by scholars of transnationalism adopt a globalisation discourse and celebrate the new found mobility among transmigrants in the global age. This review article foregrounds the role of class distinction in explaining the variation in mobility and agency. It is also argued that trans-Pacific migrants often build cross-border connections mainly for economic and family reasons, lacking political engagement with the nation-states.

Following this critique, this research further challenges the concept of flexible citizenship by politicising Chinese migrants' construction of transnational economic and family connection with their homeland. That is, I adopt the analytical lens through which I understand the economic, social and family ties to the homeland and the discourses underlying them as submitting to the state's disciplinary power in the neoliberal age.

Thirdly, whilst a number of studies on transnational Chinese modernity or alternative modernities highlight the role of culture in sustaining it, this research draws on other authors who pay attention to avoid cultural essentialism. As many studies on modernity and late modernity, including Giddens (1990), are criticised for neglecting the role of culture, it is important to acknowledge culture in theorising multiple modernities. Yet, culturalist views on alternative modernities are often challenged for their tendency towards over-simplification.

Although culturalists' theories of alternative modernities seek to disrupt the Westerncentric notion of modernity, they often reproduce the binary conception of the West versus the rest because an alternative modernity is defined by its non-Western cultural elements. The theorisation of alternative modernities is underlined by a dialectic analysis of the juncture between Western projects and local particulars. In proposing the concept of multiple modernities, it is suggested that '[a] project of modernity is restored on the level of particular traditions' (Arnason 1990: 221).

In the case study of overseas Chinese capitalism, countering Weber's view on Chinese modernity, many studies argue that Confucian practices, such as *guanxi*, function not as an obstruction to economic development but as the key elements that sustain it (Kotkin 1994; Hamilton 1996; Luo 2000; Redding 1995; Worm 1997). In this perspective, to understand these emerging modernities is to develop a cultural rather than acultural theory of modernity. In this view, overseas Chinese are considered the key actors in transnational Chinese modernity in that the subjects sojourn in the West where they acquire scientific knowledge and capitalist skills, but still 'express their instrumental rationality in an inherently Chinese manner – a reverence for Confucian discipline and solidarity and the use of *guanxi* networks' (Ong 1999: 53).

Several authors focus exclusively on the role of culture, namely, Confucianism, in explaining the economic success among expatriate Chinese business persons. Seagrave (1995) traces the business culture of Southeast Asian Chinese capitalism back to cultural values of luck, ethics and personal networks. Similar positions can also be found in many key texts of overseas Chinese business studies in a variety of

countries outside China (Kotkin 1994; Hamilton 1996; Luo 2000; Redding 1995; Worm 1997). Culture is theorised as a monolithic entity which determines a distinct Chinese capitalism.

This emphasis on culture is not only applied to the discussion of overseas Chinese capitalism but is also presented in the recent discussion of China's rising modernity which constructs China as threatening the conventional imagery of the West and the modern. Martin Jacques (2009) argues that China's modernity will emerge not in the form of the nation-state but as a 'civilisation-state'. This concept traces the growing power and significance of contemporary China in the world to its age-old tributary culture and the subsequent sense of superiority. It links China's rise and the trajectory of its rise to values and beliefs and construct culture at present as extensions of its millennia-old values in history. Like other culturalists' view on alternative modernity, this perspective focuses predominantly on the role of values, beliefs and imageries in shaping the trajectory of a modernity.

By conceptualising China's rising modernity and its overseas capitalism as utilising the cultural tradition of Confucianism or tributary system to build an alternative trajectory of modernisation, this perspective risks essentialising and re-orientalising the population. Said (1978) uses the term Orientalism to describe how a binary opposition between the West and its Other is constructed to produce a static image of non-West; that is, an image that portrays all things outside the West as homogeneously exotic and unknown, leaving out the possibility of hybridity. In a similar vein, the focus on Confucianism in the discourse of alternative modernity may serve to reproduce such efforts by describing an emerging modernity as something

homogeneously and essentially distinct from the West. It is noteworthy that migrant groups consist of diverse migratory roots and routes. To portray a group as bearers of one specific traditional culture may mask the diversity and heterogeneity in a group.

The present study is written from a second perspective in the cultural turn in understanding overseas Chinese capitalism which views culture not as the only 'variable' that determines the success of Chinese expatriates but examines the intimate interactions between culture and institutional forces. Ong (1999, 2006), while discussing the importance of *guanxi* culture and Confucian ethics, is critical of grounding Chinese modernity entirely in cultural terms. Instead, Ong locates cultural formations in institutional settings, such as the state. This approach then allows for a more inclusive and dynamic explanation of overseas Chinese modernity.

This thesis views culture not as a given but as situated. Like Aihwa Ong's work, I contextualise culture in institutional settings. Yet, expanding beyond many of Ong's studies that focus on governmentality and the state, I seek to further ground the cultural beliefs of the transnationals in a wider variety of institutions from co-ethnic association to family, thus examining the interlocking impacts of culture and structure in making overseas Chinese modernity. This study examines the arrival of modernity among Chinese transnationals by specifying the context and infrastructure where this particular culture is embedded and contested.

Finally, several key texts in the literature on Chinese transnational modernity or overseas Chinese economic success, including Ong (1999), Nonini and Ong (1997) and Ley (2010) among others, incorporate ethnic Chinese with vastly diverse

historical and geo-political backgrounds in the research scope that adopts an umbrella concept of overseas Chinese capitalism. This research, however, emphasises heterogeneity. I avoid constructing the transnational Chinese as a homogeneous group who succeed in a Western labour market by maintaining a market culture opposite to that of the West's. This study identifies the internal discontent and conflicts within the blanket concept of the Chinese diaspora by elucidating different subsections in terms of different countries/areas of origin and different time of their arrival in the host country.

By focusing on mainland Chinese newcomers, I demonstrate the ways they constantly draw the symbolic boundaries with internet use between themselves and other Chinese sub-ethnicity, such as older generations Hong Kong migrants, Hong Kong newcomers, Singaporeans and so on. This emphasis on geohistorical heterogeneity highlights the various histories, class formations and gender dynamics among different sub-ethnic groups within overseas Chinese and provides the spatiality and temporality of it. I foreground the constant reworking of the boundary between the subgroups within the broader idea of the Chinese diaspora and acknowledge the potential cultural conflicts within it.

## **2.6. Towards a geographically-grounded approach**

In addition to bringing the discussion of modernity into diasporic internet research, this study also seeks to add to the latter literature by noting that the existing diasporic internet research primarily focus on online-based activities. By limiting the observation primarily to online spaces, this approach focuses on the sociality of online diasporic communities, reproducing the binary distinction between the real and the

virtual.

The immersion in diasporic virtual spaces is useful for researchers to obtain in-depth information about online interactions. Yet, in so doing, the intimate relationship between online and offline sociality may be less visible, thus masking the important question of how online practices affect the wider social and cultural structure. Offline based social forces that structure diasporic identity and largely mediated by the internet, such as diasporic communities, transnational families, and states, are left out in existing discussions.

Underlying the emphasis on the online world in existing internet research is a popular conception of the relation between internet technologies and geographical places. As several geographers have pointed out, the online-centered approach often uses the metaphor of 'space' to refer to social activities using the internet, suggesting there is a virtual space parallel to the place-based space. Graham (1998) argues that this conception tends to view what happens online as a substitution of the offline, masking the fusion between virtual and place-based practices. Instead of substitution, it is the co-evolution of media technologies and geographical places that requires further discussion (Graham 1998; Thrift 1996). Inspired by the contribution of these authors, this study is grounded in a geography-centered approach.

There are geographers and other social scientists who touch on the relation between online and offline interaction when studying diasporic internet use. A lot of work written from within geography has challenged the methodological boundary between the online and the onsite (Kitchin 1998; Graham 1998; Taylor 1997).

Cyber-geographers have included face-to-face interviews in primarily online-based research to investigate better the linkage between cyberspace and places (see for example Holloway and Valentine 2001). Furthermore, by identifying the diverse geographical locations of users in the same virtual community and identifying the virtual locations of individuals in the same geographical places, these studies found that geographical proximity is still central to producing the group cohesion of online diasporic communities (Parham 2004; Van Den Bos and Nell 2006). Moreover, digital technologies are found to be appropriated differently by people in different geographical places (Adam and Ghose 2003).

These authors help to highlight the role of geographically-bounded contexts that are largely omitted in the literature of internet technologies. They focus on how geographical identity is reflected and performed online and thus an online-centered research method is employed in most of the research. Yet, the research objects in these studies are primarily online-based diasporic activities – it does not observe users' encounter with the internet from an offline-based method.

These authors have suggested the central role of place-based experiences in internet use by introducing face-to-face interviews and by identifying the proximity of users' geographical locations of each website. Yet, there are plenty of other possible ways in which geography can be researched in the area of diasporic internet studies. One of the critical aspects of them, I would argue, is the offline social institutions which play a central role in migratory experiences and which increasingly adopt the internet as their communication method.

Migrants' daily lives are embedded in a context wider than the virtual world and are shaped in transnational families, migrant communities, governance of both the receiving and sending countries, and other social institutions. These institutions, although largely understood as bounded in an offline context, have experienced fundamental transformation in the digital age and started to use the internet to cultivate migrants' social networks. To understand how migrants' internet use may transform identity, a research question and method set in a given online space reveals only a partial story. It is critical to conduct research in a geographically-bounded research field, and to start from the field and examine how internet use is integrated into the field.

Hence this study argues for a geographically-centred approach. Interactions with these institutions constitute a majority of migrants' daily lives, and being a migrant often means being absorbed into these institutions. I view online activities surrounding the social institutions as extensions of geographically-bounded sociality.

## **2.7. Position in internet research**

This emphasis on social institutions and wider social contexts rather than mere analyses of online texts and images can be linked to the theoretical and methodological position this research adopts in today's internet research. That is, an offline approach that foregrounds the fact that online practices are often intertwined with geographically-bounded contexts, thus arguing against a popular approach to the internet.

As internet research first emerged in the mid 1980s and 1990s, key texts in this field often limited their research practices within online spaces (Rheingold 1993, Turkle 1984, 1995). This methodological choice is informed by the theorisation of the binary distinction

between online sociality and offline everyday social lives. Research interests within that tradition tended to center on the building of online communities that are shared by individuals who are otherwise strangers to each other and understand networked relationships as disconnected and distinct from other users' social lives.

Drawing on authors who criticise this binary theorisation of the virtual and the real, including Castells (2001), Miller and Slater (2000) and Woolgar (2002), this research views online practices as extensions and continuities of offline sociality by developing methods that require researchers to be immersed in both networked and geographically located social spaces. As Woolgar suggests in *Five Rules of Virtuality* (2002), 'the sources of virtual support via the Internet were used together with other resources and became enmeshed into people's social lives, in some cases thereby transcending the boundaries of real and virtual life' (p. 17).

I seek to foreground the role of offline-bounded social institutions in a study of media and subjectivity and treat the technology of the internet as 'continuous with and embedded in other social spaces [and a media that] happen within mundane social structures and relations that they may transform but that they cannot escape into a self-enclosed cyberian apartness' (Miller and Slater 2000: 5).

## **2.8. Position in science and technology studies**

There are several conceptualisations of the internet, each of which are embedded in its distinct approach and methodology. The most popular approach among diasporic internet research views the internet as a cultural product, or more specifically, a text. Studies focusing on the online hypertextual interaction analyse the internet as a media content (Brinkerhoff 2009, 2010; Chan 2010; Chopra 2006; Enteen 2006; Franklin

2001, 2003, 2004; Gajjala 2010; Gibau 2010; Ignacio, 2006; Kim 2003; Lieberman 2003; Mallagaprada 2006; Mandaville 2003; Mitra 2005, 2006; Odumosu and Eglash 2010; Oiarzbal 2010; Plaza 2010; Tsaliki 2003; Tynes 2007; Qiu 2003 among others). Like the contents of television, novels, magazines and films, what is presented in networked spaces is understood to be a popular cultural text whose meanings and underlying discourses require direct analyses. This approach is deeply rooted in cultural studies and is adopted in the above discussed research of diasporic internet users. This approach requires researchers to be immersed in an online environment and analyse words, sounds and images. It perceives the internet as a site for textual analysis through which the ideologies and cultural patterns contained within the text/media can be understood.

This study views the internet not as a text but as an artifact that is embedded in its users' everyday lives wider than the media itself. It looks beyond the bounded space of online environments and investigates how it is socially produced, appropriated and enriched. It is conceptualised in this study as a social product which in turn responds to the social processes outside of it. This approach, not rooted in cultural studies but in science and technology studies, inevitably touches on issues surrounding artifact, society and human agency. It is necessary to identify the ways in which the study conceptualises the artifact – the internet – and how it is related to the social in the research framework.

On understanding the internet as a technology, this study is informed by authors who destabilise the boundary between technology and society, and views the technology of the internet as always social, consisting of the social, and not able to be distinguished from

the social (Bijker and Law 1992; Bowker 1992; MacKenzie and Wajcman 1985; Pinch and Bijker 1987). The approach is grounded in science and technology studies and is often identified as the social construction of technology (SCOT). This theoretical perspective argues against traditional technological determinism which understands social changes as caused by the intrinsic characteristics of a technological artifact rather than views technologies as something socially shaped.

As Bijker and Law (1992) suggests, it is difficult and problematic to distinguish between 'where and how society ends and technology starts as technology and society are always intertwined and work as a 'seamless web' (Bijker & Law 1992: 201). In researching the technology of the internet and its interaction with the social, it is critical to acknowledge that the capacities of this technology are never fixed and are open to human intervention.

This study is informed by this theoretical approach in two other senses. First, on research question, this research is designed to explore how the Chinese migrants' subjectivity is produced, performed and regulated through 'internet use' rather than by 'the internet itself'. In other words, this study explores the social significance of networked behaviours rather than the technology itself, and the 'independent variable' in this study is the social consequence of the technology rather than the artifact.

Secondly, my choice of methodologies is also highlighted by the theoretical perspective that challenges the binary thinking of the social and the technological. I argue that there may be no such thing as 'the internet' for researchers to observe. Rather, more often than not, during participant observation and interviews, researchers attempt to understand and observe 'the internet' through the observation

of the social practices surrounding the internet. Take this present research for example. The research question was at first designed to explore how the use of the internet shapes the patterns of migrants' self-making. Yet, I soon found out that there is no such thing as 'the internet' for me to observe. The networked environments that my subjects visit are always at least partially produced and designed by the subjects through their online social activities.

During the fieldwork period, to understand what the internet is, I observe how they interact with each other with the internet, what people think of as the internet, and what they do to networked environments. All of these activities form part of the internet environment. Throughout this research process, I do not get to identify a clear-cut boundary for 'the internet' - the material or the technology; rather, I can only understand what the internet is through the observation of what people do on and through the internet.

Hence this research is not written as a work of technology determinism or technology optimism. First of all, it does not examine how technology shapes the world but rather how the use of it – the social appropriation of it – interacts with other parts of users' experience. On a related note, it does not conceptualise the internet as inherently socially progressive or backward as there is no such thing as 'the internet' to be observed and analysed. The technology of the internet, I would argue, simply opens up new spaces where existing power structure and social relations can be exercised.

More importantly, the study is not merely premised on the question about whether or not the social world has changed with the invention of the internet. It is, more

significantly, about how the technology is used and perceived among the users; namely, the cultural and symbolic side of the technology. It elucidates the ways in which the symbolic meanings and cultural significance of the internet is produced through and embedded in the temporal and geographical context of the Chinese community in London.

## **2.9. Summary**

This chapter offers a review of a wide range of literatures relevant to this research. In summary, this study is written as a dialogue between two sets of literatures. The first literature is diasporic internet research, which this study adds to in several ways. Firstly, I adopt a transnational perspective in analysing migrants' internet use whereas the literature largely centres on a diaspora approach that theorises online forum as a new space for geographically dispersed individuals with the same origin and culture to gather and strengthen or discuss their shared cultural tradition or pains of being away from home.

Secondly, this research draws on science and technology study and views the internet as a social artifact whereas the literature of diasporic internet studies largely adopts a cultural studies approach which collects data online and analyses them as a text, like other media contents. This is linked to the third point. This research adopts a second-generation conception of the internet, which views the online and the offline as continuous and discards the binary thinking of the virtual and the real that dominates some of diasporic internet studies. Finally, I introduce the research agenda of modernity and Chinese transnational capitalism into this literature, the second literature this research seeks to contribute to.

I contribute to this second literature firstly by examining the role of the internet with empirical evidence, which is less explored in transnationalism studies and Chinese transnational studies. I also highlight the difference between this study and the literature of Chinese transnationalism by arguing for remodeling the geography of Chinese modernity. While existing studies are primarily written in the 1990s, it is critical to re-examine their key arguments in today's political economic structure, especially the rise of the mainland. This study proposes a more territorialised Chinese modernity where migrants, with their internet use, have increasingly submitted to the disciplinary power of the PRC state.

Overall, this study seeks to add to human geography by revisiting two seemingly deterritorialised phenomena – internet use and transnational migration. Highlighting geographers' and other social researchers' works on both transnationalism and communication technologies and the offline-grounded contexts underlying these phenomena, this study bridges the two bodies of work and re-grounds the ungrounded empires.

### **Chapter 3. Methodology: Towards a geographically-grounded internet research**

This chapter discusses the methodology and methods adopted in this research, arguing for a geographically-grounded approach in ethnographic practices surrounding the internet. The previous chapter has offered a theoretical background of the debate between the virtually-grounded and the geographically-informed approach to internet research. This chapter will start from discussing the practical techniques and related tensions a researcher may encounter when collecting data about the internet from a geographically-grounded surrounding. To discuss this, I compare the techniques of this research and those of the existing internet ethnographies. This includes the continuities and disjunctions between traditional and internet-related ethnographies and how my research design addresses these concerns.

I will then delineate the boundary of the field. This study conducts semi-structured interviews and additional participant observation and informal talks during the observation. Most of these interviews were conducted face-to-face although 16 of them were by phone. This study is based in two internet-mediated organisations for mainland Chinese professionals in London with their memberships largely overlapping. I discuss how I entered the field and the implications these research practices may bring to the field relations and findings. Following this, I will provide the demographics of the informants that I focus on. Finally, I will discuss my positionality in the fieldwork — a Taiwanese D.Phil. student conducting research on and with mainland Chinese professionals. To do so, I engage reflexively with my position and discuss how this position may engender epistemological and empirical

tensions and how these tensions are addressed in this research.

### **3.1. Qualitative methods and the challenge of the internet**

Geographers have started to recognise the advantages of the internet as a research tool. It is suggested that internet-based research practices allow a researcher to reach a wider range of participants (Madge 2007). In particular, it reaches socially isolated groups, such as ill and disabled participants, pregnant women and individuals with young children. Also, geographically dispersed groups, such as the Chinese population in London, and internationalised projects, such as diasporic and/or transnational studies can be more easily accessed with online-based interviews, observations and surveys (see also Illingworth 2001; Madge and O'Connor 2002; Hine 2000; Stewart and Stewart and Williams 2005). Yet, there is still 'a gap in the geography literature about qualitative methods in virtual space... and future "Internet research" in social and cultural geography needs to take this into account' (Parr 2002: 87).

As discussed in the previous chapter, most of the studies on diasporic internet use and identity formation conduct online-based ethnography or use online-obtained data as the main source of analyses, including various online texts, images and other forms of online social interactions. This cyber-centrism in analysing diasporic identity has several reasons. The online forums for diasporic users often stimulate in-depth discussions about identity which are less visible in daily offline conversations, helping to highlight diasporic individuals' articulation of their identity formation and senses of belonging. Diasporic individuals are geographically dispersed and hence an online

forum offers them an opportunity to meet and discuss being diasporic together, overcoming the isolating effects of geography (Parker and Song 2006). These increased opportunities for researchers to observe the meanings of being diasporic not only result from the resolved geographical dispersal. The openness and transparency of online spaces also provides access to the field, thus lowering the barriers of entry into the researched area. A researcher may choose either to reveal his or her identity or simply to 'lurk' during the fieldwork to obtain undisturbed data (Hine 2000).

In addition to purely online-based research, a number of studies on internet use are based online but conduct extra face-to-face interviews (Brinkerhoff 2009; Orgad 2006; Turkle 1996). It is suggested that adding face-to-face interviews to a primarily online-base study can be helpful in obtaining 'authentic' information about the previously anonymous internet users for it is widely argued that offline interviews reveal more contextualised details about each informant (Hine 2000; Orgad 2005). Early internet researchers have emphasised that adding personal interviews to online-based ethnography is helpful to obtain an in-depth context that structures the informants' online production of texts and culture and to increase the reliability and validity of a research about a group of online anonymous users (Turkle 1996). Moreover, it is often suggested that when conducting internet-related research, using both offline-based research practices and the online-collected data allows for informants' greater collaboration due to the short and colloquial nature of online communication (Hine 2000; Orgad 2005).

These primarily online-based ethnographies seek to use the offline-obtained information as supplementary data that assist the deciphering of their main research

site – the online community. Compared with this, I do not treat the offline social scenes as my secondary research data but as the primary research field. I use the offline data not to validate what I found online but to examine their interaction with online findings. I observe how online-initiated offline activities are organised and experienced in the city, how internet use emerges as a topic during face-to-face diasporic everyday events, the ways internet products transform the informants' personal spaces, and so on. Instead of adopting an approach of adding extra face-to-face interviews, this study draws on Miller and Slater's (2000) ethnography of the internet. Their research was primarily based in geographically-grounded settings and views what happens in networked environments not as virtual but as extensions of wider, daily-life, offline-based experiences of users.

While Miller and Slater (2000) focused on the places of internet use from offices to internet cafes, in this study, I expand my research outside these personal spaces of internet use, and immerse myself in a wider range of places from informants' living rooms where they use computers, events at conference places which were organised via internet use, to bars and restaurants where they talk and articulate the meanings of internet use. Not limiting myself to places where the informants use the internet, I explore places where the role of the internet is discussed and articulated in a group setting.

Several authors have argued that there are potential distinctions between the nature of online and onsite data. Firstly, it is often argued that while bodily and visual interactions play a significant role in traditional, place-based ethnography, the analysis of online data relies primarily on texts (Madge and O'Connor 2002; Orgad 2006).

There may be significant differences between the two modes of social practices even if they are from the same informant, thus a researcher's observation of an informant may vary largely depending on where they meet.

In her study, Orgad (2006) examines an online community of patients with breast cancer, analysing the textual data in the web spaces and email communication of the community and also conducting face-to-face interviews with some of the informants. Comparing the online and face-to-face data, the author found that whereas her primary understanding of the informants was built on the short, colloquial communication online, they were often challenged by the bodily interactions in the offline situations.

For example, while some patients seem guarded about their experiences of breast cancer online, they may express a high interest in participating in the research after seeing a female researcher engaging in this topic and the body languages may also indicate interest and cooperation during the interviews. Moreover, the presumed socioeconomic status of the informants based on the textual interaction with the informants often contradicts what is observed verbally and visually during the face-to-face interaction. This is partly a result of the different nature of verbal and bodily expression. Also, this is because the impression management of a socially desirable self is relatively easy online.

In my research, this discrepancy between textual and visual data on websites and data collected in face-to-face events may be relatively moderate due to the nature of the sociality of the community I focus on. Whilst Orgad (2006) examines a social group

that is based primarily online and has no offline-based social activities, I explore a Chinese community that moves flexibly between the online and the offline as the members of the web space regularly meet with each others in various face-to-face events. While impression management and identity play allows internet users to produce different practices online (textual expressions) and offline (material bodies), it is often found that this difference largely dissolves when the level of anonymity decreases (Hine 2000; Wynn and Katz 1997).

The informants in my research contact each other initially via short Facebook messages and Googlegroup emails then through face-to-face social events, and move back to the online for continued constant communication. Anonymity is less guaranteed among this social group. As a result, compared to the studies focusing primarily on online-based communities, the discrepancy between the informants' online and offline expression, images, and the articulation of identity is less significant.

Moreover, the dichotomy of online versus offline and textual versus visual maintained in earlier studies may not apply to the internet tools emerging in recent years and adopted by the group I focus on. For example, my informants tend to upload images of themselves onto Facebook, thus mitigating the anonymity of the online space and including a visual and bodily context in the online data. Various videos and digital photos of the informants in their daily lives and in the events held by the Chinese associations can be found on their official websites and Facebook pages, which allows the bodily and the visual to play a central part not only in the offline-based interaction but also in the online data.

The second potential tension caused by including online data in a geographically-grounded study is about locality. Some authors argue that involving both online and onsite data challenges the conventional ethnographic methods which are grounded in a bounded place where a community with a clear-cut boundary produces cultural meanings (Hine 2000). According to these authors, it is essential for an online-cum-onsite data collection to justify its inclusion of two seemingly distinct social spaces in a study. Hine (2000) argues for the use of the concept of multi-sited ethnography in answering this question – a concept that emerged as a response to today's world of globally mobile people and travelling cultures. Challenging the traditional ethnographic idea of the field which often refers to one single located field boundary, multi-sited ethnography argues for attention to the field of relations, connections and networks rather than a fixed geographical location (Hine 2000; Marcus 1995; Strathern 1996). Fieldwork, hence, should include the spaces where the social relations of the researched group occupy rather than a fixed locale where the group physically concentrates because in today's highly mobile world, it would be difficult and problematic to identify such a static field. According to this perspective, it is critical to include the spaces where these social relations are experienced rather than to limit the scope to a single locality whether it is online or offline.

While Hine draws on multi-sited ethnography to justify the research practice of online-cum-onsite research practices, this research further highlights the perspective of Science and Technology Studies of the internet, websites, emails and so on, which views them less as a distinct social space parallel to one grounded in physical places. This study treats them more as a social artifact that is embedded in and produced

through everyday living. This research is grounded in the migrants' urban living spaces in London where they use internet technology, and hence observes their use and production of internet products as part of their daily living. Websites which they use to interact with each other are treated as an integral material culture of their onsite lives in London, like mobile phones or other technology use.

### **3.2. Sites of investigation**

This study is based on semi-structured interviews and participant observation in two main associations for Chinese professionals in London – Xiyu and the Association for Chinese Financial Professionals in UK (CFUK) (see Figures 3.1, 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4). The data include 53 interviews and additional observation and informal talks with wider informants in these associations.<sup>8</sup>

I received the information of events of the associations via Googlegroup, websites or Facebook and analysed their group dynamics on the web. I participated in the web-based sociality of these associations which includes all the web tools the organisations report using, including their Facebook pages, Googlegroup pages and the official organisation websites. I then participated in their gatherings which were advertised in these web spaces and held in various places in London, being immersed in the place-based sociality. The places where they met include a variety of settings, from pubs, bars, restaurants, karaoke places, to seminar and conference rooms in commercial buildings or hotels. I met further members of these associations mainly at these events. During the events, I observed how they maintained contact and established long-term connections with each other; that is, through both further

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<sup>8</sup> See appendix for details of the interviewees.

face-to-face social gatherings and online tools, such as instant messaging services, Googlegroup, and Facebook. I then maintained contact with the informants using the same methods – online tools and more face-to-face events.

Prior to the offline events, most informants only know each other through email exchange and short messages on Facebook. After meeting each other at a party or a networking event, they continue to maintain contact through texts exchange and sharing photos and other images of the offline events using Facebook, Googlegroup and instant messaging services. Further face-to-face interactions are also arranged through various internet uses, including Facebook invitation and messages, discussion forum of the organisation websites, and Googlegroup email list. As a result, the sociality ranging across various online spaces and offline places can be understood as a coherent unity and a continuous process, which requires exploration as a whole.

Regarding the practices of contact with the government, Xiyu and CFUK often function as partnered organisations that assist various Chinese governmental offices, from the local government of several cities to the Chinese embassy in London, to disseminate information and to arrange events among the Chinese professionals in London. I started by paying attention to the information about upcoming events held jointly by Chinese government officials and the organisations. Xiyu and CFUK include the cultivation of close ties with Chinese officials as a key organisational objective. I was immersed in the online spaces where the communication between these officials and the informants took place, including the websites and Facebook pages of Xiyu and CFUK and events pages on Facebook created directly by the government representatives.

Online communications are usually short, colloquial, impersonal messages surrounding the purposes, time and venues of upcoming face-to-face events which are mostly about future opportunities for business partnerships and transnational capital and talent flow. There is less discussion about personal experiences or other in-depth discussion into details about the actual business cooperation as the informants and the officials usually do not know each other prior to the events. While these online platforms are largely open and transparent, the communication between government officials from China and the informants also uses socially-enclosed internet tools, such as one-to-one communicating methods of instant messaging and emails. These tools are particularly important after they have met at the events, exchanged contact information, and the officials have returned to China. I obtained information about these personalised uses of the internet to connect with the representatives of the Chinese state mainly through interviews with the informants rather than my direct observation and immersion in the enclosed online spaces.

As the internet-mediated communication between the informants and the state representatives are often short messages disseminating information about face-to-face events between the two, I also reported details of these events and obtained information regarding their interaction via interviews with the migrants. These were usually events held by the Chinese Embassy or other Chinese government officials from China and took place in various conference venues in London.

On family, I obtained information regarding the informants' practices of family communication mainly from interviews and informal conversations with them. This is

because of the relatively private nature of internet communication with family members and the fact that this communication often takes place in the informants' personal spaces, mostly their homes. In some cases, I observed the informants' internet-mediated communication with family members by staying by their side when they used video-conferencing tools to communicate with families online, such as SKYPE and MSN Messenger. Yet, this only took place when I felt safe to be around the informant at his or her home and when they felt I was trustworthy and invited me to visit where they use the internet to talk to their parents. I also sought to observe other forms of internet-mediated transnational family bonding, such as the informants' weblogs which their family members view and sometimes comment on.<sup>9</sup>

### **3.3. Entering the field**

I found the initial informants by advertising for mainland Chinese professionals in London. I started by sending out messages on Facebook to users listed in the network of London who had a Chinese name and the Facebook groups of the Chinese alumni of universities near London. I received responses from the initial informants which allowed me to conduct the first few interviews. I asked about their participation in any ethnic associations and these working professionals directed me to Xiyu and CFUK, which then became the main site of my research practices and helped identify further

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<sup>9</sup> In addition to the methods discussed here – participant observation and interviews - I have considered adopting a wider range of research practices. Focus groups involve a large number of participants and reveal the dynamics of the community, which is a good way of exploring social networks and the formation of ethnic sociality – a key topic in this research. Yet I found it difficult to assemble a large number of participants for research purposes mainly as a result of the busy lifestyle of these city-based professionals. Alternatively, the events of Xiyu and CFUK provided an opportunity for me to engage a large number of informants at the same time and encouraged group discussions of my questions among the participants in a more informal, leisure-oriented setting. I also considered asking the informants to record what they do with the internet daily and to show me the bookmarks and browsing history of their daily web use. This proved to be unfeasible because of concerns of privacy. Most of the initial informants expressed concerns, directly or indirectly, when asked to do so. I then asked questions about their daily use and most visited web spaces in the interviews and other talks instead.

informants in these organisations.<sup>10</sup>

I used snowball sampling to mingle with informants from Xiyu and CFUK. In so doing, this study adopts a ‘big net’ approach which seeks to mingle with as many relevant informants as possible and then to gradually form stronger trust relations with the key actors in a social phenomenon. This approach ensures a broad range of perspectives before the micro-level interactions begin (Fetterman 1998). I identify two kinds of informants in this study. Firstly, the key informants are those with whom I established stronger trust relation and many of whom are active, key members in CFUK and Xiyu. I immersed in their daily lives for longer hours and more frequently. As a result, they offer more detailed information regarding the Chinese professional associations and insiders’ views on the transborder *guanxi* between Chinese professionals in London and China-based officials. Because of the stronger trust, they also tend to offer more in-depth discussion about the private sphere in migrants’ daily lives, namely, the communication with family and intimate relations. The number of key informants is smaller than the second type of informants, ordinary informants. Ordinary informants, although providing less profound details about institutions, offer a wider range of accounts and diverse perspectives on migrants’ daily lives.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> There is another association for Chinese professionals that some of my initial informants have heard of and that is largely defined by its internet-mediated sociality, the London Alumni Council (UK 海歸同學會). Unlike Xiyu and CFUK which focus on participants primarily based in London, the London Alumni Council is a branch of the Alumni Council which is based in China and aims to link together Chinese alumni from British universities who have returned to China, forming transnational networks for further business opportunities. Whilst it also holds events and forms ties among those in London from time to time, it mainly focuses on networking events in Beijing, the Guandong area, Shanghai, Shenzhen, and Zhejiang. The London Alumni Council only held one London-based event during the fieldwork and sent out online notifications about their upcoming events in China. I did observe the Facebook page of this organisation and participated in its London-based event. However, due to the above reasons and also because of the thinness of the available London-bounded data, they do not form the data presented in the following chapters. Thus I did not include it in the main section of methodology.

<sup>11</sup> Please refer to Appendix for a list of the detailed backgrounds of ten most contacted informants.

Members of Xiyu and CFUK largely overlap. Most of the initial informants have been to both the events of Xiyu and those of CFUK. Both of Xiyu and CFUK organise one or more events every month. Although most informants are more actively involved in one of the organisations than another, they tend to have attended events held by both Xiyu and CFUK or viewed and signed up to the web spaces of both of them.

Communication within these organisations is built primarily upon internet use. A few informants became aware of the associations through word-of-mouth whereas most informants did so via online channels. This includes receiving advertising messages on Facebook, visiting their official websites by clicking on the hyperlink in related web spaces, viewing friends' joining their Facebook groups or participating in their events, and so forth. The membership of these associations is formally obtained via online registration. After joining the associations online, the informants receive information about the upcoming face-to-face events in London and sometimes in China. Members stay connected between these events via email lists, Facebook, and other online tools.

Xiyu and CFUK distinguish themselves from other associations in both their theoretical and empirical features. There are several organisations for the Chinese diaspora in Britain or in London, such as the London Chinatown Chinese association established in 1978, London Chinese Community Centre established in 1980, and the London Chinese Community Network established more recently in 2001. These are mainly designed for and recruit their members from the older generations of migrants, most of whom are Hong Kong Chinese. Many Chinese associations emerged in recent years to attract members of a younger generation. More well-known examples include

the China Innovation and Development Association UK (CIDA), British Chinese Youth Federation, Xiyu and the CFUK, and many other much smaller associations such as British-Based Chinese Network and the London Alumni Council. These associations, compared with the older generation of Chinese associations in Britain, are more media-savvy, most of which have their own websites.

Among these newly emerging associations, Xiyu and the CFUK are similar to each other with membership largely overlapping. They brand themselves as associations for mainland Chinese professionals, thus distinguishing themselves not only by sub-ethnicity and age but also by socio-economic status. As demonstrated in the introduction, this group has been rapid growing in recent years as a result of changing global economic context and the subsequent shifting migratory patterns of the Chinese diaspora. It also has the most exposure to internet-mediated environment and possesses a strong media competency. They also both included in their organisational objectives the cultivation of close ties with the Chinese state and serve as important partnered organisations with the Chinese Embassy in organising events for London's Chinese professionals. Furthermore, they distinguish themselves from other recently-created organisations for the ways their sociality is formed; that is, a wired social bonding that shifts constantly between online and onsite environments.

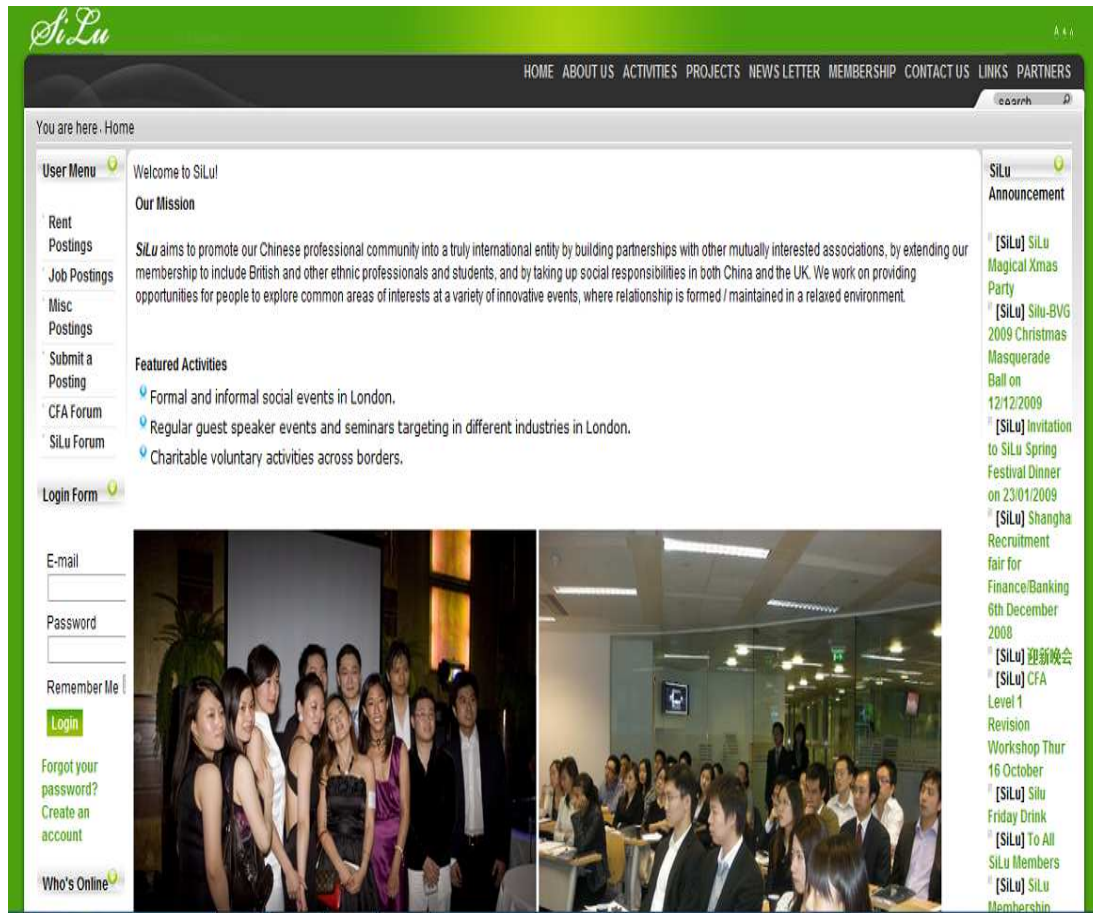


Figure 3.1. Homepage of the official website of Xiyu

facebook



**SILU** 丝路  
— Connecting People —

**Silu - Connecting China**

Wall Info Discussions Photos Events

**Information**

Category:  
Organisations - Non-Profit  
Organisations

Description:  
SILU/丝路 (Silk Route), 英国华人的家

Silu organisation aims to build mutually beneficial relationships among Chinese professionals, and between Chinese and other ethnic communities in the UK, with the intention of increasing awareness and appreciation of different cultures, business practices and achievements.

If you are interested in joining the Silu email lists, please send an email to [member@silu.org.uk](mailto:member@silu.org.uk) with your full name, current school/company, and where you hear about us.

Privacy type:  
Closed: Limited public content.  
Members can see all content.

**Admins**

**Silu 丝路** Dear SILU members,

We are pleased to let you know our affiliate organisation "Young Icebreakers" has offered a number of places to our members to their exclusive 2nd Anniversary dinner.

...  
[See more](#)

**Invitation to Young Icebreakers 2nd Anniversary dinner**  
Thursday, 17 June 2010 at 18:00  
Royal China, Baker Street

09 May at 15:08 · Share · [RSVP to this event](#)

**Silu 丝路** Dear members,

This Friday, Silu monthly drinks will be combined with Jin Zi's leaving drinks.

Location is Pitcher and Piano 200 Bishopsgate, EC2M 4NR

...  
[See more](#)

**Silu monthly drinks / Jin Zi's leaving drinks**  
Friday, 07 May 2010 at 18:00  
Liverpool street

04 May at 00:39 · Share

**George Lin** Dear Members,

Latest photos from our Morgan Stanley event.

Regards,  
...

Figure 3.2. Xiyu Facebook page

Congratulations AcFPU won "2010 Best Global Chinese Financial Elites Award"!

Association of Chinese Financial Professionals (ACFPU) is a non-profit organisation that serves all Chinese working professionals in United Kingdom through unique educational, professional development and social initiatives. >>

Partnership



Venue: Futian Shangri-la Hotel, Shenzhen, China

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The forum brings together Asia's foremost thought leaders and business executives to share insights and form a powerful networking opportunity. We are delighted to host many high profile speakers this year including:

Figure 3.3. Homepage of CFUK official website



Figure 3.4. CFUK Facebook page

### 3.4. Demographics and representativeness

The members of the two associations are mostly young adults who have left university in recent years. They take up a wide variety of city jobs, from engineers, legal services, business consulting, accounting, to finance, with the majority of the participants in accounting and finance. The age of the informants who participated in interviews ranged between 22 and 36. This relatively young age may be a result of the migratory history of the Chinese population in Britain — from Hong Kong Chinese in the food and trade industry to the mainland Chinese students for UK's higher

education arriving only in the past decade.

Also, the members of these organisations consist mainly of mainland Chinese. On rare occasions, I encountered members born in Hong Kong or the second generation in the events. My initial informants, who were born in mainland China, directed me to the organisations whose majority of members were born in mainland China and came to the UK in the late 1990s or early to mid 2000s. The spoken language used during the face-to-face events is Mandarin, a language used by mainland Chinese. Yet, they usually use English to communicate on their websites, Googlegroup email lists, Facebook and other online platforms. The language use of Mandarin Chinese is an important marker of the subgroups among the broader community of the Chinese diaspora. There are several long-standing Chinese associations based in London which have members mostly from Hong Kong and hence use Cantonese to communicate – the language popular in Hong Kong, such as the London Chinatown Chinese Association. As the linguistic and cultural practices are different across sub-ethnic groups among overseas Chinese, different subgroups tend to form communities of their own and draw boundary between each other<sup>12</sup>.

These mainland Chinese have diverse migratory routes. Whilst the majority of the informants are first generation migrants who left their family and arrived alone for

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<sup>12</sup> This linguistic difference between old and new Chinese organisations reflects the migratory history of the Chinese diaspora in Britain. Before mainland China's recent economic and social transformation, the majority of Chinese migrating to Britain is Hong Kong Chinese as a result of the colonial past. Hence the ethnic organisations founded decades ago tend to consist mostly of Hong Kong Chinese whereas several recently founded organisations, such as Xiyu and the CFUK, emerged from the need for mainland Chinese newcomers to socialise in a language and culture they are familiar with. As a result, Hong Kong Chinese are largely excluded from ethnic associations like Xiyu and CFUK whilst older Chinese associations for Hong Kong Chinese are less accessible for mainlanders.

higher education, some of the informants migrated with their parents. The majority migrated to Britain directly. Yet, there are also informants who lived, studied or worked in Malaysia, New Zealand and Singapore before they arrived in Britain.

The number of men and women in the fieldwork are approximately the same. When asked about the ratio between male and female members in Xiyu, one of the founders, Karl, told me that it is something between equal number and 60 percent male. Dee, chairwoman of CFUK, suggests that their male members are slightly more than female members, which she attributes to the fact that they focus on financial professionals, an industry where more Chinese men than women work.

Although both Xiyu and CFUK claim to have around one thousand official members, the number of people present at the events they host is usually much smaller. The Xiyu monthly drinks events that are hosted for business networking opportunities in a leisure setting usually attract about 60 members each time, a large number of whom are active members, organisation founders and committee members. As a result, people meet mostly the same members they already met in previous activities. CFUK also regularly hosts seminars about careers information in finance which usually limit their participants to less than 40 and adopt a first-come first-served online registration system. Yet, seasonal or yearly events, such as Xiyu's winter ball or Chinese New Year celebration can involve about 200 participants. The research is based on observation of members' online interaction, participation in face-to-face events and interviews with informants I have met at the events. As a result, it can be inferred that the sample centres on the more active members in these organisations – people who have stronger intent and less limitation to socialise with co-ethnic professionals in

their free time.

In summary, by focusing on internet-using associations for Chinese professionals, this sample represents a group of college-educated, financially stable individuals spending time on internet-mediated ethnic activities. Thus it is not representative of the wider population of Chinese in London. It is not the intention of this study to account for a general picture of Chinese in London or Chinese transnationals. Rather, it is a case study of a specific sub-section of this group; that is, individuals with high digital literacy and leading a mobile lifestyle. This is linked to a common critique of studies of transnationalism in general. Portes et al. (2003) argues that studies on transnationalism consistently focus on immigrants engaging in transnational activities, thus excluding those not involving in these activities. It should be acknowledged that this is a study of transnational activities which selects informants from associations that constantly arrange cross-border events and exchange information with contacts in China. This is also a study of the effect of internet communications which is based on a sample selected because of their membership in an internet-based organisation.

### **3.5.Planning the journey: arriving, leaving and the imagery of home**

The majority of the informants left home alone for education in the UK. Studying abroad in a Western country is widely read among the informants as an exclusive practice among upper-middle class Chinese and a form of cultural capital to signal their social status at the time they migrated, which reaffirms findings in many studies on Chinese students (e.g. Ong 1993; Shen 2005; Waters 2005). In general, a UK degree is valued and portrayed as a status symbol and an advantage for them to start a

career in China in the future.

Yet, it should be noted that the discourse about studying abroad and studying in the UK in particular is changing. Informants generally suggest that *Haigui* (海歸), generally referring to the return migrants from the developed world, bears much less cultural, social and economic power in recent years. As China's economy continues to develop, more and more families can afford to send children to study in the West which leads to the inflation of degrees from Western higher education institutions. While at the time of the late 1990s and early 2000s, having a degree from an English-speaking country largely assured a promising career development in China, studying abroad in the West is increasingly dissociated from a symbolic practice exclusive to the elite stratum. It is maintained among the informants that graduating from a British university is less and less considered a fast track career ladder.

Whilst studying in the English world serves as a status symbol, the choice of a destination country among the English-speaking world further signals the cultural differences and class distinctions. More than one informant told me jokingly about a saying that the best, brightest students go to America on scholarships, the less talented students stay in China and the children of wealthy families come to the UK where funding and public financial support are less available. Whilst Western higher education is widely read as cultural capital and a signifier of social status, this popular saying notes the difference in its funding structure across contexts and how this serves to further make a class distinction among qualifications from different countries. Most of these student migrants arrived in their early to late teens and attended middle to high school education; many of them are independent schools. Others arrived later to attend postgraduate studies.

Some informants migrated not initially for education. Five individuals from Fujian arrived at first to work in ethnic shops and restaurants. Fujian has long been an emigrant province since the mid nineteenth century. During the pre-reform communist regime between the 1950s and early 1980s, Fujian and two other southeastern coastal provinces were the main areas that sent out migrants under the tight control of emigration (Pieke et al. 2004). During the period the main channel of migration was through existing connections with relatives abroad. This tradition of emigration and seeking overseas job opportunities through the chain of transborder social relations remain in Fujian today. All the five Fujianese arrived first as a dependant of their relatives' already in London or as a worker at the shops or restaurants of relatives or family friends. Arriving in their teens, they started working and saving for high school education or diplomas, which then led to a college degree.

There are also a few informants who migrated mainly as a result of their parents' job relocation to London. Some of them migrated with a middle class family and attended schools and finished college with the financial support from their family. Yet, one key informant migrated with her parents who are a Chinese medicine practitioner and a service worker. Although her family was not able to support her college education in London, the informant values college education and chose to work before and during university studies in order to provide funding for her education and for her family.

As what it means to migrate as a student and then a professional in the West is transformed, what it means to return is also changing. The majority of the informants plan to return to China at some point of their life. Chinese familialism and the family

responsibility of care for the aged are most frequently discussed reason for return. Informants generally express the needs to return permanently to their family and parents. The sense to 'return to the roots', as a Chinese saying suggests, is often highlighted in the informants' conversation regarding their future migratory plans.

Whilst the informants highlight the Chinese familialism and the strong sense of family bonding that compels them to return, the use of Chinese familialism varies at different stages of informants' life cycles. While younger single migrants in their twenties tend to plan to return whenever a better job or entrepreneurial opportunity emerges in China, migrants who have formed a family in the UK have a dual role in family responsibilities. Feng is a 33-year-old computer engineer who has married and had an seven-year-old daughter and has obtained settled status in the UK. When explaining his future migratory plans, he emphasises the importance of return, he identifies his responsibility of return and taking care of aging parents in China. Yet, he and his wife plan only to return after his child goes to college and can lead an independent life by herself in the UK. Migratory plans of migrants at a later stage in their life cycle are caught in constant tensions between family responsibilities for different generations.<sup>13</sup>

Besides the conventional reason for return that highlights familialism, informants in this study demonstrate another motive for return migration. The homeland is painted as a place full of economic opportunities which need to be seized at the right time. There is an emphasis on mainland China's prosperity underlying the informants' discussion of the decision of return migration. Many informants explain that staying

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<sup>13</sup> In general, there are no significant difference in plans about return between men and women. A general trend is that younger single migrants tend to express their willingness to return within a few more years of work experiences in London. Married migrants all highlight the potential conflicts between settlement in London and return to China as a result of their dual family responsibilities. Yet, it is noteworthy that all the married migrants I encountered are male.

in London and working as a professional upon completion of their studies is a strategy to develop a more valuable CV that is useful in their career development when they return to China. Some informants were made redundant during or shortly prior to the fieldwork and thus were looking for job openings both in London and in China. Some of them increased the frequencies and length of their visits to China in order to do job searching there or in preparation of return but during the fieldwork none of the informants actually moved back to China that I was aware of.

Underscored by a celebratory narrative that portrays the homeland as a promising place for economic success, a sense of sojourning rather than settlement in London is foregrounded. Many of the informants have been a resident in the UK for over ten years or have worked for more than five years, which according to the naturalisation provisions at the time granted them the right to settle in Britain as citizens. Yet, a large number of them do not intend to apply for a permanent residency or citizenship of the UK. This is because they plan to develop a career trajectory in China and the state of People's Republic of China (PRC) does not operate dual citizenship. Obtaining a UK status may lead to the loss of citizen-related beneficial policies when they return to work or start a business. Others do seek to obtain a UK citizenship or permanent residency. Yet this is often identified not as life-long settlement but merely as a strategy to maximise economic gains. As Ong (1999) suggests in *Flexible Citizenship*, these informants do not consider citizenship an essence of the sense of belonging but rather a tool for them to evade this disciplinary technology of the state that creates flexible connections in multiple nation-states. An informant told me that she wishes to obtain British citizenship as foreign capital is highly valued in China. With British citizenship, she aims flexibly to switch between her cultural and social advantages as

an ethnic Chinese and her political category as a foreigner when she returns to China and starts a business.

However, there are exceptions that disrupt the general pattern of a strong linkage between the perceived rising Chinese modernity and an intention to return. Feng identifies another reason he postpones his return journey. Feng came from Guangzhou, a coastal city among the first few cities that were opened up to overseas investment. Guangzho has developed at a rapid pace since Feng's emigration more than ten years ago. He identifies rising house prices in the city in recent years as a result of deregulated capital both globally and locally. Born in a middle-class family, Feng explained that his parents could not support him financially should he choose to return and require housing in the Guangzhou city. As an engineer, he does not anticipate that on his salary in China he will be able to afford a house to accommodate his family of three. Affordable housing means unmodernised small flats far from the areas of prosperity and job opportunities. Although most of the informants draw on the rising Chinese modernity in forming their plans to return in the near future, the unintended consequences of modernity projects and urbanisation are highlighted to be a key factor that leads to Feng's delayed return.

Another informant, Xue, similarly confirms the adverse effects of the Chinese economic growth on migrants' plan to return. When explaining her concerns regarding return, she cited a Chinese soap opera that was aired and popular at the time of the fieldwork, *Woqiu*, which paints a typical story of a middle-class, dual-income couple in Shanghai who struggles with the ever-rising housing prices and lives in a rented small room in a non-modernised area of the city. She identifies with the role

and discusses how this financial difficulty is complicated by class and gender.

From a middle-class family, Xue's father is the breadwinner in her family working as a college lecturer. Having asked for parental financial support for her postgraduate degree in Britain after her college studies in China, she explains that she hesitates to seek financial help from her family for her return and settlement in Shanghai while this is what many other Xiyu or CFUK members expect to do. This highlights a class distinction in explaining the effects of the rising modernity and urban development on the return journey. Whereas privileged families have access to the modernity project in the homeland by buying into a living in modernised urban spaces, migrants from middle-class families are generally excluded from the imagery of modernity.

This class distinction is further complicated by a gender difference when comparing the story of Feng and Xue. When planning return migration and long-term settlement in China, Xue explains her two options as to settling into a modern living back in Shanghai. Working in Morgan Stanley, a leading investment bank, Xue plans to stay working in London until she has secured required funding for her return to China as a similar position in China may not pay as well and the housing price is rising to beat where she lives in London. She then identifies a second pathway for her to access a Shanghai living; that is, marriage. Her family is encouraging her to consider marriage as a way to settle back to her hometown as in China's coastal cities men are increasingly expected to have owned a property before they get married. This also applies to transnationals in London as many male informants are planning to purchase or have purchased, some with their parents' help, properties in coastal cities or their hometowns in preparation for their future plans for marriage and return migration as a

family. For Xue, marriage with co-ethnics from coastal cities like Shanghai means a secured access to property and settlement. This gendered access to the city-based modernity in China illuminates how the plan of return and the imagery of being modern in the homeland is fragmented. Plans for return and the perceived Chinese modernity are also interwoven differently through various transnational redistributions of class, gender and life cycle.

### **3.6.Ethics**

As Warf (2004) proposes, cyberspace is one of the ‘cutting-edge’ research objects for the geographical community, especially when it is applied in everyday life (see also Graham 2005; Madge 2007). The development and discussion of ethics in such research is still in its infancy. The traditional guidelines of ethics for ethnographies may require further examination.

For instance, the ways in which informed consent can be acquired and what consent means can be different in traditional ethnography and in ethnography that involves networked practices. Ideally, any informant needs to be fully aware of the purpose of the research project and the identity of an ethnographer. A researcher is usually expected to give out a consent form to each informant in order to clarify in written form his or her intention and the range of the research scope (i.e. what the researcher will observe and include in the report). However, in many online settings, it is difficult to obtain written consent from all of the users of a cyberspace, such as viewers of a specific webpage.<sup>14</sup> This may cause the ethical controversy of ‘lurking

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<sup>14</sup> Although in other online environments, obtaining the full list of users and sending out consent form to them is still possible. Email list is an example. It is also possible to send out a consent form to all users of some newsgroup that provides onsite messaging service although it can be less straightforward.

online'; that is, a researcher observing and sometimes participating in an online space without informing the users. Some researchers justify the acts of lurking for data that otherwise cannot be obtained (Glaser et al. 2002 on online racism) and others claim that lurking is important before gaining informed consent to understand the research field (Chen et al. 2004). However, it is also found that leaders of online groups primarily consider researchers' observation without participation unethical and unwelcomed (Chen et al. 2004; see also Madge 2007).

In this present research, informed consent was obtained in two forms. Firstly, this study has the element of traditional ethnographies that involve data collection based on face-to-face sociality. For face-to-face interviews, I gave out a consent letter stating the aims and scope of the research before the interview started. For those who arranged interviews with me via email or Facebook messages, I attached a copy of the consent letter to our communication or stated the purpose and use of the data in the email prior to the interviews. There was also participant observation that took place in various social events where I met and talked to many informants briefly. In these situations, I did not give out a written form of consent but introduced myself as a D.Phil. researcher and explained briefly what my project is and why I was there.

There is a second part of research practices where I immersed myself in an online space and observed what the informants did and how they interacted. An online space can be enclosed or open. For the enclosed cyberspace where all members can be reached by any member of the community, such as Googlegroup, I attached the outlines of my proposed research to its members when I asked for volunteer interviewees at the beginning of my research so that they can be reminded that a new

user will be recording and analysing what they do and say on Google group.

The more ambiguous part is the relatively open cyberspace, including the Facebook groups and official websites of these associations. These are open spaces in the sense that almost everyone, members or not, can view and post comments. Informed consent cannot be obtained from all the contributors and authors of the comments, photos and long articles. In these cases, it is rather blurred as to how far can an ethnographer observe and report in her study. Although not able to obtain consent from all the potential viewers and contributors of these online spaces, I contacted the owners of these spaces; i.e. the chairperson and managers of these organisations, and acquired their consent for me to use sources from these spaces as a part of my study. I also assure anonymity by providing every informant a pseudo name. When including sources from a webpage, email, blog and video-conferencing activities, I do not use source that contain informants' names or other personal data.

It is also essential to examine the public-private divide in the cyberspace. In a traditional ethnography, observing and reporting findings collected from the public domain is generally acceptable whereas results based on subjects' private matters may need further justification. Hence some authors suggest that, similar to the ethic codes in a conventional ethnography, it is acceptable to report data from the public online domain providing anonymity is assured (Hewson et al. 2003). However, whereas the boundary between the private and the public is fuzzy in an offline setting, it can be even more blurred in a networked environment, considering the relative novelty of user's exploration of the online world. For example, it is difficult to determine whether an online conversation between two users in a newsgroup is public or not. It

can be viewed as public because the conversation is accessible to all registered users of the website. Yet, it can also be private as it is found that internet users tend to have the 'illusion of privacy' when conducting online communication in a relatively public space as they do not usually expect lurkers or silent participants (Barnes 2004).

In my research, I draw on the guidelines for research ethics published by the Association of Internet Research (AoIR) (2002) which suggest that it should be viewed as private spaces when users are considered subjects (e.g. chatrooms, MUDs) whereas it can be considered public when users act as authors of the online contents (e.g. webpages, blogs). In this present study, the only online spaces that may pose questions regarding the private/public divide are the Facebook groups' 'walls' and the websites of the associations. These spaces, according to AoIR, can be viewed as public. When using visual and non-visual data in the thesis, I provide anonymity to all users of the Facebook pages of Xiyu and CFUK by removing real names or usernames from the data.

### **3.7.Positionality**

I view all social knowledge as its author's situated understanding which is always shaped and 'biased' by his or her social position. What researchers can do is to be reflexive and honest about their positionality and how it impacts on their field relations and production of analysis. Hence, in this section, I seek to report my fears, hopes and concerns and their impacts surrounding field relations emerging during the research process.

The proximity between the informants' cultural backgrounds and mine requires

further notes on positionality. Being a Taiwan-born student in the UK, I share a number of similar social, cultural and migratory experiences with the informants. Firstly, as I speak Chinese, look like Chinese and have a Chinese last name, I found myself seldom perceived as a total outsider by the Chinese informants in my previous projects and this research. The informants constantly refer to a discourse of Chinese ethnic solidarity when describing the field relations not only among themselves but between them and me. For instance, when I asked for interviews with them or other forms of their participation in my research practices, the informants often express their willingness to help by emphasising that overseas Chinese should help each other.

Secondly, my migratory status also often highlights a mutual understanding in the field relations. I share the experiences of being a foreign student in the UK for higher education with the informants, some of whom even went to the same universities as I did and found out we had mutual friends from school during our initial conversations. When talking about their reasons for migration, future migratory plans, immigration status and other daily experiences of being a migrant, their answers often start with “I am sure you know the feelings...”, assuming our similar migratory situations in the UK.

However, although never fully considered an outsider, I was not perceived as a total member of the community. Both the informants and myself tended to position my role not so much as an insider nor a mere researcher from outside the community but as someone in-between. I did not find myself embraced as an insider in most social scenes due to the fact that they thought of me as merely a short-term visitor. I am a student who was not part of them before my postgraduate studies and shortly will

return to where I am from upon completion, which makes a key element of belonging to a community – long-term and in-depth social relations – less possible. The fact that I am a student rather than a working professional in certain industries in London also means that I am not their main target for business networking which is one of the key purposes for them to socialise in these ethnic associations and in the social scenes where I conducted my research. The status of a student thus marks a boundary between me and my informants.

More importantly, I found that the mainland Chinese informants tended not to perceive me as an entire insider also for another reason. My different linguistic uses, bodily practices, certain principles in personal interactions I use and the subsequent misunderstandings and embarrassments served to signal the fact that I am from Taiwan which is not perceived to be a ‘core’ part of China or ‘their’ part of China and hence signal my marginalised position in a Chinese community.

These differentiating cultural practices are underlined by a geopolitical discourse. The political issue of the independence movement from mainland China of Taiwan emerged in the fieldwork from time to time and constantly shaped the field relations. Partly out of politeness and to avoid being hostile towards my possible political beliefs, the informants usually refer to me as ‘ethnic Chinese’ or ‘cultural Chinese’ (華人, *Hwaren*) rather than ‘political Chinese’ (中國人, *Zongguoren*). While the former is a more inclusive concept that is adopted to describe people who are culturally Chinese and not necessarily citizens of the PRC, including ethnic Chinese in Singapore, Indonesia or other nation-states, the latter is often used exclusively for PRC citizens. When drawing on Chinese solidarity during the fieldwork, the

informants tended to tell me that we *Hwaren* should stick together rather than *Zongguoren*. This choice of word signals not only the informants' politeness in maintaining the field relations but also simultaneously the distance they place between us. In addition to the part of the informants, my own political position also contributes to the distance. The fact that I was born into an extended family that supports Taiwanese independence from mainland China and that refuses to perceive themselves as Chinese also leads to my skeptical perspective of my own Chineseness. As a result, I hesitate to view my interpretation as a 'native perspective'.

This perceived marginality of my position in the Chinese community emerged in the fieldwork constantly appeared and has various impacts on the research. The skepticism about my Chineseness sometimes helped, I would argue, to form a more critical perspective of the concept of the Chinese and the Chinese diaspora. For example, in the study, I argue against an essentialising conceptualisation of the Chinese community. I pay attention to the internal diversity and sometimes conflicts within the problematic category of 'the Chinese', identifying the boundary between different subgroups within the Chinese community and the role of the internet plays in drawing it.

Although maintaining a critical perspective, I avoid an ethnocentric stance in the study of mainland Chinese migrants. Studies on Taiwanese migrants in mainland China have pointed out that these migrants tend to have difficulty identifying themselves with mainland Chinese as the former often associates the latter with less modernisation and even backwardness (Lin 2011). This perspective can widely be found in studies on Chinese culture. For example, in the literature on *guanxi*, several

scholars, particularly western-based ones, have found themselves needing to carefully avoid viewing everything Chinese as irrational and uncivilised and everything western as normative and modern (Kipnis 2002). I would argue that this tendency to criticise practices of non-normative capitalism may risk re-orientalising the researched group. Hence, during the design of interview questions, I avoid structure the study around the exoticity of this group. Throughout the fieldwork, I hesitated to interpret the different political culture and social networking practices of the mainland Chinese as backward and/or non-modern.

Yet, the distance between me, a Taiwanese researcher, and my mainland Chinese informants together with my marginalised Chineseness sometimes still posed difficulties in building field relations, particularly in the early stage of field work. For example, some informants were less likely to talk to me about sentiments about what it means to be Chinese, who gets to count as Chinese or to express strong senses of Chinese nationalism, considering the fact I am from a place where the dominant idea of what it means to be Chinese is often challenged. It was sometimes awkward when I asked questions about the governing practices of the PRC government and its strategies of managing its overseas population, which may cause conversational tension throughout the fieldwork as it is often read by the informants as my critical position of the PRC government. Yet, this tension was sometimes gradually mitigated as the trust in field relations was established as the fieldwork went on, particularly between me and the key informants whom I got in touch with most often and remained close contact.

### **3.8. Data processing and analysis**

The data processing and analysis includes two parts. On the part of interviews, I audio-recorded interviews when informants consented to it. They were conducted in Mandarin Chinese as it is the language used in the face-to-face events among the informants and between the informants and me. I transcribed them in Chinese while using English to develop codes, establish analyses and write them into the thesis. The quotations of interviews and other informal talks with the informants in this thesis are based on my translation.

On the part of participant observation and informal talks during the observation, field notes were written in two different ways in order to be analysed systematically. Shortly after the observation, I took notes of the key conversations during it and descriptive notes were taken to describe direct observations of people and things, such as people's bodily actions and arrangement of objects and spaces. Then, inferential notes were taken to discuss possible meanings, emotions and relationships behind the descriptive notes and the noted conversations. To obtain an in-depth and contextualised understanding of a social incident, I focused on four aspects of an observation – time, space (surroundings, arrangements, atmosphere), subjects (key subjects, relevant subjects) and the researcher (reflexivity).

All names used in this thesis are pseudonyms. Some of the informants used Western names to introduce themselves during events and online whereas others chose to use Chinese names. To preserve the significance this choice may bring, for those who used a Western name, I assign them a Western name in the thesis whereas Chinese pseudonyms are applied to those using Chinese names during fieldwork.

These scripts were first processed through the procedure of open coding which highlights descriptions and concepts that are of theoretical significance. Axial coding then emerged based on open coding through which I group similar codes together and categorise them to form concepts. Finally, I produced a diagram based on the axial, which reduced concepts into themes, thus establishing relations among concepts. In the process, I chose to employ emergent codes which do not premise on existing theories and concepts, rather than pre-existing codes or pre-figured, in order to preserve the richness of the meaning of the data and not to limit them within the scopes of pre-existing research.

### **3.9. Conclusion and discussions**

In summary, this study adopts ethnographic methods and seeks to obtain in-depth data regarding the micro-processes of interpretation, subject production and social formation. The research practices include face-to-face, semi-structured interviews and participant observation in both online and offline environments.

As the key research question is to explore a group of people who move constantly in-between the digital and the face-to-face spaces, it is critical to examine offline-based sociality not simply as supplementary data useful in obtaining a contextualised interpretation of the online social interactions but to investigate how the online and offline sociality interact.

In so doing, several methodological questions may rise as previous authors suggest. This includes the potential discrepancy between online textual data and offline bodily, visual data, the discontinuities between online identity play and face-to-face 'reality' and the inclusion of multiple field sites. For the first two issues, I argue that the nature

of this researched group – a community formed largely through face-to-face activities whose members interact online with visual and bodily internet technologies – serves to largely bypass the tensions between the online and the offline. Regarding the inclusion of multiple field sites ranging from the online to the offline, I draw on the literature of science and technology studies and propose a methodological focus on field relations rather than a fixed boundary of a physical space. I justify the choice of the online and offline sites by maintaining the logical linkages between sites.

The demographics of the informants reflect the theoretical position of this research; that is, a perspective that problematises the view of the Chinese community as a unity. Instead of researching into Chinese migrants in London as a whole, I focus on a newly emerging community of Chinese migrants in London that is relatively less explored – Chinese professionals from mainland China and the ethnic associations formed within this subgroup. The informants were mostly born in mainland China, emigrated to the UK for higher education in their teens and stayed in the UK to work as a professional after the completion of their college or postgraduate degrees. This group rises as a result of mainland China's reform to open up to globalisation and its improving economic situation that allows the elite and middle-class families' ability to afford overseas education for their sons and daughters.

Throughout the fieldwork, both the informants and I view my position as in-between the inside and the outside of the community of Chinese professionals in London. My cultural background as a Taiwan-born, Mandarin-speaking student means we share some basic cultural knowledge during the fieldwork. Yet, our difference remains significant due to my expected short immersion in the community, our political

differences and the fact that I am still a student and have not yet started to lead a working lifestyle. I sometimes benefit from this in-betweenness for it allows for a critical perspective of the idea of Chineseness and it also enables a perspective of empathy for me to obtain an in-depth understanding of their practices regarding family values, work ethics, career plans and so on. Yet, this in-betweenness, particularly the potential political conflict, sometimes also causes tensions and the informants' unwillingness to disclose information, especially regarding the topic of government and political opinions. This awkwardness, however, gradually dissolved as the fieldwork progressed and trust relations were established.

## **Chapter 4. Digitised guanxi and community formation: How internet-mediated ethnic networks are brought into migrants' transborder economic practices**

This chapter delineates an emerging form of Chinese migrants' community: that is, the sociality among young Chinese professionals that weaves together the online and the offline. I highlight the central role of these internet-mediated social ties, discussed in this thesis as digitised guanxi, in the informants' economic lives not only locally but also transnationally. In so doing, I emphasise the process through which the migrants maintain intimate connections with key actors in Chinese modernity.

In the following sections, I will start by discussing the literature on ethnic social networks and the case of guanxi in Chinese transnationalism. I then highlight the need to draw on Wittel's concept of network sociality – sociality that is characterised by its transient nature, its internet use and its assimilation of leisure and work – in the setting of Chinese knowledge migrants' guanxi building. The section on findings will begin with a thick description of London's major associations for young Chinese professionals that are made possible through internet use, illuminating their objectives, activities and the making of their group boundary.

I will then explore the reasons for the centrality of the internet in these associations, symbolically and economically, and how these activities are underlined by a popular optimism about China's digital and economic development. To be more specific, on symbolic practices, I argue that the informants' use of the internet to form ethnic associations serves to signal their status as modernised, tech-savvy subjects compared

with other subgroups in the broader concept of the Chinese community. On economic activities, the internet-mediated social bonding with not only Chinese in London but also those in China is considered critical to the informants' career development. This perceived added value of network sociality with Chinese is also largely built upon the discourses of China's recent digital and economic development. This chapter then ends with an analysis of the distinction between conventional and digitised guanxi and the Chinese specificity of internet-mediated sociality.

#### **4.1. Ethnic social networks**

Existing studies have demonstrated several ways in which migrants turn to co-ethnic ties for economic opportunities. This dependence on co-ethnic grouping results from a range of phenomena. Racial exclusion and discrimination in social settings and in the labour market is one of the main reasons (Bonacich 1973; Wong 1988; Zhou 2004). The lack of language proficiency among the first generation also largely accounts for their difficulty in obtaining social capital outside their ethnic group and in participating in the mainstream labour market (Mata and Pendakur 1999).

There is also an underlying cultural mechanism. As Waldinger (1986) suggested, cultural solidarity among certain ethnic groups connects ethnic organisations to individuals and stabilises these relationships, which in turn enables successful ethnic economic activities. For example, the Chinese and Japanese communities in the US have been known for their ethnic solidarity and their ability to utilise strong ties to build organisations that assist its members' better performances in the labour market, such as ethnic mutual aid organisations (Light 1972). In the cases of Polish and Korean communities in the US, it is also found that ethnic religious organisations

have contributed important economic support towards the prosperity of ethnic businesses (Cummings 1980; Min 1992). This ‘bounded solidarity’ created by being treated as culturally distinct creates a strong trust relation within the groups, fostering reliable co-ethnic networks useful in identifying opportunities in the labour market (Portes and Zhou 1992).

Studies of Chinese migrants’ ethnic networks largely refer to interpersonal connections known as *guanxi* – a system of trust that is sustained by the interweaving of kinship, friendship, co-ethnicity and various other social ties. This system of trust can serve as a form of social capital in a Chinese individual’s social mobility (Chan 2000; Gipouloux 2000; Hsing 1997; Hsu, J. Y. and A. Saxenian; Smart 1993). As this chapter centres on Chinese networks, it is critical to identify how it relates to this literature and how I construct and use this concept.

A popular approach is quantitative. Utilising aggregate data, studies adopt Social Network Analysis and other statistical tools to determine whether *guanxi* networks have impacts on employment allocations, funding applications, trade and lending decisions and so on and assess the extent to which they have impacts and what types of *guanxi* impact more (Bian 1997, 2002; Wellman et al. 2002). Another approach adopts qualitative methods. It observes interpersonal exchanges as rituals of the gift economy in China (Kipnis 1997; Smart 1993; Yang 1994 among others).

The second approach is micro-level, which examines the interpersonal exchange and the details of reciprocity during the interpersonal process. It is also discussed as ‘practices of *guanxi* production’ or ‘*guanxi* practices’ which are distinct from *guanxi*

itself (Keister 2002). While the latter refers to the social network itself, the former is rituals, customs and social behaviours that produce social networks, enhance strengthen of social networks and use social networks as instruments for social and economic advancement.

This present study adopts a micro-level scope that examines the practices of guanxi. This is not a study that investigates how each guanxi exchange brings specific advantages to an individual's personal career trajectory. It is, rather, a study that discusses how digitised social networks serve as an infrastructure of transnational institutions. It not only investigates the internet-mediated guanxi coined in the London-based events. Furthermore, it examines how this locally-inscribed guanxi is also digitised to be deployed in transborder transactions between institutions, such as states, ethnic organisations and cross-border business synergies, thus exploring what implications this digitisation of guanxi may bring into the structural transformations of these institutions.

The pioneer studies of guanxi emerged during the early stage of China's reform era when the PRC government opened up to foreign investment. These studies suggest the essential role of the circulation of gifts, favours and banquets between the state sector and the foreign petty capitalists (Smart 1993; Smart and Smart 1999; Yang 1994). However, it should be noted that this emphasis on a networking culture underlined by Confucian interpersonal values was later criticised for its tendency to essentialise the Chinese business environment. Yang (2002), among others, argues that by privileging a singular notion of Chinese guanxi, researchers tend to neglect various tensions across class, ethnic and regional differences. Moreover, this

essentialist view of guanxi sees the Chinese networking culture as ‘an unchanging essence which was already formed prior to the capitalist process, rather than formed in the very process of negotiating the entrance of transnational capitalism into a state economy’ (Yang 2002: 468). Earlier studies of guanxi culture studied and portrayed it as a specific form of Chineseness that is expressed through bribery and corruption. Thus, researchers, particularly Western-based ones, often found themselves having constantly to avoid reading everything cultural as Chinese while portraying everything rational as Western (for example Kipnis 2002).

Chan Kwok Bun (2000) associates guanxi with two fundamentally different perspectives. The first approach regards guanxi as a genuinely Chinese phenomenon. Focusing on the cultural terms, this position views Chinese social networks as primarily embedded in a philosophical tradition in Confucianism that is relation-based (Fei 1992; Tu 1981; Yang 1994). It is argued that unlike its Western counterpart whose social connections are built upon individualism, Chinese individuals are continuously evaluated, managed and defined only through reciprocity and relations with others.

This cultural orientation toward understanding social networks among Chinese is increasingly criticised by an institutional turn in the analysis of guanxi. This new wave of guanxi studies emphasises the role of institutional factors that produce the specificity of social networks among Chinese. From this perspective, guanxi is just another form of its Russian analog, *blat*, that is built upon gift and social exchange (Ledeneva 1998). An emphasis on interpersonal exchange is understood as a result of lacking formal institutions and reliable legal infrastructure and thus the need for trust through informal channels.

Institutionalists adopt various analytical strategies to weigh the competing significance of culture and institutional factors. A first strategy is to study the different roles of guanxi in different Confucian societies which have vastly distinct institutions, such as Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan (Alston 1989). Another strategy is to explore the changing role of guanxi in mainland China where institutions are under rapid reform and transformation. The underlying implication of the institutionalist position is that the gift economy and social exchange are not inherently Chinese. Guanxi is only a Chinese phrase that refers to a general, universal phenomenon. Thus guanxi should be researched in comparison with wider cases where interpersonal connections take place and social reciprocity is valued.

Drawing on this perspective, this study views guanxi as one cultural variation of the general phenomenon of social networks and as a Chinese form of social networks that prevail in many societies across the world. It does not use guanxi to refer to the irrational and outlawed market exchanges but applies this term to the general social bonding practices among Chinese. It is necessary, I would argue, to conceptualise guanxi as to some extent universal, in order to provide a point of cross-cultural comparison. As Wellman et al. (2002) apply Social Network Analysis to guanxi studies, they develop an analysis of guanxi by placing it in the perspective of interpersonal relations and exchanges elsewhere in the world.

Departing from the binary distinction between culture and institution, this thesis uses the concept of guanxi not as essentially Chinese but views it in terms of social networks that are embedded in the Chinese culture and institutional environments and

hence have its features produced by its unique historic, cultural and structural backgrounds and require a contextualised exploration. That is, digitised guanxi is a culturally and institutionally contextualised case study of 'network sociality'.

A new form of interpersonal tie has emerged in recent years and has become a central part of professionals' social lives, which is identified as network sociality (Wittel 2001). This emerging form of social tie is theorised in contrast to the concept of community which conveys stability, longer-lasting relations, embeddedness and belonging. The concept of network sociality is underlined by Bauman's (2000) theorisation of liquid modernity that highlights fleeting and transient social bonding. Network sociality, according to Wittel, is an urban practice that is most significant among culturally-educated and computer-literate individuals. It is characterised by the assimilation of work and play and its embeddedness in information technology. Internet technologies play a critical role in organising these activities and in maintaining cohesion in these social scenes.

Linking this concept to the discussion of digitised guanxi, I argue for a focus on network sociality and its embeddedness in internet technology in the studies of ethnic solidarity, particularly among professionals for whom the concept was first formed. Like Wittel's conceptualisation of network sociality, the informants' social bonding is primarily underscored by its use of ICT and the assimilation of work and leisure activities. Yet, while Wittel's concept emerges from observations of the largely Western and localised sociality among the new media industry in London, this chapter seeks to go beyond the scope and examines network sociality in a transnational context and among Chinese migrants. It adds a cross-border perspective and a

culturally-specific angle to the notion using the analytical concept of digitised co-ethnic guanxi.

In lay terms, ethnic networks and the entrepreneurships or other business opportunities built on them are often associated with less-skilled industries bounded in the ethnic enclaves in the host society. Indeed, the key authors in this area produce a significant number of studies that examine small ethnic businesses in the import/export of raw materials and ethnic cultural products and other industries that provide ethnic goods and services, from ethnic restaurants, laundries, greengrocers to nail salons (Bailey and Waldinger 1991; Landolt 2001; Light et al. 2002; Waldinger and Lichter 2003). Yet, recent studies have also started to call for attention into cases outside the labour-intensive setting trapped in the inner city.

Firstly, they have started to adopt a transnational perspective and explore ethnic social networks that are not bounded in 'ethnic enclaves' but spread across borders. Ethnic ties are found to be not only useful in urban geographical ethnic enclaves such as Chinatowns but also valuable when developed to aid business activities that are dominated by border-crossing practices (Guarnizo *et al.* 2003; Portes 2003; see also Zhou 2004).

Secondly, a literature on ethnic social networks among migrants in skill-intensive industries has emerged. Studies on the Chinese diasporic networks have started to pay attention to the newly burgeoning industry of information technology which is largely based in North America with its transnational linkages with Asia. For example, several empirical studies have revealed how Taiwanese engineers educated in the US

and working in Silicon Valley have used connections with co-ethnic classmates in both Asia and the US to build transnational collaboration and entrepreneurial practices (Hsu and Saxenian 2000; Saxenian 1999, 2001, 2006; Saxenian et al. 2002; for a case study in the Western European context see Leung 2001). Montgomery (2008) focuses on Taiwanese and Indian engineers who received undergraduate education in Asia but moved to California to work. She identifies the advantages of these engineers in maintaining interpersonal connections with alumni, a large number of who went to Silicon Valley after graduation and accumulated significant social capital in the IT industry within their social networks. It also explores how these alumni relationships are strengthened through a constant exchange of emails among the engineers. In addition to ties formed in educational settings, kinship and familial ties are also found critical in aiding professionals and entrepreneurs to advance their economic situation. Several authors have identified how kin and family ties among Hong Kong born real estate tycoons act to establish their influence in Canada and other North American cities (Coe et al. 2003; Olds 2001; Mitchell 1997).

Drawing on these recent developments, this chapter focuses on migrants in knowledge-intensive industries from a transnational perspective. Yet, there are still many areas in the literature that require further exploration. First of all, the role of communication technologies in forming and transforming co-ethnic networks is largely neglected. The ability of communication technologies to transmit information across borders is significant. As the conception of network sociality suggests, today's networking activities are largely embedded in information technology. Hence it is critical to explore whether and how new communication technologies have fostered new forms of ethnic sociality and, more importantly, how these recent forms of ethnic

social networks mediated by ICTs have transformed our understanding of the relationship between ethnic social networks and migrants' social and economic activities.

The role of communication technologies is not only missing from the general discussion of ethnic social ties but also often neglected in the research of guanxi. In the case of Chinese migrants, key texts on Chinese social networks in overseas Chinese mainly focus on guanxi that is constituted by kinship systems and relationships formed in educational settings (Chan 2005; Hsu and Saxenian 2000; Leung 2001; Ong 1999; Saxenian 1999, 2001, 2006; Saxenian et al. 2002). Although academic attention has started to be paid to the use of email in strengthening social ties such as alumni and classmates that existed before the use of the internet (Montgomery 2008), there is little discussion surrounding online initiated ethnic ties and their impact on migrants' everyday lives. There is relatively little attention being paid to the role of online-initiated guanxi.

Secondly, while several scholars have called for greater attention into the middle-class setting of migrant co-ethnic networks, attention is still largely limited to certain industries. For example, in research about migrant Chinese professionals and entrepreneurs in knowledge-intensive industries, current discussions primarily centre on the IT industry in North America and, in much fewer studies, Europe. This leaves out a wide variety of knowledge-based industries where a large number of Chinese professionals concentrate and utilise co-ethnic networks, from financial services, legal professions, to business management and consultancy.

This chapter is, hence, written as a dialogue between the concept of network sociality that assimilates work into play with ICT uses and the studies on Chinese professionals' networks that offer insights into co-ethnic ties but pay less attention to the role of the internet. How can these online-started Chinese co-ethnic networks among a group of individuals who have no or little connections in real life be developed into a system of trust? How can these online-initiated webs of trust then help the individuals to advance in transnational economic activities? Compared with other forms of networks, what is the role of this online-initiated guanxi in linking the migrants to a transnational business world?

#### **4.2.Xiyu and CFUK: a thick description**

The very first event I attended, held by an association for London's Chinese professionals, paints a typical picture for almost all the following gatherings that took place throughout my fieldwork. I received the invitation on Facebook after I sent messages on it to the founders of the association, Xiyu, and requested access for my research. Usually the membership is granted when a potential member fills out an application on the website of the organisation and provides a reference from another Chinese professional in the organisation who can verify the applicant's current affiliation and position and the fact that the applicant is a working professional based in London. When membership is granted, the person is allowed access to their Googlegroup – an online forum that also offers a group email function. Information about upcoming social events, business ideas, job offers and sometimes immigration regulations is mainly disseminated via the email list on Googlegroup, although it is also advertised on their Facebook page and the official website of the association.

The first event I was invited to was called Business Venture, which was started by a number of Xiyu members who were looking to connect Chinese people in London who have good business plans with those with social and economic resources to help put the plans into practice. It began with an email on Xiyu's Googlegroup that called for a first meeting for potential Chinese entrepreneurs and venture capitalists.

The meeting I attended was located in an exclusive bar area in a hotel in London's major district for financial activities, Canary Wharf. Upon arrival, the participants exchanged business cards. There were around 20 participants at the event. About one third of them were women. The participants were in their mid twenties to early thirties. As most participants did not know each other before the event and only a few of them had met each other in person before, we were asked to introduce ourselves by explaining the reasons why we were interested in this event. To be more specific, we were asked to identify three types of resources we had – our current position and company in London, our business plans or available capital for investment and our 'resources' back in China which referred to the businesses our family members own and the potential transnational business networks and opportunities they might provide.

On the one hand, identifying the participants' resources in different locations helps to link their socioeconomic potential in London to the materials they have access to in China. By doing so, they are able to come up with business plans of transnational synergy. On the other hand, identifying these resources also serves to signify the homogeneity, if not exclusivity, of participants' socioeconomic backgrounds, making a boundary for the group. The accountant who co-founded the Business Venture group,

Sergei, was the first to introduce himself. He told us that he worked in an accounting and consulting firm in the city, Deloitte. His family runs a company in communication technologies in China, and he started this group because he wanted to invest in good business ideas as the stock market and investment objects had become less reliable during the economic downturn. Following Sergei, there were also several accountants, IT managers, consultants and other professionals who introduced themselves and their connections in China. Then I introduced myself as a Ph.D. student, talked about the topic I am working on and explained what my family is doing in Taiwan. After all the participants had introduced themselves, they went on for a drinks reception and started conversations with each other. In addition to me asking around for further interviews with the attendees, I was approached by several participants who proposed potential business plans which might fit my background, including the possibility for me to join a travel agency which was about to be started and was aimed at Taiwanese tourists to the UK and a commercial website selling goods to Chinese in the UK. These entrepreneurial attempts were largely transnational, linking together the participants' resources across the globe.

The tone of conversations at the event was supportive with constant reference to ethnic solidarity. When I introduced myself as a Ph.D. student looking for help with my research, the participants all agreed to have further interviews with me and told me that we should help each other because they were once students and that Chinese abroad should look after each other. This ethnic solidarity, together with a class solidarity, was further emphasised when I asked why they used co-ethnic networks for business opportunities. Some told me that Chinese should look out for each other because they are faced with more difficult social networking situations in the

workplace compared to local British workers. Others told me that they wanted to return to China and start their career there someday. Hence, social networks with Chinese professionals are helpful because those who can afford to receive education in the UK and survive in middle-class workplaces in London usually come from a well-connected, privileged background in China. Co-ethnic networks are believed to be not only more helpful with career development in London but also a resourceful contact for business that will be started in China in the future.

While most participants had never met the others in person previously, this online-organised event served as the beginning of long-term interpersonal relationships that combine online communication with largely offline based interactions. This event ended with some of the participants going out for Chinese karaoke and others going to dinner together. After four months, the group was developed into a venture capital company which set up its own office in London.

Besides Xiyu, this study is also based in the Association of Chinese in Finance UK (CFUK). Xiyu was the first association for young, mainland Chinese professionals in London. The members of the two associations often overlap. I met my initial informants mainly from Xiyu and more than half of my key informants also have membership of CFUK or have been to events of CFUK.

Before Xiyu, there were several sizable London-based associations for the Chinese diaspora but these communities are mainly designed for, and recruit their members from, the older generations of migrants from Hong Kong. These include the London Chinatown Chinese association established in 1978, the London Chinese Community

Centre established in 1980, and the London Chinese Community Network established more recently in 2001. Perceiving the need for an organisation for the younger generation of non-Cantonese speaking Chinese professionals working in the city, Xiyu was first started as CHAX, an internal group for Chinese workers in Morgan Stanley with about thirty members and later expanded to include other London-based Chinese professionals outside the firm. It now has more than one thousand members. As the first large-scale association targeting young mainland Chinese professionals in London, its main objective is to ‘form an organisation that unites Chinese professionals in London together since there has not been any organisation doing so’, according to one of its founders, Karl. At first, Karl and other founders simply wanted an organisation where Chinese migrants of a similar lifestyle in the same city can meet each other and enrich their leisure, cultural and social lives. Later in 2007, he encountered another organisation, CFUK, which aimed to offer opportunities for business networking among Chinese financial professionals in London. He immediately became keen on this idea and decided gradually to incorporate the networking function into their project.



Figure 4.1. Xiyu event: winter ball



Figure 4.2. Xiyu event co-hosted by Morgan Stanley: Careers and career development in the UK and the Far East countries

Compared with Xiyu, the activities of CFUK focus more exclusively on the educational and professional development and social initiatives that are helpful for career progress. They include talks given by key figures in finance and other industries in both London and China and seminars held by partnered educational institutions and companies including the London Business School, London School of Economics, Soochow University, Bank of China, Goldman Sachs, Morgan Stanley and the like. They also hold regular networking events in a leisure setting following these seminars and talks.



Figure 4.3. A KPMG View

Source: CFUK website

Note: A seminar where CFUK invited the chief economist of KPMG, an accounting firm, chairman of KPMG forensic and a partner in KPMG finance. The seminar was followed by a networking event and was coordinated by KPMG and hosted by CFUK.



Figure 4.4. 2009 conference on international exchange of professionals in Shenzhen, China.

Source: CFUK website

Note: The forum in Shenzhen was hosted by the State Administration of Foreign Experts Affairs, the P.R. of China and the People's Government of Shenzhen Municipality, co-hosted by the Bureau of Personnel of Shenzhen Municipality, China International Talents Exchange Association, China International Talents Exchange Foundation, The State Administration of Foreign Experts Training Centre, undertaken by 'International Talents' magazine, and implemented by Shenzhen General Chamber of Commerce. CFUK has been invited as a guest to represent Chinese talents / professionals from UK.

These events aim to build not only social ties between Chinese professionals in London but also networks with other non-Chinese business figures in London and transnational ties with officials, education institutions and business contacts in China. Jai is a 27-year-old analyst at Morgan Stanley and a member of CFUK and explained to me why she is keen on participating in the association and connecting with contacts in China:

I think people who are here are mostly those from a well-connected background in China. Although I am working here, it's very likely that I'll return to China and establish my career there in the near future. Even if you don't plan to go back to China for work and want to start your own business here, it's competitive for Chinese people if their business plans are related to China..... Associations like CFUK are therefore very important.

Several founders are sons and daughters of high-profile officials [in China] and they can get us networking opportunities with bankers, entrepreneurs and government officials in China through their events. It's particularly important to be well-connected with officials if you are going to do business in China. You need to cultivate relationships. I myself come from a more moderate background. I'd love to attend those networking events to get advanced.

(female, financial analyst, 27)

Through joining these associations, the informants first establish social ties within Chinese communities in London. Then, through socialising with other members in these communities who tend to own resourceful social capital in China, they further build valuable transnational *guanxi* in China. It is emphasised in the objectives of CFUK and Xiyu that they aim not only to build co-ethnic networks in London and also wider transnational networks based on them. During the fieldwork, CFUK organised more than ten events in China, which involved a number of different city governments in the coastal China, multinational or national investors and firms in China and also a large number of its members who primarily live in London but constantly travel to China (Figure 4).

The timeline of the establishment of these organisations reflect both the structure of migration between mainland China and Britain and the evolution of communication technologies in recent years. Xiyu/CHAX was established officially in 2007 whilst the preparation of CFUK was started later in 2007. One of the active members in Xiyu, Jerry, told me:

Organisations like these [for migrant professionals from mainland Chinese] did not emerge until recently for a reason. Chinese professionals are mostly people who came here first to study. I went to Oxford in 2001. There were

only about 20 [mainland] Chinese students that year. But in the mid 2000s, there were hundreds of them. It's a result of China's economic growth in recent years. In 2001, there were not many people who could afford to study in Oxford. A large number of these students stay after graduation and work here, mostly in London. In the mid 2000s, the number of Chinese professionals in London surged and hence the need for organisations like these surged. As far as I am concerned, there weren't any organisations before ours, except perhaps for the second generation of Hong Kong Chinese. But they are quite different. They have their own organisations and speak a different language. We don't really mix. They don't need us, either. They have their own networking sources.

(male, consultant, 28)

The majority of the members in organisations like Xiyu and CFUK are mainland Chinese who were born in China and sought higher education in Britain. Hong Kong Chinese and the second generation of migrants rarely become part of these organisations due to different linguistic and cultural practices and particular needs for business networking. The recent surge in migrants from mainland China who came to the UK first as students led to the need to organise new ethnic communities among this population.

The timeline of the emergence of these associations also corresponds to the rise and popularity of the Web 2.0 online platforms. As Karl told me:

Before the age of the internet, it would have been almost impossible to know all the people we know on Xiyu Googlegroup. There are more than a thousand working professionals who are in different firms, went to different schools and live in different areas. I estimate that there are around 4,000 working [mainland] Chinese professionals in London. It's very difficult to contact all of them without a platform like Googlegroup or even Facebook. It is open to a group of people who are potential members but disconnected from each other without the platform. It then disseminates information to a

large number of people simultaneously and reaches people we didn't really know existed.

(male, financial analyst, 27)

New trends in media technology are reflected in the patterns of social grouping. Communication methods emerging in the Web 2.0 are designed to be multi-dimensional and transparent, which is central to making the connectedness among dispersed groups. Social networking sites, group emailing site, wikis, interactive websites indicate user sharing and user generating.

There is an affinity between the features of Web 2.0 platforms and the ways in which the sociality of Xiyu and CFUK is organised. As the longer-existing Chinese associations adopt telephone calls, flyers or very simple web tools such as an official webpage to disseminate information, it implies a web manager who generates event information and the vast receivers of the information. The use of Web 2.0 tools, however, indicates that the users/members serve not merely as information receivers but also largely generators of social activities and group solidarity. The ability and preferences for internet tools of different generations thus contain distinctive symbolic meanings.

### **4.3. Digitised guanxi as network sociality and its symbolic role**

Karl's explanation also points out the first reason why these associations should be theorised as network sociality and distinguished from an earlier generation of ethnic bonding in the context of the Chinese diaspora. Wittel suggests that the concept of network sociality disentangles social ties that are not embedded, fluid, transient and fleeting and that are formed in ICT-informed settings. The ways in which

memberships of Xiyu and CFUK are defined and secured demonstrate this pattern.

Karl identifies the centrality of the internet in forming their symbolic group boundary. Indeed, the media strategy of these organisations, including advertisement, recruitment and the dissemination of group information, relies exclusively on the internet. These associations disseminate information about recruitment on Facebook, on their own websites, via email lists such as Googlegroup and by word of mouth. When an internet user subscribes to their email alerts, registers on the websites or joins their Facebook group, he or she will be able to communicate with other members whom they have previously never met. In other words, the boundary of these social groupings is primarily defined by their online inclusion. Once included online, the members will receive information about recent events these associations have held in various geographical locations in London. Membership is not inscribed in stable kin or long-term connections but is granted with use of digital media. It is thus network sociality for its fluid social bonding and the centrality of internet use in making the group boundary.

Compared with Wittel's case examples, network sociality in Xiyu and CFUK further highlights an essence of migrant communities which may lead to a greater importance of ICT use in networking; that is, geographical dispersal. In addition to serving as a symbolic marker of the group boundary of Xiyu and CFUK, the centrality of the internet in enabling ethnic networks also results from the dispersed nature of the Chinese diaspora, or, of the Chinese professionals in London in particular. As Karl suggested, this is a group of individuals who work in different firms, spend long working hours not in ethnic businesses but in multicultural

workplaces and, unlike the South Asian, African and Caribbean communities in London, do not form a co-ethnic residential area. The informants had not previously been brought together socially and geographically but are now organised to socialise in various places in the city. The connection among the otherwise much disconnected group of migrant workers in dispersed middle class workplaces is made possible when internet use becomes prevalent.

Karl continued to explain the centrality of ICT use by comparing the internet with other forms of communication. The designs of different communication tools vary, which impacts the ways in which the informants utilise them and organise activities:

It's convenient to use mobile or telephone calls or sometimes text messages to organise activities for five people. But if it's going to be an organisation, an organisation that aims for something bigger, it's not enough. It's difficult to call more than ten people for one event. You either need a fixed office where everybody knows where you are – like the older organisations in Chinatown do. Or you need something like Googlegroup or a similar email list.

The informants appropriate the internet tools and phone applications differently while telephones and mobile phones are discussed by Karl interchangeably.<sup>15</sup> Phones, speaking and texting are reserved for communication between two or among a small number of users and offer limited capacity in communicative settings that involve large-group sociality. For Karl, phones alone are not enough for organising an association unless supplemented with an office where a larger number of members

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<sup>15</sup> Yet, it should be noted that the number of informants using mobile phones to access the internet has been increasing during the fieldwork period. When talking about phones, the informants usually refer to speaking and texting. The informants also tend to call the online applications by their names, such as Facebook, email, Googlegroup, instead of referring to them as using mobile phones, when talking about web applications used on mobile phones.

can visit. Compared with phones, the relative openness of online spaces provides the possibility of communication among a large number of users.

Another active member in Xiyu, Lu Ming, further explains why the internet is adopted when asked to compare different possible communication strategies for Xiyu:

It's not that phones wouldn't work. It just costs too much and doesn't work as well as the internet. I know there are Chinese communities also using handouts and letters to disseminate information. The problem is, for them to work, the organiser has to allow a longer period to advertise information about activities. It takes time. Use emails and you can be sure members will receive it right away and most will read it within 2 days. Using letters or handouts also makes you less likely to change the location of activities. The percentage of their members who receive the information must be low. That restricts you from spontaneous activities. Their activities require a fixed time in a fixed venue in order to increase participation. They put everybody in a community centre, which keeps their activities limited in terms of space. We do online discussions as well as dinners, parties, ballroom events and other events all over the city. We are more mobile using the internet instead of a community centre.

(male, technician, 29)

Lu Ming identifies the main advantages of the internet compared with other methods of information dissemination in ethnic communities, including print products and a physical public space for members to meet and communicate. According to him, the internet functions as a substitute for a physical space such as an office of other Chinese organisations as it also serves as a public space where members get together whenever they feel like meeting other members.

Furthermore, Xiyu and CFUK demonstrate a unique articulation of the internet, which

centralises the role of internet use in forming their sociality. Using the internet to socialise with co-ethnic individuals is often viewed by the informants as a critical practice through which they build a sense of belonging to a certain type of overseas Chinese in a particular historical context. The internet serves as a symbol of a new form of Chineseness which is young, modern and mobile. Active members of the wired associations often portray the Chinese associations of earlier generations as adopting traditional communication methods and lacking digital literacy. Partly as a result of this, traditional Chinese communities are portrayed as unable to attract the recent waves of Chinese migrants who are skilled, younger migrants and actors of the rising Chinese digital modernity. Luo best explains how adopting the internet to socialise highlights young Chinese professionals' self-identification:

Luo: We are different from the other long-standing Chinese organisations. Our members are different. We are younger. Our members are mostly migrants who came here to study and have graduated from universities and have been working for a couple years. Members of the older organisations are probably mostly elderly migrants. In my social circle, I barely know any who are active in those older organisations. They don't use the internet. If they do, they do not know how to use it properly or they do not use it as frequently as we do. At best they may have a website. We use a variety of internet tools, including Facebook, website, Googlegroup and sometimes MSN. It is 2009 - everybody is online now. The older generation of Chinese associations has its limits.

(male, industry analyst, 27)

According to Luo, internet use – and particularly the use of the Web 2.0 tools – is portrayed as a boundary-making device through which the new wave of migrants and their organisations distinguish themselves from the older generations of migrants who are in a different age group and are less tech-savvy. The adoption of different

communication methods signifies the diverse groups within the broader idea of a Chinese community in London. It serves as an identity marker of belonging to a distinctive subgroup, which is located in a specific socioeconomic and historic context. Socialising with co-ethnic individuals without the internet is hence constructed by the informants as the 'Other' Chineseness.

Using the net in Chinese associations is not only adopted to compare the informants with other subgroups among overseas Chinese, it is also viewed as an important way to signify their strong linkage with, and belonging to, a certain socioeconomic category in mainland China. Another active member in Xiyu and CFUK, Jinxi, told me:

Development in China is very rapid now. You use the internet to contact anyone in the cities – students or business people and government officials. In CFUK, businesses and governmental departments in China email us first when they want to contact Chinese financial professionals in Britain. Those who are a valuable resource to them can all be contacted online. It's a digital world now – even in China. If you are online, you are part of the more advanced half of China.

(male, former financial analyst, 31)

Jinxi describes a digital modernity that is shared between 'the more advanced half' of Chinese in China and the overseas Chinese professionals. By connecting themselves to the internet, the informants produce an emerging form of transnational subjectivity – a subjectivity underlined by a sense of belonging to modernity that is defined by access to digital technologies.

#### **4.4. The assimilation of work and play in the context of Chinese**

## **transnationality**

Events and communication at Xiyu and CFUK are embedded in a variety of leisure settings where co-ethnic business-associated ties are carefully cultivated. This coincides with a second feature of network sociality; that is, the assimilation of work and play. Yet, sociality at Xiyu and CFUK further adds a diasporic specificity. Most events of Xiyu are cultural and social activities which are underlined by an urban middle-class consumerism that hybridises Chineseness and Britishness. An active member in Xiyu, Lu Ming, painted a general picture of the events of this organisation and explained its initial objectives:

We all make new friends at work and other places when starting our new job and life in London who are mostly foreigners [non-Chinese]. It's not that it's not good to have foreign friends. It's just sometimes you want to have another group of friends who speak the same language, like the same food, prefer basketball and badminton to rugby, understand what you are talking about when discussing family responsibilities, parents and relationships so that you can sometimes get together and do all that. At first we [CHAX and Xiyu] just played sports that we liked together and then dined in Chinese restaurants together. I am not sure about our female members but they did things like going to shopping centres together and the like. It has then gradually developed into what you see today.

Whilst Lu Ming drew the cultural and social boundary between Xiyu members and their 'foreign' coworkers, the activities he specified also largely define the class distinction of this group. The distinctive lifestyle of Chinese professionals necessitates a social grouping among Chinese of similar socioeconomic backgrounds. As Lu Ming suggests, these collective cultural practices are marked by consumption-orientated activities and are embedded in a middle-class lifestyle setting in the city, such as shopping, karaoke in pubs and joining a sports centre. Before I came across Xiyu and other wired Chinese organisations for

professionals, I imagined that my informants' Chinese cultural activities would be 'traditional' such as parade watching during Chinese New Year or Chinese martial arts such as Kung-Fu and Chi-Kung as this was what I observed in a Chinese organisation in Chinatown whose members were mainly first generation Hong Kong migrants. Yet participating in events held by the wired organisations for young professionals and talking to their members helps to reveal a different picture of Chinese cultural activities.

Hanson is a 25-year-old former accountant and an active member in both Xiyu and CFUK. He further identifies the distinction of cultural activities in Chinese organisations among different subgroups not only by pointing out the underlying consumerism but also the largely westernised lifestyle that marks these consumption choices:

Hanson: We have a lot of events. There are monthly drinks and networking events as you know. And there are also larger events, such as ballroom events. We just had a Xiyu Christmas party and then a Chinese New Year party is coming up. There was also a Miss China in UK beauty pageant by CFUK.

Me: Were they Chinese-style activities?

Hanson: I wouldn't say they were entirely Chinese-style. It was more like westernised Chinese activities. For example, in the beauty pageant and other ballroom events, they rented ballrooms in hotels and there was a dress code – black tie. Women wore long dinner dresses and men wore tuxedos or suits. The food was Chinese but in a Western format – finger food with wine. The performances did include people singing karaoke in Chinese but other than that, we played (Western) classical music as our background music for the event.

This cultural consumption among the informants hybridises middle-class Britishness with a hint of Chinese culture and is often underlined by a celebratory discourse of the emerging Chinese modernity and an indication of Chinese nationalism. The nationalistic sentiments and optimistic attitude towards Chinese development was particularly a central theme during the period of summer of 2008 – the time of the Beijing Olympics. Both Xiyu and CFUK held themed events about the Beijing Olympics during the summer of 2008. As Yuan, another member of Xiyu, recalls:

I was in the office when the Olympic torch arrived. I received an email from Xiyu a few days earlier about being there to support the torch. I think some of them also went to a restaurant by the river near the torch. I couldn't be there. But I did go to the pub crawl to watch the closing ceremony together. It was also organised on Xiyu Googlegroup. I know a lot of people managed to get a holiday and went back to China to watch the games. For those who couldn't, we went to pubs to watch it and got drunk together. It was fun, too. It was a busy summer.

(female, human resource)

As Yuan reveals, a highlighted sense of Chinese national sentiment is woven into a largely British cultural practice of a pub crawl. The nationalistic sentiment surrounding the event is even more evident when Yuan spoke about the earthquake in Sichuan, a southern province in China, which took place shortly before the Beijing Olympics:

After the Sichuan earthquake, CFUK co-hosted a charity dinner/performance. People bought tickets to enjoy the shows but also to donate money. They received a lot of donations overnight although I can't remember exactly how much..... Of course people were very passionate. For one thing, overseas Chinese can't be at home but they know other fellow Chinese are suffering. That doesn't feel right. Also, it was a very

sentimental period. The summer Olympics were coming and you'd think this is a time we have been waiting for, a time for China to go on the world stage. It should be a moment of pride. It's not supposed to be a time for Chinese people to suffer.

The informant passionately explained how this period of time was expected to be an opportunity to represent China to the world. Drawing on a sense of national pride and the 'readiness' of China in terms of its recent development, this conversation demonstrates how the discourse of a rising Chinese power is knitted into the cultural consumption (e.g. shows of Chinese popular culture in East London) of the young overseas middle-class Chinese. Network sociality constructs largely the informants' cultural and social lives, both of which are marked by a celebratory discourse of China's recent economic development.

As Wittel's theorisation of network sociality suggests, economic purposes are often embedded in the cultural and social activities arranged through the internet. Yet, network sociality in the context of Chinese migrants further adds a transnational framework, thus introducing a geographic angle to the discussion of network sociality. These digitised *guanxi* with co-ethnic professionals in the UK are considered useful not only for the informants' career development in the local labour market but sometimes also for their long-term career goals of building transnational businesses with China or setting up a career back in China. Wired ethnic associations serve as a site where the migrants accumulate critical social capital in sharing the newly emerging economic power brought by the rise of China.

The digitised co-ethnic *guanxi* is helpful in the local labour market of London for several reasons. One of the most significant reasons is the disadvantages brought by

their migratory status encountered in the workplace. The informants feel the need to turn to co-ethnic networks with professionals in similar industries in London for reliable resources. Leon works in a venture capital firm and complains that he needs to develop connections among the group of wired Chinese professionals in order to compete with his British-born colleagues:

In the field of venture capital, connections are extremely important. They are all we have. So it is very difficult for me to compete with, say, a British guy who was born into a wealthy British family and hence has a lot of relatives, family friends, or other contacts who can offer that sorts of resource. I simply don't have that..... I went to Imperial College and may have known some of the brightest guys in London who can offer good patents or other brilliant ideas. But that alone is not enough. I need to broaden my social circle. So places like Xiyu are very helpful because they have a lot of elite members – people who went to the best universities in the UK and work in the most competitive companies in London. That helps.....I'd say the internet does help. We are all migrants who need connections to get advanced. But it might be impossible to link all of us together without the internet..... Like I said, a wide ranging network is very helpful and you can say that the internet does that for me.

(male, venture capitalist)

Co-ethnic social networks are helpful for migrant employees in industries such as venture capital where social embeddedness is particularly important. In Leon's example, while he lacks the social networks that are critical in this industry due to his migratory status, he seeks a co-ethnic social network among professionals supplements his sources of contacts and provides a further diversified networking environment. These Chinese organisations purposively target professionals and use the internet to locate and bring together this supposedly isolated group, which builds a wide-ranging social network for Leon.

In addition to the width of networks that these wired organisations provide, the depth and quality of these connections are also reported to be useful in workplaces. As Leon goes on to explain:

I also joined the Business Venture group. I have advantages when doing business with Chinese people compared to my British colleagues because there is also a trust issue. They trust me more. It's just like a British guy would prefer doing business with my British colleagues to doing business with me. It's natural. You can't blame them.

According to Leon, social ties within these Chinese organisations not only offer a wider ranging network but also good quality social connections that are useful in business settings because trust strengthens in co-ethnic networks.

Another example demonstrates an often reported phenomenon of the ethnic glass ceiling and the role of networked co-ethnic ties in it. Kuan is an analyst in an investment bank. He told me that eventually he plans to go back to China to work because of a perceived glass ceiling in workplaces in Britain:

We need to work several times harder and it may take a lot longer for us to achieve what a British co-worker achieves. It is why things like CFUK are popular. They have members who are people from other firms in the same industry as you and they know how you feel. You can discuss these harsh situations with them and how to tackle it. More importantly, sometimes people switch between different firms in the same industry in order to increase their salaries and chances of getting a promotion. But how can you achieve that? It's important that you know someone in other big firms in the same industry. That's what CFUK or Xiyu does. They have a lot of professionals – hundreds of them. You'll meet other people in the same

industry as you. If you can't meet any of them at the events, you can simply send an email and find out who's out there. That helps.

(male, financial analyst, 31)

The glass ceiling in workplaces is reported to be a major concern in the migrants' career development in Britain. Yet, wired Chinese organisations serve to mitigate the negative effects by enabling connections across a large number of industries and firms. They bridge professionals across a large number of people in various firms and neighbourhoods and those socially distant from each other. The networked social ties then compensate for the migrants' lacking social capital in the labour market through the inter-firm linkages these associations provide.

These networked social ties serve as a valuable resource particularly during a harsh economic climate. Kuan links the rising popularity of networking among white collar Chinese in London to the recent economic meltdown:

It's the same thing for people who have just been made redundant. The number of people coming to the events increases. Why? They were made redundant during this economic downturn – traders, analysts and so on. They come here and want to talk to people who still have jobs in similar industries and look for insider's information about vacancies and connections in those firms. Even if you still can't find jobs in London, meeting other Chinese professionals help. The West is falling, but there are still growing opportunities in China. Even though the salaries may not be as attractive, they are still interested in further information through networking with Chinese here.

Comparing the economic performance of China and Britain, Kuan highlights the discourse that portrays China as a place of hope and the future, which is a repeated

theme in the discussions of job searching and co-ethnic social networks among the informants. Upon perceiving the difficult economic climate in London, the informants turn to co-ethnic social embeddedness not only for job opportunities in London but also to enquire about the possibilities of starting a career outside the city.

In addition to advantages in the local labour market in London, the network sociality also contributes to the construction of transnational economic activities which are mostly entrepreneurial practices. They include the flow of capital from their families in China, the business plans which emerge primarily from the informants' white-collar backgrounds in London and the social networks which are useful in these business proposals and come from a variety of places across the world.

While transnational assemblages of business resources have been discussed extensively in studies of ethnic entrepreneurship, the existing literature often focuses on restaurants, groceries, import/export trading of raw materials and other less-skilled ethnic services (Bailey and Waldinger 1991; Landolt 2001; Light et al. 2002; Waldinger and Lichter 2003). Informants in this study identify several novel settings and formalities in which transnational entrepreneurial efforts are assembled. These renewed ethnic business practices are characterised by professionalism, a concentration in the knowledge-intensive industries and the centrality of internet technology.

Ted's newly started consulting firm is a typical example. Made redundant shortly after I began the fieldwork, Ted helped to start the Business Venture group using the Googlegroup of Xiyu in the hope that he might be able to produce good business

opportunities utilising the connections with co-ethnic professionals and with the resources from their elite families in China. A first email for the Business Venture group on Xiyu's Googlegroup was circulated and attracted about 20 members to participate in their first events. They then started their own Facebook page and Googlegroup and advertised their subsequent events both on their own and Xiyu's online platforms.

Ted drafted a business plan that made use of his experience in one of the major accounting firms, Deloitte, in London and was hoping to combine it with the advantage of doing business among Chinese professionals in London and their access to capital and social ties in China. After meeting with a number of accountants in several major accounting firms online and then in the Business Venture group events, they decided to start a consulting company that offers services in career advice for people aiming to seek jobs in the four major accounting firms in London. More specifically, they primarily target white-collar workers and students who will be arriving shortly or have just arrived in the UK and have not yet familiarised themselves with the UK labour market. They expect that most of the targeted groups will find job seeking challenging due to their lack of familiarity with the London labour market. The potential clients include undergraduate students in their final year, postgraduate students on a one-year course in the UK, aspiring students in China aiming to join the UK labour market after completing their degrees, or white-collar workers in relevant industries in China and UK. The firm then prepares these applicants for accounting firms, assists in their job seeking processes by giving advice on CV writing and interview skills and receives payments from successful applicants.

This business proposal requires transnational effort in several ways. Firstly, on funding, the capital required for the start-up company mainly comes from these founders' savings, which, according to Ted, are mostly provided by their families in China. Besides the generally better-off family backgrounds of these informants, this is largely a result of their relatively young age (mostly in their mid twenties) and the small number of years they have spent earning in the labour market. Other participants of the Business Venture group who are interested in the business plan also contribute the capital required to start the company, which also involves transnational funding from China.

Secondly, the social networks required for the success of this business proposal are also largely transnational. As they target Chinese who have just arrived or will shortly arrive in the UK, they find marketing both in China and in the UK critical to the success of the business. One of their sources of clients is aspiring students reading for postgraduate degrees or in their final year in a UK university who plan to become an accountant in the UK, for whom the company holds career events through partnerships with student unions – particularly Chinese students associations in each university. Another source of clients involves more transnational efforts. They seek to disseminate information about their service among potential Chinese migrants to the UK who seek to participate in the London labour market. Hence the company looked for partners in China working in higher education, agencies for overseas studies and the major accounting firms in China. This was accomplished both through word of mouth and their online platforms including Googlegroup email list and their Facebook page, where they advertise for Xiyu members who know contacts in these industries in China or are interested in being part of their business proposal.

In summary, this transnational business is built upon both the digitised linkages among migrants in London and their economic and social resources in China. Perceiving the barriers of entry into the middle-class labour market in Britain among the ‘fresh on board’ due to the lack of cultural, linguistic and other skills among migrants with good qualifications, Ted started the firm that offers experiences and business networks with Chinese migrants who have already been in the industry of accounting and finance. To do so, digital technologies play a key role. They are adopted to identify co-ethnic business contacts in the accounting and finance industries, who are otherwise less connected and can contribute to the business plan for and by Chinese migrants. Digital technologies are also the most important communication methods used in maintaining the linkages between Ted and his colleagues in London and their business partners in China through emails and videoconferencing.

These transnational entrepreneurial practices are built upon an underlying optimism about China’s economic development. From capital, employees, to clients, these start-ups rely heavily on China’s growing ability to provide sufficient funds and its increasing production of middle-class talent who can afford to travel and receive education in the West. There are also prerequisites to the transnational economic activities among the informants; that is, the sufficient skills of digital technologies and memberships of a well-established digital social network that offers efficient cross-border connections. Hence the access to the internet remains central in the informants’ successful integration into the transnational Chinese economy.

#### **4.5. Digitised guanxi vs. 'unwired' ethnic networks**

How, then, does the wired ethnic sociality differentiate from other conventional ethnic business networks that predate the use of the internet? In an earlier section in this chapter, I demonstrated how forming digitised guanxi serves as a symbolic gesture that signals the different social and cultural positions of the informants from members of unwired ethnic associations. In addition to the symbolic significance, Ted's case of entrepreneurial practice provides evidence that highlights other distinctions between networked and conventional ethnic sociality.

First of all, efficiency is portrayed as a key feature of the network sociality by a large number of the informants when they are asked to describe the role of the use of digital technologies in their building of business-oriented co-ethnic ties. It is repeatedly reported by the informants that co-ethnic networks are wider-ranging when built with speed internet-mediated communication. In addition to its width, it also identifies required resources more quickly, simply via an email or a Facebook message. It sometimes also functions to bridge two ends who otherwise lack the chance to meet. In the example of Ted's start-up, he quickly identifies the type of talent and resources he needs – help from a specific industry in a specific place (e.g. educators in China, head hunters in London, etc.) – via the circulation of an email within the internet-organised ethnic association.

Secondly, this direct linkage between a resource provider and a person who needs it is closely related to another key feature that distinguishes internet-mediated ethnic networks from unwired ones; that is, the hierarchical structure of ethnic associations.

Existing studies on other overseas Chinese professional associations (Saxenian 1999, 2001, 2006; Sexenian et al. 2002), mostly within the IT industry in Silicon Valley, show that the co-ethnic business networks are established through various activities held by the association committees. This sociality is mediated by a hierarchical group order, where the connections between two or more members are largely shaped and restricted by a centralised power structure. A social connection is produced only through a centralised group event and the social, cultural, or economic needs of the members are met when the committee organises events or other activities to respond to them.

The case of wired associations, however, demonstrates possible ways in which a less centralised power structure can be deployed in an ethnic network. In the case of Ted's networking for his start-up, he found the talent he needed by sending out messages online directly to the target audience without the mediation of a centralised group committee. The formation of the Business Venture group is another example. It emerged as a group within the larger group of Xiyu as a few members of Xiyu decided to find potential entrepreneurs or investors within Xiyu. They started the group by sending out online messages to all Xiyu members via Googlegroup without the intervention of the Xiyu committee dominated by a few members. Although there are regular events organised by a centralised Xiyu committee, such as monthly drinks and networking events, there are also a number of events that are spontaneously started by one or more regular members. Sports events and business meetings are constantly initiated directly by or among the members. While a centralised committee organises large-scale events for all members, the direct linkages among the members enabled by internet communication allow the organisation of activities among a

smaller and more specific group within the larger association. This distinguishes the networked ethnic ties from the conventional ones; that is, the former gives rise to projects that flexibly target the audience they are interested in.

#### **4.6. Digitised guanxi: the Chinese specificity of network sociality**

This section identifies the Chinese specificity of network sociality; in other words, it discusses how the notion of network sociality is distinct in the case of Chinese migrants.

What is the specificity of guanxi, compared with Wittel's case study of sociality grounded in a Western setting? The first and foremost observation is there is a repeated emphasis on interpersonal networks, or guanxi, among the informants when asked about their intention to participate in co-ethnic network sociality. This emphasis is structured with a discursive construction of guanxi as China's centuries-old cultural tradition with a reference to a mainland Chinese economic triumphalism.

Several informants cited a popular Chinese saying, 'with guanxi, it's alright' (有關係就沒關係), when asked about why they choose to join wired associations like Xiyu and CFUK. 'With guanxi, it's alright' identifies that, in addition to the formal regulation system such as the law, there is another informal set of principles that governs the flow of capital; that is, the balanced obligations of interpersonal exchanges. Quoting this saying in their articulation of business practices with China-based firms, contacts and capital indicates how the informants envisage the moral economy of the Chinese business culture.

This emphasis on *guanxi* within Xiyu and CFUK is woven with an articulation of mainland China's economic development which identifies the core and marginal actors of Chinese modernity. When asked about why they join Xiyu and CFUK and maintain ties with co-ethnics, many informants' responses construct China as a main place for their present and future economic gains and the abroad-educated Chinese as playing an important role in China's rising economic power. Participating in Xiyu and CFUK is not only perceived as making connections but, more importantly, it is 'making connections with the right people'. As Jai's and Jinxi's interviews suggest in an earlier section in this chapter, making connections with the UK-educated Chinese is particularly essential as this is a group widely read as enriched with significant amount of economic, social and cultural capital. Networking within Xiyu and CFUK aids in the informants' current career development in London and current or future business opportunities in China. This is because this group takes up a wide range of professional jobs – an indirect result of their well-off background in China, and because their social and economic resources accumulated through the rise of China can often be transferred to their economic gains in London. Furthermore, according to Jai and Jinxi and many interviews further discussed in the next chapter, connections within this group are also valued and perceived as key to their future or present business development in China as they are considered well-connected in China.

Furthermore, as demonstrated earlier, the symbolic use of network sociality among the migrants also exemplifies how this concept is contextualised into the history and socioeconomic formation of the Chinese diaspora in Britain. It serves to dissect the broad notion of the Chinese diaspora into smaller sectors. The tech-savvy Web 2.0 generation is portrayed against the dated web page users, the old is positioned against

the young, and Hong Kong migrants are positioned against the mainland newcomers, which are all grounded in the colonial history, the recent rise of mainland China and the migratory patterns of the Chinese population.

Finally, another distinctive feature also defines the specificity of network sociality appropriated in the context of Chinese migrant community. While in transnational business synergies *guanxi* is increasingly established through internet-mediated platforms, there is an emphasis on hybridising the online-based *guanxi* in an offline setting among the informants with reference to a specific Chinese cultural practice. Online-organised *guanxi* needs to be constantly maintained in offline-based sociality because of an emphasis on physical appearance in interpersonal bonding in the Chinese culture. Many informants cited the Chinese saying, ‘meeting in person brings extra closeness’ (見面三分情,見面就有情), which foregrounds face-to-face interaction in building social bonding. Through this saying, the informants articulate that these internet-mediated *guanxi* initiation and maintenance are required to regularly cultivated through face-to-face interaction. This will be further exemplified and discussed in the next chapter where the transnational *guanxi* between the China-based Chinese government officials and the migrants are examined.

#### **4.7. Conclusion and discussion**

This chapter examines a burgeoning form of ethnic association that can be characterised by its network sociality. The initial bridging of the social networks rely exclusively on the internet – from the advertisement of the associations, recruitment procedures, to the dissemination of their group information. Focusing on the institution of wired ethnic communities, I demonstrate how this networked ethnic

sociality produces an emerging subjectivity among the Chinese transnationals; that is, the subjectivity of a modern form of Chinese transnationals that is obtained only through the use of digital technologies and the participation in internet-mediated social networks.

This newly emerging form of ethnic sociality significantly transforms the informants' daily experiences in several ways, all of which are largely marked by the (discourse of) the recent rise of Chinese digital and economic modernity. Firstly, the informants consider the affiliation with online sociality a symbolic practice through which they identify themselves as belonging to a young, modern and mobile subgroup in the broader idea of the Chinese diaspora. Through internet use in co-ethnic networking, the informants view themselves as being part of the rising Chinese digital modernity.

Secondly, practicing culture collectively is one of the main activities of the wired Chinese associations, underlying which embedded a form of business-associated social bonding. The cultural practices organised by the wired associations are composed of a series of consumerist practices from shopping, going to pubs, to joining a sports centre, which is underlined by a celebratory discourse of the economic power of China and overseas Chinese. Migrants' economic activities are also largely shaped by the materialisation of the co-ethnic network sociality. Wired social ties among co-ethnic professionals are cultivated through cultural and social events and are utilised as a way to bypass the ethnic glass ceiling and the disadvantages brought by the informants' migratory status.

In addition to the labour market of London, the networks are reported to be useful in

transnational business plans as cross-border networks are made easy with internet use in forming wired Chinese associations as they help quickly to identify needed and trustworthy social capital. This recourse to digital linkages and the dependence on economic and social resources in China serves as another practice through which the informants make sense of the rise of China's digital and economic modernity and their own central roles in building it.

The features of these activities organised via the wired organisations significantly differentiate from the conventional social ties and networking capacity of the unwired ethnic organisations. Compared with the findings of previous studies on Chinese associations for IT professionals, network sociality provides an opportunity of speed networking and functions more efficiently regarding the matchmaking among professionals with similar networking needs and cultural consumption patterns. Furthermore, the power relations in the wired associations are also decentralised and less hierarchical due to the direct linkages among members who are enabled by internet use.

There is also a Chinese specificity in the exploration of the concept of network sociality. The symbolic meaning of network sociality intersects with the historic and socioeconomic formation of the Chinese diaspora in Britain. The emphasis on guanxi in Chinese business culture also further centralises the role of the internet. This is because the guanxi that was previously less feasible due to its transborder nature is now facilitated by the internet. Network sociality is thus largely valued in the context of the Chinese business culture. It is also noteworthy that there is a highlight of the place-grounded physical appearance in forming social bonding in the Chinese culture.

Network sociality remains valid not only through online-maintained social grouping. It is required to be cultivated on a regular basis in an offline setting.

While this research explores the younger generation of white collar Chinese, it is also important to explore what impacts, if any, the internet has brought about among the older generations of Chinese organisations. Preliminary visits during the fieldwork to the traditional Chinese organisations in London's Chinatown suggest that these organisations do tend to use telephones as their major communication method while they still have an official website. Yet, limited by its scope, this study does not look in-depth into the ways in which digital technologies encounter the traditional communication methods and how it may affect the dynamics of social grouping among the migrants. Furthermore, this chapter examines the formal, largely institutional ties that are formed online. Yet, it may be equally interesting to explore how more informal social ties can shape various migrant experiences, such as co-ethnic dating websites. Or, how do these informal networked ties supplement or interact with the formal wired associations?

## **Chapter 5. Transborder governance: Laws, policies and the practices of the digital management of overseas talent**

Whilst chapter 4 illustrates the ways in which the migrant professionals form digital sociality, this chapter demonstrates the role these digital social ties and other digitised linkages play in enabling the PRC's transborder control over this population. The PRC state views success in managing this population as critical to its developmental strategies and modernity project because economic growth and the underlying neoliberal logics have strengthened PRC's demand for quality labour.

More specifically, I adopt the approach of governmentality analysis to demonstrate that the transborder governing practices via internet use produce the state's innovative imageries and discourses of who to govern and how to govern. The internet use embedded in transborder social networks increases the government's ability to exercise power across the boundaries between nation-states and allows transnational governing techniques to be deployed in novel ways. Both the state's power play and the informants' responses to it are underscored by a discursive emphasis on China as an emerging global economic power.

In this chapter, I will begin with a discussion of neoliberalism and how a governmentality approach helps demonstrate the rationale, mentality and practices of states in the neoliberal age. Focusing on the works of Foucauldian authors on neoliberal governance, I then discuss empirical studies that utilise the concept of governmentality to analyse various acts of today's states that seek to maximise their competitiveness in a global process, including zoning for special economic areas, promoting a certain industry to a global audience and policies that attract global talent.

I highlight a missing element in the governmentality studies of neoliberal states: that is, the role of digital technologies. In so doing I suggest that digital technologies create new subjects in the global competition for quality labour and produce new fields where diasporas can be managed and monitored by cross-border state power.

The section on findings includes three key examples of the state's management of its overseas quality human capital. Firstly, the case of CFUK and Xiyu and their close connection with the PRC government demonstrates how wired ethnic communities now serve as a critical medium between migrants and the government of their country of origin. This mode of transborder population management is characterised by the use of social ties that are digitally-based and geographically-located and by the constant use of a citizenship-based nationalistic discourse to encourage transborder digital connections.

The second example discusses an informant's experience with the association for Singaporean medical professionals in London. It resembles the case of CFUK in that this association also utilises digitised guanxi across borders and maintains intimate connections with an overseas state. Yet, compared with the first example which highlights a discourse built upon nationalistic discourse surrounding citizenship, it illustrates how the digital management of overseas population can also base itself on cultural nationalism. Through this inclusive culture-based nationalism, a nation-state calls for not only overseas citizens but also valuable working population that does not obtain full citizenship but shares the same cultural values with the country, thus attracting talent with multiple national linkages.

The third example discusses informants' use of an online registration system set up by the Chinese Embassy for China's overseas population in higher education. This section demonstrates the digital management of overseas talent through the surveillance of migrants' aggregate biological information and through the exercise of a state's biopower. This transborder information flow is enabled without the mediation of digitised guanxi; it is sustained entirely through online platforms. Through the use of the overseas population's biological information collected online, the state is able to target and monitor better their choices and processes of labour.

### **5.1. Neoliberal governmentality: the competition for global talent**

Governmentality analysis explores the mentalities, rationalities, discourses, tactics and techniques of governing. The concept of governmentality is closely linked to Foucault's theorisation of knowledge/power (Foucault 1991; see also Gordon 1980; Larner and Walters 2004). It involves the production of certain 'truth' surrounding the governed and the governing. New subjects and new ways of thinking about the governed and the governing are created to produce citizens that are best fitted to a government's will.

While Foucault dates the emergence of governmentality – a specific form of knowledge political economy – to the eighteenth century when governing power was largely exercised within the borders of a nation-state, recent scholars have started to inquire about the possibility of applying this concept to governing practices in the age of globalisation. Authors explore how governmentality can be deployed in governments' market-driven policies that enhance their performances as a nation-state

in global competition.

Aihwa Ong in *Neoliberalism As Exception* (2006) focuses on the case of East and Southeast Asia and theorises the use of neoliberal, market-driven interventions in the states' management of population and the administration of space. The neoliberal technologies of the state can take many forms. Ong uses a Foucauldian perspective and argues that these many forms of neoliberalism all surround the idea of biopower which involves skillful management of population and the national space it dwells. Zoning technology is one of the common examples. China, for instance, creates 'Special Economic Zones' (SEZs) and 'Special Administration Regions' (SARs). These are national zones where limits to market freedom in other national spaces under the semi-socialist state control are lifted to attract global capital and to increase its economic competitiveness in the global era. The governing technology of citizenship is another example. Using the concept of 'latitudinal citizenship', Ong exemplifies how development states treat citizenship and the rights and privileges it renders as a way to secure its competitiveness. The concept of citizenship is now produced as something implicitly based on income, the dignity of work and representation.

With a similar approach, Larner and Le Heron (2004) highlight the example of New Zealand's land-based industry and how the government adopts calculative practices to enhance its global competitiveness. According to the authors, the ways in which the benchmark of New Zealand's goods is negotiated demonstrate the New Zealand state's spatial imageries of its locally-based goods and its globally dispersed

customers, linking the local to the global. Through benchmarking techniques of the state, the geographical distance between New Zealand-based producers and internationally located consumers are diminished by policy associations. Another example of the government's perception of global economic space put into practices can be found in the calculative initiatives of call centre attraction (Larner 2001, 2002). The international economic activity of the outsourcing and/or attracting of low-level jobs is shaped by the rationalities of governance. The state constructs a feminised and ethnicised image of typical call centre workers in the policies of attracting international call centre investors, producing a new type of subject to fulfill its governing goals. To conclude, the author theorises globalisation as a governmentality; that is, '[a] style of political reasoning premised on particular conceptions of what and who is to be governed' (Larner 2001:300).

In addition to the above analyses, the approach of governmentality analysis can also be applied to understand the governing acts over the extra-territorial population of a nation-state. It is argued that neoliberal states strategically engage their diasporas as a way to maximise the competitiveness in the global age. Larner (2007) demonstrates a genealogy of diaspora management among neoliberal states, illustrating how the states' conception of diaspora is transformed from the concern of immigration officials to economic development agencies. Diaspora policies evolve from reducing immigration offences to requiring highly skilled overseas population to relocate back to the origin countries. Today, policies also formed to encourage the construction of transborder networks, cooperation and monetary flows without necessarily requiring the expatriates to geographically relocate. This is when the concept of 'brain

circulation' emerges to overwrite the idea of brain circulation (Saxenian 2005). Overseas population is considered not a loss of human capital but an asset valuable to facilitating cross-border flows of capital, knowledge and skills to the origin country.

Based on this perspective that highlights the state's changing view of the diaspora from a border control issue to a development strategy, this chapter adopts the approach of governmentality studies to examine the PRC's governing techniques surrounding diaspora that emphasise them as a valuable development asset. Yet, to expand beyond this existing analysis, I highlight the role of the internet in aiding and shaping these governing rationales, mentalities and practices, which is largely missing from the literature of governmentality and neoliberal governance.

Internet technologies, I would argue, produce new subjects to be governed and create new fields where state power can be exercised. What types of digitised governing techniques are adopted by states to reach and manage its overseas citizens and produce them as useful labour force? What are the rationalities and discourses underlying these internet-mediated practices of the states? What subjects have been produced as the governable and as the governing through internet use? This chapter engages with the above questions and explores the internet-mediated governing practices of the diaspora from a governmentality perspective.

To understand states' control over quality emigrant labour, a discussion of the literature of the global competition for talent is needed. Talent, or highly skilled workers, is normally defined as having a university degree or extensive/equivalent experience in a given field, including highly skilled specialists, independent

executives and senior managers, specialised technicians or tradespersons, investors, business persons, key workers and subcontract workers (OECD, SOPEMI 1997: 21).

Several theoretical models have developed to explain the global movement of skilled workers. The classical human capital theory views professionals' movement around the world as a rational choice to find employment that best suits their education and training. In addition to viewing the global movement of professionals as a personal choice, there are also many institutional factors that incorporate individual choices into the macro, global political economy (Goss and Lindquist 1995; Todaro 1985).

The internationalisation of higher education is a key driving force for the global flow of talent. On the one hand, higher education is seen by developed countries as sellable or tradable in international business and increasingly treated as a way to earn export revenue (Iredale 2001; Ong 2006). Developed countries recognise the value of knowledge workers in today's advanced economies. Hence producing more workers with knowledge-based training from a quality educational system becomes critical. In other words, the developed world seeks to attract students not only because of the commercial gains but also because it is the key field of the global competition of talent (Chang and Deng 1992; Kuptsch 2006). On the other hand, people from the developing world view Western higher education as the most promising means to employment in an industrialised country and better salaries (Iredale 2001). The governments of the developing areas also have the incentive to encourage their citizens to study abroad in the hope that they may bring back valuable knowledge and capital central the development of these counties upon the completion of their studies (Abella 2006; Chang 1992; Chang and Deng 1992). As a result, higher education

becomes as channel through which the global flow of talent is encouraged. These viewpoints consider the global mobility of professionals a result of the differences between the rich core and the less developed periphery areas, which highlights the significance of macro analysis of global political economy.

To prevent brain drain and to obtain the optimal outcome of talent competition, governments have worked on policies and projects that manage their extra-territorial population. These governing practices are understood as diaspora engagement or diaspora strategies (Gamlen 2008; Lerner 2007). Early examples of the management of extra-territorial population can be found among underdeveloped countries. This then travels to the 'mid-range' countries where high skilled workers also outflow to the West (Lerner 2007). Finally, the governing techniques travel to the developed world as globalisation increase the need and channels of globally mobile talent.

Various governing techniques have been included in diaspora management projects and policies. Culturally, states have constructed discourses that highlight the coherence between diaspora and the population within their borders. Extra-territorial celebration of cultural events is often foregrounded by states' intervention, such as India's Non-Resident Indian Day. State-sponsored diaspora television and other print media are now ubiquitous (Gamlen 2008). On political rights, states carve new models of citizenship for extra-territorial population, allowing them to travel, work, do business and vote without being territorialised (Baubock 2005; Dickinson and Bailey 2007). States also engage in offering social and civil rights for extra-territorial population through consular relations and bilateral agreements with the destination states (Gamlen 2007, 2008).

## **5.2. Emigration management laws: the case of People's Republic of China**

Like many developing countries, China has been facing the crisis of brain drain and adopting measures to manage the flow of its skilled workforce. Whereas sending its high-quality workforce abroad is desirable both politically and economically, the concerns for brain drain caused by their delayed return or no return are significant. China's response to these concerns has changed over the past decades.

Before China's reform in 1978, there were relatively few overseas Chinese professionals and students. Since 1978, approximately 520,000 students have gone abroad for higher education; the majority of them stay to work overseas upon completion of their studies (Xiang and Shen 2009). The trend to retrain abroad increased particularly around 1989 when the Tiananmen event caused concerns for political and economic stability among the overseas talent (Deng and Chang 1992). To tackle this crisis, by adjusting the distribution of public funding for outflowing talent, the PRC government managed to redirect its overseas professionals to East Europe where political beliefs are less conflicting with its own. It also sent out more short-term visiting scholars rather than long-term students and increased the return rate by not funding the professionals' spouses and children to travel with them (Chang and Deng 1992).

However, these once efficient measures to manage the outflow of professionals through control over public funding have faced increasing challenges since the early 2000s – a time when the increasing wealth among the middle and upper-middle class

families in coastal China means they are more capable of going abroad without government funding (Xiang 2005; Nyiri 2001). This is evident in the statistics demonstrated by Xiang (2005) showing that the number of overseas students and professionals significantly rose to a historical high and yet the number of returning ones remained relatively stable (Figure 5.1).

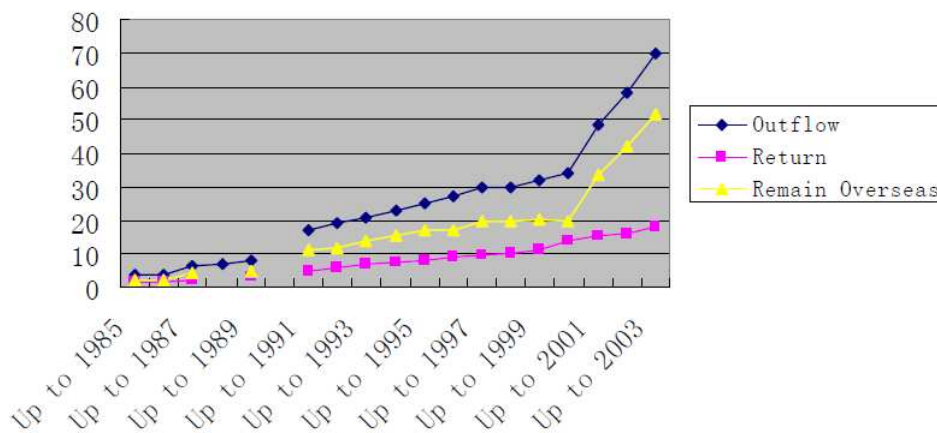


Figure 5.1. The outflow and return of overseas Chinese students and professionals (10,000 persons)

Source: Xiang (2005: 22)

To respond to this recent outflow of students and professionals, a restrictive policy that relies on the control of public funding is not enough. Since the late 1980s, the PRC government has developed a set of well-structured policies that seek to encourage the inflows instead of merely imposing restrictions on the outflows. On the one hand, the central government works on the large-scale, nationwide institutional policies. As to labour migration, the Ministry of Labour is responsible for regulating and licensing any companies involving the export of Chinese labour. It set up a

special Overseas Employment Office in the 1990s in order to address better this concern. Regarding student migrants, private education agencies that promote and offer services for the outflow of students to foreign education have been under stricter scrutiny and required licenses from the Bureau of Commerce and Industry since the early 2000. The categories of passports are also transformed and simplified, allowing for a more straightforward surveillance of all citizens' movement. Special conferences and committees of the central government are set up to monitor all these new measures of population control. Overall, the control of the outflow of the population is increasingly institutionalised in China (Xiang 2003) (Figure 5.2).

Laws	Date of Promulgation	Effectiveness
Decree of the State Council on Implementing the Policy of Protecting Remittances by Overseas Chinese	23 Feb 1955	23 Feb 1955
Circular by OCAO, SBoP (Personnel), SBoL, MoF, MoPS on Treatments to Returned Overseas Chinese and Relatives of Overseas Chinese Existing China to Visit Families	9 Apr 1992	9 Apr 1992
Circular on Beneficial Treatments in Housing for Returned Overseas Chinese, Relatives of Overseas Chinese and in Education and Employment for their Children	20 Mar 1983	20 Mar 1983
Rules of the State Council on the Encouragement of Investments by Overseas Chinese and Compatriates from Hong Kong and Macau	19 Aug 1990	19 Aug 1990
Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Returned Overseas	7 Sep 1990	7 Sep 1990

Chinese and the Family Members of Overseas Chinese		
Implementing Measures of the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Returned Overseas Chinese and Family Members of Overseas Chinese	19 Jul 1993	19 Jul 1993
Law of the People's Republic of China on Protection of the Rights and Interests of Returned Overseas Chinese and the Family Members of Overseas Chinese	31 Oct 2000	31 Oct 2000

Figure 5.2 Laws and documents on overseas Chinese

Note: Reproduced from Xiang (2003)

On the other hand, on the local level, the city and county local governments actively involve themselves in a variety of smaller projects and activities that promote cross-border collaboration with overseas professionals. This includes policies that encourage scholars to travel to China for seminars and short or long-term research projects and other professional events (Xiang 2005).

Like most existing studies on governments' strategies to combat the outflow of talent, the above data on the PRC government's management of brain drain centre on formal, official policies. Yet, it is worth noting that there are also informal channels through which the government reaches its overseas talent and manages professionals. This can be a particularly important research angle in a culture emphasising guanxi like China.

Xiang Biao (2005) provides evidence indicating that the majority of overseas Chinese professionals have been maintaining informal, personal contact with various

educational institutions, firms, government offices, and other related organisations in China, which may play a key role in bringing talent back (Figure 5.3). These connections, however, are often established not through government-funded policies but through existing personal ties between one overseas Chinese professional and an employer in these organisations or government offices of various levels in China (Table 5.1).

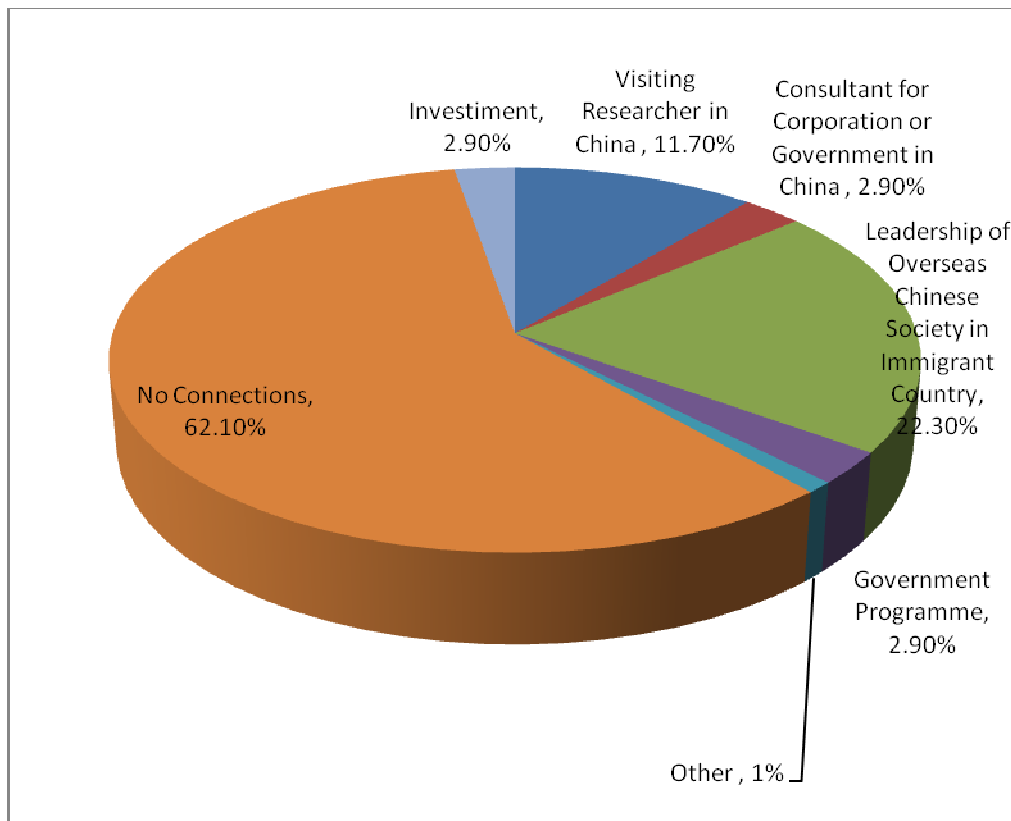


Figure 5.3. Channels of connections with China

Source: Xiang (2005:32)

Means	Percentage
Personal connections (former classmates or colleagues)	84
Academic conferences or other academic exchanges	35
Government programmes	20
Fairs in China	20
Recruitment fairs by Chinese institutes overseas	11
Other	4

Table 5.1. Main means to establish connections with institutions in China

Note: Reproduced from Xiang (2005:60)

This foregrounds the less researched role of transborder *guanxi* in understanding a state's, or, to be more specifically, the PRC government's strategies of global brain drain. The informal channels of transborder governing practices, such as interpersonal contact between government officials and overseas talent, is less explored, compared with the formal, official channels (Xiang 2005; Xiang and Shen 2009).

Among all informal, interpersonal channels, overseas Chinese professional associations are worth noting. It has been suggested that there are increasing connections between the overseas associations and various government or private organisations in China (Pieke 1998). It is also found that these connections usually start with a few active members of the associations building personal ties with the PRC's political elites (Nyiri 1999, 2001). These data suggest the significance of transborder personal ties, or *guanxi*, in understanding developing countries' strategies

to manage global brain drain. Hence this chapter focuses on these less researched channels through which the PRC state exercises its power of population management transnationally.

Furthermore, due to the long-distance nature of these informal, interpersonal channels of overseas population management, internet use may be particularly significant in bridging these transborder guanxi. Thus in this chapter, I explore how the digital guanxi is adopted to bridge the interpersonal connections key to the PRC's cross-border talent management.

### **5.3. Transborder governance through wired communities: the case of CFUK and Xiyu**

The PRC government officials contacted the informants throughout the period of the study. Both CFUK and Xiyu played a critical part in organising recruitment events where guanxi between government officials and the informants were established and where the officials aimed to attract the return flow of talent. An example of this digitised guanxi with the PRC government developed to aid in the transborder flow of talent is a project of the PRC government — ‘The Return of Overseas High-Quality Talent’ (Figure 5.4, 5.5). Hosted at the early stage of the financial crisis in 2008, this project targeted Chinese financial professionals in major world cities in the hope that they may seek to return to China for economic opportunities considering the lack of job openings in the West. During December 2008, three events were held in London, New York, and Chicago. Both Xiyu and CFUK were contacted by the Chinese Embassy in London to promote its event information and encourage their members to participate. Almost all the informants with whom I spoke were aware of the event.

About a quarter of them went to the event.

The main host of this event was the finance office of Shanghai city council who invited over 20 participating firms, including Shanghai Stock Market, Shanghai Bank, several Shanghai-based hedge funds and insurance companies. All the participating firms are Chinese-capital enterprises. These firms sent out representatives to London, held interviews at the event and invited participants to bring CV there. Hu, who works in finance and went to the event, explained his motives for attending the event by arguing that digital connection with officials and business leaders in China is essential to his career development:

Hu: I asked Jai [an active member of CFUK] to introduce me to some key figures beforehand.....We [the officials or the business representatives and I] met for the first time at the event. At the event, I just walked there and introduced myself as the person emailed you before or talked to you on Kaixin [a Chinese social networking site] before. It became easier to start a conversation. I am not sure if they did send my CV to their boss before the event. But establishing connections with them is definitely a must when it comes to finding a job in Shanghai's financial circle. It can even be considered rude if you just initiate conversation and ask for insider's information about the opening at the event without this prior introduction.

(male, trader, 29)

Guanxi is emphasised in job searching in China's major financial cities, which is portrayed as the main reason the informant participated in the event.

As transnational guanxi is unlikely to be based on face-to-face sociality, internet-mediated social ties become central. For transnational Chinese, guanxi

cultivation was once a slow process involving long travels and is now facilitated with the internet. He continued to explain how the transborder guanxi was established through a mixture of existing contacts and internet-initiated communication:

I brought my CV there but I did try and contact several people in human resources in the recruiting firms before the day. If a CV is delivered to the recruiting manager via an employer within the firm or via a mutual acquaintance, your chance of getting in the firm will definitely increase, particularly for Chinese firms. So I asked Jai [an active member of CFUK] beforehand to introduce managers or other employers she knows in these banks.

In this case, Hu asked a well-connected member of CFUK to introduce to her several employees in the financial industry in Shanghai before the interview started in London and sent out emails to the potential employers in China. He draws on network sociality developed through wired ethnic organisations and then further utilises internet applications to reach cross-border social capital. Transborder guanxi is particularly salient under the current global political economy perceived among the informants. While the informants increasingly value the economic opportunities in China at a time they view as a downturn of Western capitalism, bonding with business and relevant contacts in China in what they envisage as the Chinese way becomes important.

This event, along with other similar events held during the fieldwork period, demonstrates the key features of the relationship between a PRC governing agent and the extra-territorial professional population. Firstly, in addition to attracting talent through policies that give tax cuts and other monetary incentives, this event demonstrates how the PRC state recurses to guanxi and interpersonal connectedness

to open up channels of cooperation and to motivate expatriates. The events involve guanxi cultivation between key members in Xiyu and CFUK with other agents – the Chinese professionals in London and the PRC government officials.

The wired associations are the main channels through which the informants obtain information regarding the overseas project hosted by the PRC government. Through this efficiently-built digitised guanxi, new subjects to be governed by state power are produced because the previously largely anonymous group becomes more reachable and manageable to the state. Using their usual communication channels on the internet from Googlegroup, websites, email lists, and Facebook, Xiyu and CFUK are two main sources through which the event information is disseminated among the highly specified and yet dispersed group. As the government lacks the ability to obtain the contact information and other information about each professional, the wired ethnic communities which efficiently reach a wide range of skilled Chinese workers in London via internet tools become useful in the management of PRC's overseas citizens.

This intervention of the wired associations reduces the difficulty of transborder governing practices – information is delivered across borders in a quicker way and is circulated among a specifically targeted group of receivers. The individuals that are otherwise less likely to be contacted are now competently managed and viewed at a collective level by the PRC state. This group is hence reinvented as an accessible target of the state to govern and constructed as key subjects in neoliberal governmentality.

Key members in these wired associations also cultivate close personal ties with the PRC government officials in China. The participating PRC government officials in this event, largely from the local, city-level government of Shanghai, are the main hosts of the event. The transnational guanxi between active members in overseas Chinese communities and officials in China is largely initiated online, move onto offline-based guanxi in London, and then continue to be maintained and managed across borders after the events via the use of emails, websites, instant messaging services and social networking spaces. Dee, a founder of the partnered organisation of the event, CFUK, explains the process of this transnational construction of digital guanxi with officials:

We usually use emails to initiate the conversation as face-to-face visits cost too much and telephone is too direct. After the emails, we then arrange meetings in London or sometimes in China for the officials, the companies interested in recruiting us, and our members to meet.....They do need to meet in person, not just online. Connections cannot be built over an email. There is a Chinese saying, “meeting in person brings extra closeness”. So they fly here, meet us in a conference and maybe some social events or dining events afterwards...During those events, they exchange contact details. I usually give people my QQ [a Chinese instant messaging tool], email, and sometimes my user name on social networking sites, depending on how close I feel or I need it to be.

(female, finance industry, 28)

The bonding between the PRC government and the wired communities in London is an intermingling process of online and face-to-face sociality. Dee identifies how the transnational management of human capital is enabled first by virtual ties and then by guanxi developed in a geographical place. Guanxi grounded in geographically-based sociality is much emphasised in the successful management of overseas human capital.

However, because of the nature of its transnationality, connections between PRC officials and its overseas population need to be managed over a distance without the constant maintenance of face-to-face guanxi. The role of internet tools then again acquires its significance at this stage of cross-border guanxi building. This highlights that transnationalism, whilst often associated with the metaphor of ‘ungrounded empires’, is crystallised in locales (Zhao and Tseng 2001). As Sassen (1994:123) wrote, ‘globalization processes assume concrete, localized forms’. Transnationality needs to be bounded in the locally-forged social networks, thus blending the global into the local social scenes.

This links to the second feature of these events; that is, the personal connection requires skillful use of a wide range of internet products and high digital intelligence. Strategic use of online products is central to successful transborder guanxi maintenance. As Dee continued to explain:

It’s not possible for us to maintain really close ties over a distance. Actually, you don’t need to be the best friends of the officials and they don’t seek to be really close to the professionals. So telephone or other frequent visits cause embarrassment. Also, visits are not realistic considering the distance. So we keep in touch online. It’s more appropriate. And, it’s free..... I’d say if there were no QQ or emails, we wouldn’t be able to keep in touch.....But meeting in person is still important. It’s different between emailing someone without meeting him or her first and emailing or QQ someone after you met at an event. The latter feels like you are really connected, it’s more personal. Especially QQ, you won’t give someone you never met your QQ account, but it’s acceptable to give it to friends you met once.

According to Dee, building ties with officials is a process that involves a high level of

digital skills and competency. The exposure to a wide range of digital tools is required and the various cultural meanings of each of these newly emerging technologies are central to the successful management of such *guanxi*. This intense demand for digital competency in building *guanxi* with officials means exclusivity in accessing the state and accumulating social capital in a transnational setting as social groups with less digital knowledge may be largely neglected.

The third feature of the wired *guanxi* cultivation with state agents is the compliancy among the diaspora as a result of the discursive construction of China's modernity. A discourse emphasising China's economic success can be observed in events like the event of 'The Return of High-Quality Talent' both among the informants and the government officials. It functions to encourage the participants to view ties with the governing body as valuable asset in doing business and obtaining economic return.

It is argued in several studies of diaspora management that the element of coercion is absent in the governance of a population outside the border (Gamlen 2008; Larner 2007). While coercive sovereignty is absent, governmentality comes into place. The discursive construction of citizenship, nationalism and loyalty serves as the basis of the informants' motives to build *guanxi* with the state.

The discourse of China's financial modernity is often blended with an emphasis on citizenship-based nationalism, which is implied in various published documents surrounding the skilled return migrants. A flyer disseminated at the event of The Return of Overseas High-Quality Talent in London used the slogan 'Chinese financial professionals return to China; Chinese financial professionals receive welfare from

China'. This strategy adopted by the PRC government and its partnered organisations in this event is twofold. Firstly, they emphasise the increased wage and prosperity in China's financial industry, which is underlined by a nationalistic discursive confidence in China's financial modernity and future economic power.

Secondly, and more subtly, they also seek to attract talent to flow back to their country of origin by constructing and emphasising a nationalistic sentiment of collectiveness and social stability secured by citizenship. Pal Nyiri (2000, 2001) has pointed out the nationalistic sentiments underlying the PRC state's attitude towards overseas Chinese. The state discursively constructs overseas Chinese as a result of its modernisation. Emigrant communities are celebrated as a product of China's economic power and thus patriotism among overseas Chinese is manufactured.

The flyers disseminated at the event demonstrate how the state utilises nationalistic sentiments to bond with overseas talent. Yet, in addition to general nationalistic sentiments suggested by Pal Nyiri, the flyers and the participants' articulations of them further demonstrate how nationalistic discourse is built exclusively upon the concept of citizenship. That is, being a Chinese politically means assured economic and social stability, which cannot be offered in the UK, particularly under a harsh economic climate.

This discursive highlight of China's modernity not only appears in the documents produced by government agents, but was also repeatedly emphasised in the informants' own conversations with me when I asked them about their motives to participate in such events. Dee explained:

Dee: It's a trend. The centre of global financial market is shifting. It's not just London and New York now. It's also Hong Kong, Singapore, Shanghai and Shenzhen. Our (CFUK) aim is to help financial talent flow. And the governments of these countries want that, too. So it's obvious why they seek cooperation with us. We have established a pool of financial talent, the majority of whom is willing to return back to Asia.

Dee's talk illuminates the critical role of the discourse of the changing geography of global economic power in encouraging the informants to build social ties with Chinese officials. Chun, another CFUK member and participant of the Shanghai recruitment event, further elucidates by emphasising how Chinese citizenship together with its financial modernity offers stability for him:

Chun: I know some of the Chinese financial professionals are seeking permanent residency or a passport of the UK. But in fact, the majority of them will not get it, especially considering the economic climate at the moment. As a Chinese citizen, you'd naturally think you'll return to China some day after gaining a few years' work experiences in the UK as a way to increase your market value.....Without citizenship, it's not possible to develop a stable career. You have no idea when you have to leave. In the long run, our members may feel safer to continue their career back in China. Your country protects you. That's why talent flows. The Chinese government officials may try to entice talent with increasing salaries in recent years. But that's not enough. At least at the moment it's not competitive enough compared with those in London. The key trick they adopt and should continue using is the assured stability for citizens to work in their own country.

(male, analyst, 27)

In summary, the digitised guanxi between Chinese officials and the informants illustrates innovative imageries and tactics of the PRC in governing its overseas

population. The discursive construction of the changing geography of the global financial modernity and the success of the Chinese economy serves as a basis for the informants' loyalty as a citizen and their incentives to stay digitally connected to the state agents. The informants' close connection with the PRC officials, in turn, produces themselves as new subjects for state power to control over in the digital age, because this previously largely anonymous and distant group becomes visible, imaginable and hence manageable for the state with the help of digitised guanxi.

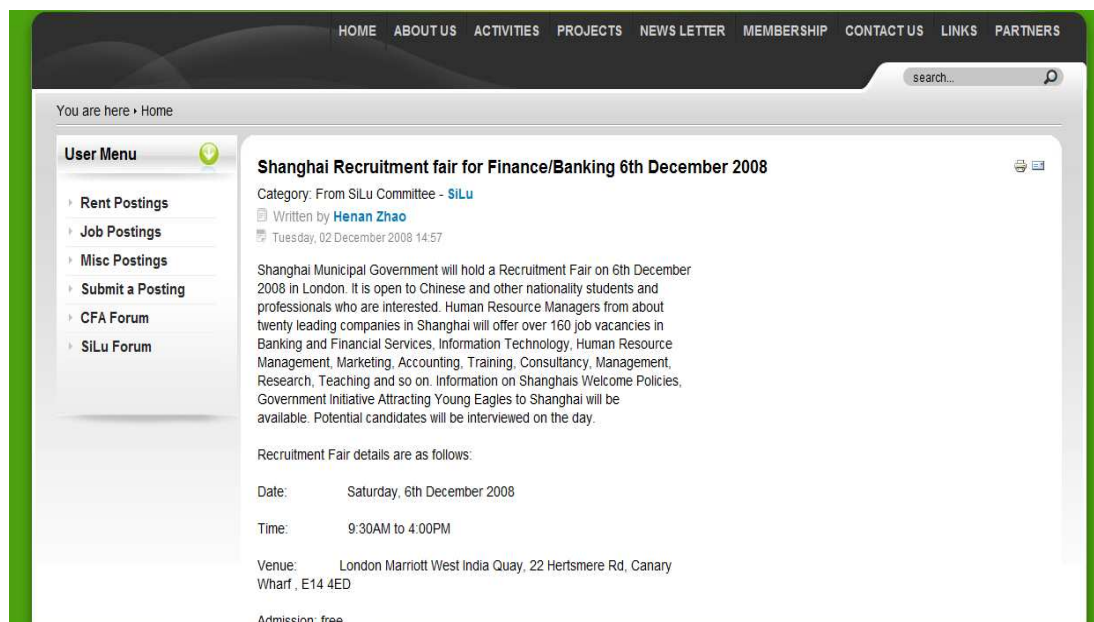


Figure 5.4. Advertisement of the recruitment event on Xiyu's official website

上海市政府有关部门以及上海浦东发展银行、上海银行、上海证券交易所中  
洋保险公司等 20 余家金融机构将于 2008 年 12 月 6 日在英国伦敦、12 月 9  
日在美国芝加哥、12 月 13 日在美国纽约举办三场《2008 年上海市海外高层次金  
融招聘会》，推出银行、基金、证券投资等专业领域 170 多个职位，另有其它特  
端岗位 1000 多个，招聘中国留学人员和其他专业人士。具体情况如下：

一、上海市海外高层次金融人才招聘会（英国伦敦）

1、时间：2008 年 12 月 6 日 9:30-16:00

2、地点：伦敦西印度码头万豪酒店

London Marriott West India Quay, 22 Hertsmere Road, Canary Wharf, London  
E14 4ED

二、上海市海外高层次金融人才招聘会（美国芝加哥）

1、时间：2008 年 12 月 9 日 14:00-18:00

2、地址：芝加哥双树酒店

Double Tree Hotel Chicago

1909 Spring Road, Oak Brook, IL 60523

三、上海市海外高层次金融人才招聘会（美国纽约）

1、时间：2008 年 12 月 13 日 10:00-15:00

2、地点：喜来登酒店

Sheraton LaGuardia East Hotel

135-20 Avenue, Flushing, NY 11354

Figure 5.5. Chinese version of the advertisement of the recruitment event

## 5.4. Multiple linkages and the culture-based discourse of loyalty: Harry's case

Besides the discursive emphasis of citizenship-based loyalty, there are examples suggesting another form of truth production that is utilised in attracting talent; that is, a more inclusive, culture-based discourse about nationalism. Besides Xiyu and CFUK, some informants also participated in other wired ethnic associations for professionals that are linked to governing agents other than the PRC state. Whilst born in mainland China, several informants have family and/or other personal connections in East Asian or Southeast Asian countries, including Japan, Singapore and Malaysia. Some have family doing business and living in these countries prior to their stay in the UK.

Although not having full citizenship of these countries, the informants are still often approached by the states where they have ties because they are considered valuable human resources that may potentially contribute to the competitiveness of the nation-states.

This highlights the multiplicity of digital guanxi with nation-states among skilled workers. It underlines the fact that the competition for talent exists not only between the West and the developing world but also between countries within the Asia-Pacific area. Alternative discourses of talent and their national loyalty hence emerge as a result of informants' multiple national linkages.

Harry's case is an example. Born in mainland China, he went to Singapore to attend middle and high school before applying for entry to a UK university. After his studies at University College London, he is now a doctor in training in London. When asked if he has maintained contact with the PRC government after migrating to Britain, he explained how he identified more with the Singaporean nation-state and has been a member of an association for Singaporean medical professionals in the UK, Singapore Medical Society of United Kingdom (SMSUK) (Figure 5.6).



Figure 5.6. Official Website of SMSL

Source: <http://smsl.org/>

This wired association for medical professionals resembles CFUK and Xiyu in several ways. Firstly, the composition of the association is deeply intertwined with an Asian state. Its committee board is hosted both by officials of Ministry of Health of the state of Singapore and medical professionals in the UK. Like in CFUK and Xiyu, state power is exercised under the mask of everyday social and leisure life. Harry first became aware of the association through a Singaporean friend working in the same hospital as he does. He was then invited by the friend to attend a cocktail party hosted by the association. As he recalled:

Harry: I went to the first event just for fun. It was a cocktail party. I don't have much leisure time. But at that time, I happened to be free. It's nice to meet people from Singapore, especially when they are also doctors..... I went and expected a relaxing evening but it turned out to be quite formal. I met a lot of medical officials from Singapore that night. They wanted to know overseas Singaporean doctors because they are in

desperate need of medical professionals and would like them to go back there someday, if not now.

(male, doctor, 24)

Similar to CFUK and Xiyu, personal and leisure guanxi works as a basis for further official connections with the state. The state seeks to secure its professional workforce in the global age through seamless social web across distance between individual government officials and each overseas professional.

Harry continued to explain in detail how the political agenda of population management is brought into this personal tie between him and the officials:

Harry: We email each other after the officials return to Singapore. They tell me about job information in Singapore and see if I am interested. Sometimes it's about gossip in the social circle of doctors in Singapore. Singapore is not big and my father is a doctor there, too. Very often these officials and doctors know my dad. Sometimes they even know my family friends. It's kind of funny. They'll probably talk about me when they meet in Singapore. These small talks do work when it comes to making closeness and trust.

In Harry's case, continued maintenance with overseas governmental contacts after the events hosted by SMSUK is built through the informants' social networks across borders – particularly his family and kin ties. This guanxi weaves together the personal and the political. For the government agents, their political agenda of managing overseas skilled labour is accomplished through highlighting the transborder web of guanxi they share with the informants. For the migrants, social capital and the valuable labour market information this social web brings about are accumulated within the family sphere through the personal-cum-political transborder

connections.

Secondly, SMSUK resembles CFUK and Xiyu also because these personal-cum-political bonds connecting its members with the state are largely internet-mediated. Harry became aware of the ethnic association through a co-ethnic friend. Internet use dominates his following maintenance of his contact with other members and further Singaporean officials:

Harry: I do not contact them [the officials]. They usually have regular events in London. Each time they introduce new officials or senior doctors from Singapore to us but they'll leave after the events. Sometimes the officials I've already met come back to London and visit. They [SMSUK] email us about the events. We subscribed to the email list when we attended their event for the first time. I also get personal emails from individual member and officials from time to time. They are always about subjects we did not finish at the events or other information I asked for at the events.

Like CFUK, the medical association uses internet tools to increase the strength of the bridged networks between government agents and the overseas professionals in-between face-to-face events. Whilst it is difficult to produce a social environment for officials and the informants to build face-to-face sociality frequently due to its transnational nature, internet tools help to increase the frequency of the ties. In addition to frequency, the quality of the bridged ties between government agents from Asia Pacific and the professionals in London is also strengthened. This is because the internet, in this case, emails, can be used not only as a public communication method to disseminate group information through email list but also a tool to maintain more personal communication between two individuals.

The most significant distinction between CFUK and SMSUK is the discourse upon which these digitised ties with the state are built. The recruitment events held by the CFUK, Xiyu and the PRC local governments often construct mainland China as a singular destination for Chinese citizens to return to. It is maintained that the political belonging of the migrants signifies the cultural and familial belonging, all of which point to one clear-bounded territory; that is, mainland China. Welfare offered for Chinese citizens is emphasised in the recruitment events and the policies advertised in the events also target Chinese citizens.

Compared with this citizenship-based nationalism, Harry's case demonstrates how the state of an Asian emerging country competes for global talent also by employing a culture-based nationalistic discourse in order to attract as much human capital as possible. Officials invited by SMSUK not only target Singaporean citizens by offering citizen-only policies, but, for Harry and other non-citizens, they also employ discourses based upon cultural closeness to attract talent with no political attachment (i.e. citizenship). Harry, and many of his co-workers who join the association, do not obtain Singaporean citizenship but maintain strong social ties and the cultural connections with Singapore. This cultural and social intimacy with the nation-state where no political attachment is established is highlighted throughout the contact between Harry and the state agents of Singapore:

Harry: I wouldn't say I am Singaporean. I am not British, either. I don't have citizenship of these countries and I don't intend to get one. But they [the officials] are right. I do want to go back to Singapore someday. I like Singapore. It's not like China. It's a better place to work for a doctor. And my father is there. Wherever my family is, there is home. I am more

attracted to life there. They know it. So they assume that I am keen on finding a job back there. We talked about life in Singapore, foods, education and the reform of the medical profession in Singapore. It all feels very familiar.

Harry offers a discourse that builds the proximity between him and Singapore not on political attachment and citizenship but on cultural intimacy. From family ties, foods to issues surrounding daily life in Singapore (i.e. education, work life, etc.), this cultural intimacy draws on the everyday banality of the sense of national attachment. The state power that exercises transborder control over highly skilled working population is thus deployed in a less straightforward and yet more pervasive and wide-ranging way compared with the citizenship-based discourse. It is this 'cultural sovereignty' that justifies state surveillance and control with the banal discourse of daily life. It allows the state to reach a larger number of its potential working population as the sovereignty is not limited to the population who politically belong to it and obtain citizenship. Rather, it includes highly skilled workers by highlighting their cultural citizenship which can be generated and granted more flexibly. This is a result of increased competition for global talent and, in particular, a result of the increased competition for skilled labour among emerging economies.

This culture-based discourse produces more subjects for a state to exercise control over as the otherwise irrelevant skilled workers are now contained in the state's scheme for labour recruitment through an inclusive discourse of nationalism. Together with use of digitised guanxi, this discourse aids in attracting as many professionals around the world as possible.

## **5.5.Digital control via information management**

Both the previous cases demonstrate the transborder deployment of state power through digitised guanxi. The third case, the use of an online registration system for Chinese students in the UK, offers an example of another mode of state's digital surveillance which is deployed in a more direct fashion. That is, an online platform which collects data from the informants, compiling the aggregate data that are, according to Foucault (1991), key to a state's exercise of biopower.

Foucault coins the concept of biopower to demonstrate how the governing power is not only deployed through law and jurisdiction. It is, very subtly in modern states, each governed individual's biological attributes that are the main concerns of the state. From health, hygiene to bodily labour, states monitor and manage its population by obtaining the information surrounding their biological traits. Statistics become a critical tool in modern politics as they break down each individual to its smallest elements and hence makes the information about each individual more manageable and under stricter scrutiny. Under this governing rationale, labour is divided into skills and the body becomes dissected into age, sex and other productivity-related features. Individuals are fragmented into basic bodily or biological categories. The use of the registration website for PRC skilled emigrants in Britain can be analysed from this perspective.

From 2004, the Chinese Embassy in the UK has devised an online registration system for Chinese citizens in the British higher education system (Figure 5.7). Work permit holders in universities and student and academic visitor visa holders – both

undergraduate and postgraduate levels – are required to register on the registration website. For those who have been registered for six months or more, they are qualified to apply for the Return Higher Education Graduate Certificate, a document required when one applies for the state’s beneficial policies for skilled return migrants (Figure 5.8). These include tax reduction when shopping in China, scientific research funding and beneficial policies when starting a business. Holders of Return Higher Education Graduate Certificate also have the freedom to choose to work, settle and obtain a household registration, *Huko*, in most major cities in China while most other Chinese citizens can only register in the cities where they were born and are not allowed such mobility.

Data to be submitted include the applicant’s identification, from name, other names used in the UK to passport number. It also obtains information regarding the applicant’s biological category, such as sex and age. Information regarding one’s productivity in the labour market is also essential, including education background in China and UK and work history. Contact details in Britain are also required.

Once registered, the applicant’s data will be verified by the Education Section at the Embassy’s office. Verified applicants are required constantly to update their information, particularly regarding their address and other contact information. This, according to the guidelines published by the Embassy, is in order for relevant governing bodies to get in touch with them (Figure 5.8).

## 留学生报到登记系统

请选择

我来英国后，尚未对本次学习经历进行报到登记。现在需要报到登记。

我已对本次学习经历报到登记过，现在需要对报到登记信息进行修改、打印，需要查询管片老师信息或修改密码，需要查询留学回国人员证明办理情况。（需要用户名和密码）

用户名：  （您登记的护照号码）

密 码：

我曾经报到登记过，但是我忘记了登录密码。

常见问题解答。

[继续\(N\)](#)

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相关网站

Figure 5.7. Online registration web page for overseas students

<http://srs.moe.edu.cn/>

- 1、凡持有有效STUDENT签证的攻读本科（含本科）以上学位的中国留英学生、持ACADEMIC VISITOR 签证的访问学者和持WORK PERMIT 签证的在英国高等院校、科研院所做博士后的研究人员，抵英后均应尽快登录留学人员报到登记系统（<http://srs.moe.edu.cn>）进行报到登记。对持非学生签证攻读学位者，驻英使馆教育处将按照国家有关规定不予以开具《留学回国人员证明》。
- 2、报到登记信息请确保真实、准确、有效，并由学生本人进行日常的维护和更新（如住址、联系方式等变动时，需使用个人账户和密码登录系统进行更新）。请注意：报到登记是留学人员在留学期间和教育处保持联系的重要渠道，不是仅为办理《留学回国人员证明》而必办的手续。因此请所有留学人员抵英后尽早办理报到登记手续。凡因登记信息不符、不实等引发的责任由登记者个人负责。个人密码是留学人员登录报到登记系统进行信息维护和查询的唯一工具，因此请勿随意设定并请牢记。因系统原因，登记时注册的个人电子信箱最好是能长期使用的信箱。
- 3、填写报到登记表时，如果总是提示某项内容出错或无法完成填报，可能是你使用的计算机设置与报到登记系统要求有冲突，请仔细阅读报到登记系统里的系统管理员提示。
- 4、对于连续攻读两个以上学位或有两次以上不同学习经历的留学人员，驻英使馆教育处仅对其在英国所获得的最后学位给予办理《留学回国人员证明》。具体说明请阅读“[常见问题解答](#)”。
- 5、根据系统设计的要求，留学人员在报到登记成功30天后，才能打印出带登记序列号的“留学人员报到登记表”。
- 6、留学人员申请办理《留学回国人员证明》的期限原则上为365天，即，申请人邮寄《留学回国人员证明》的完整申请材料，必须在其毕业（或结业）证书上所显示的日期之后的365天之内，截止日以邮寄的邮戳为准。
- 7、对于连续在英国居住/学习不足六个月的短期留学人员，驻英使馆教育处将按照国家有关规定不予以办理《留学回国人员证明》。

Figure 5.8. Guidelines for the online registration

Source: <http://www.edu-chinaembassy.org.uk/lxyg/zflx1.htm>

Informants give out the information helpful for the state's management of overseas talent; that is, the information Foucault theorises as useful for the state's exercise of biopower. From age, sex, to educational level, information as such is utilised in governing techniques through which the state exercises control over the individual body. The information submitted allows the state to categorise this group of skilled workers abroad according to their differentiated productivity. Their age suggests how productive each of them is, dividing more desired labour from the rest according to one's biological category. The education and work information also helps the state to break down the skills of this group into different specialised industries, allowing for the state's efficient targeting the kind of labourforce its economy currently needs. Statistical data based upon such information divide individual citizen into small biological components and thus facilitates the state to scrutinise individuals efficiently. The informants' bodily mobility and labour process are now more manageable for the state as it utilises the data to reach this highly specified group and sends out messages that target them to mobilise this group to work in China.

In addition to collecting background information, this website also assigns every user a China-based contact who is experienced in the user's academic field and has studied or worked in the UK. Gia is a user of the system. Graduated from university in the Guangdong province in China, Gia came to London to read for a master's degree. Shortly after her arrival in London, she was informed by an official in the Chinese Embassy via email that she needed to register on a website for overseas Chinese students without which it may be difficult for her to find jobs, particularly openings in

government offices, when she returns to China because her data need to be online in order for the local government to confirm her educational background. She was given a set of identity numbers for the initial registration:

Gia: I first logged on expecting nothing more than a webpage for me to fill out and give out information about myself. But it is actually quite thoughtful. Besides giving out personal information, each student is assigned a mentor in China. Mine is a professor in China who used to study in the UK and specialises in the same subject as I do. He wrote to me and told me to feel free to contact him if I need any help and advice regarding life and studies here.....They'll give you information about jobs in China and related policies. I find it quite useful.

(female, engineer, 25)

In addition to information management, the state also seeks digitised guanxi to be built through the website. It attempts to utilise the online updates of information combined with and sometimes reinforced by digitised social ties to maintain close surveillance over the valued pool of workers abroad.

The online registration system assists the state efficiently to obtain key information of the population of high labour market value beyond its borders. Largely because of the state's relative inability to obtain information outside its territory, previous studies on biopower and biological information management tend to focus on population management within the borders of a nation-state. The transnational flow of information on the internet suggests a renewed territoriality of the state's governing techniques in the digital age.

This state's innovative imagery of the territoriality of its power has several

prerequisites. Firstly, the gradual erosion of traditional borders of state power is a response to globalisation. In the case of the PRC state, globalisation facilitates the outflow of the working population with higher education qualifications. Yet, its increased economic development results in the need for such quality human capital and thus leads to the increased desire of the state to elevate the control and management of its outflowing working population. Secondly, this desire for border-crossing governance is also a result of the popular use of the internet among the outflowing population. The information on the overseas population, previously less likely to be obtained and updated, is now under constant, close policing by the state of the migrants' country of origin as internet use reduces the inconvenient and infrequent transborder information flow brought by distance.

Thirdly, there is another prerequisite for the successful management of information and practice of biopower among the overseas population; that is, a discursive consensus between the informants and the state that promotes a positive image of the registration system and the submission of personal data. Compared with the within-border, non-digital information management, the transborder submission of overseas population's digitised information often requires the consensus of the migrants due to its transnational nature and, consequently, the state's reduced ability to coerce individual into information management. Without coercing state power, emigrants can only be reached when they choose to.

This is particularly true in the case of the online expatriate registration system. There is a discursive consensus between the users and the governing agent which serves to encourage migrants' use of the website. That is, a production of certain 'truth' that

facilitates the state's control.

According to the documents published by the Embassy, offering an online registration space for expatriates is portrayed as an act that guarantees a convenient platform for its overseas population's access to the state and the economic resources the state offers to them. On a webpage of the Education section of the Chinese Embassy in the UK, registration on the system is described as a 'service' the state provides to the expatriates in order to assure their social and economic rights (Figure 5.9). It is emphasised in the document that through submitting authentic contact information and maintaining contact with the state the expatriates's legal rights can be protected. Using the language of rights rather than obligations and the language of services rather than responsibilities, constantly maintaining biological data online is produced as facilitating citizens' own economic development instead of fulfilling the state's power deployment and governing goals.

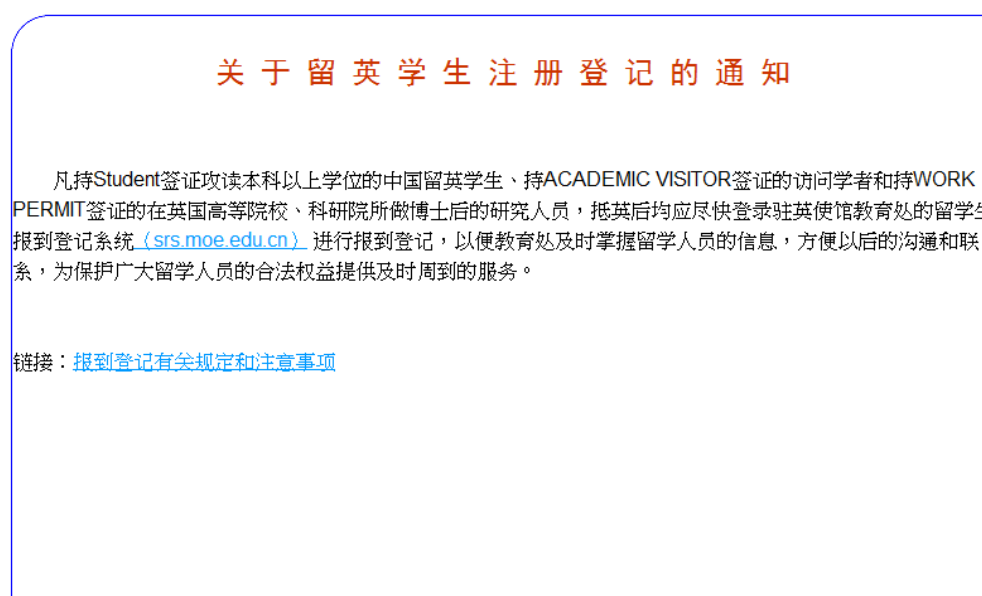


Figure 5.9. Notification of online registration

Source: <http://www.edu-chinaembassy.org.uk/news/tzgg1.htm>

This language of rights protection and a government's care for its citizens is also highlighted in the informants' discussion of the registration website. As Tom, a user, explained:

Tom: I think it's a good idea to set up the online registration system. On the one hand, I got extra help with my life in the UK. I got this supervisor, professor who has the experience of living and studying in the UK. I didn't really contact him very often. I only gave him one email as I recalled. But I feel safer particularly when I first came here with no friends and nobody who can help me. It feels like the government is protecting and taking care of us overseas students. On the other hand, it's also more convenient for us. There are tons of things I need to do or prepare regarding travel, studying abroad, returning to China and working back there. For example, there are documents required to be submitted and other complicated procedures..... And the fact I am outside China makes it even more inconvenient to run all these procedures.....It's great now they use technology. Simply logging on, giving out my personal information, and receiving the information and reliable resources I need from an official makes it a lot easier. I will return to China permanently someday. So this is important to me.

(male, accountant, 26)

Both Tom and Gia emphasised the efficiency in the state's adopting advanced technology and read it as a symbol of a modern and responsible governing act. On the one hand, the state's use of the website is portrayed as adoption of advanced technology in mitigating the inconvenience faced by citizens in the less digital era. A sense of modernity is emphasised by the users of the website. The governing practices is produced and celebrated as acts of modernism of the PRC state. On the other hand, this online registration system is portrayed by the migrants as helpful because

maintaining close contact with the state and supplying information to it is perceived as necessary and critical for their future migratory plans and career development under the PRC regime. The governing technology is not perceived as surveillance of the informants. Rather, it is constructed as a responsible act of a state which takes care of its citizens and whose protection of citizens is not limited by its borders.

This serves as a discursive basis for the state's remote, online surveillance of its professional citizens abroad. The transborder digital control of highly skilled workers' biological information relies on the citizens' certain ideologies towards the state and its governing practices. As a result, a group of cooperating citizens who construct the state as modern, high-tech and caring and thus maintain a submissive attitude towards the government's information control serves as a prerequisite of the success of transborder digital information management.

## **5.6. Conclusion**

This chapter examines the renewed desire, imagery and tactics of the state to manage its overseas population with the aid of the internet as measures to construct China's modernity project. This transborder governing practice that seeks to police the mobility and labour process of overseas talent is underlined by neo-liberal calculations. In particular, in the case of the PRC state, this transborder digital surveillance of skilled citizens is situated in the politico-economic context of its recent development and hence its increased need to access the skilled labour force that aids in the transformation of its rising modernity. On the part of the migrants, linking themselves to the PRC state with the internet is portrayed as vital to their economic success at a time most views as a downturn in Western modernity. The state's use of

advanced internet technology in maintaining cross-border connection with migrants is also portrayed by them as a modern way of governing.

This chapter develops a dialogue with authors utilising governmentality analysis to discuss states' development strategies in the neoliberal age. In particular, I highlight the work by Aihwa Ong (2006) and Wendy Larner (2001, 2007) which examines various governing acts employed by the non-Western states to enhance their performances in global competition. Using this approach, I seek to add to this literature by introducing the role of internet technologies which has not been systematically examined in this literature. I demonstrate the kinds of subjects reinvented by the state through the state's use of the internet to control its overseas talent. I also identify the discursive construction that has been adopted to assist such governance and the new fields that are produced to accommodate the above power relations.

In this chapter, I illustrate different modes of the transborder digital governance of skilled labour using three examples. The first case of CFUK and Xiyu exemplifies how border-crossing management of population is accomplished with the intervention of wired ethnic communities. These wired associations utilise the internet to reach as many professionals in London as possible, enabling the state to target better this rather dispersed and anonymous group. Overseas talent hence becomes more imaginable and manageable subjects for the state. By assisting the PRC city governments and the Chinese Embassy to hold recruitment events in London, these associations build digitised social ties across borders and maintain *guanxi* between government officials and their members. An emphasis on China's economic prosperity together with a

citizenship-based nationalistic discourse is adopted to assist and encourage the building of such transborder digital coordination.

The transborder management of talent through wired ethnic organisations can be characterised in the following ways. On the structure of talent management, four parties have involved. While government offices – mostly on a city-level – contact the related firms in China, the Chinese Embassy contact the ethnic associations in London which then assemble the supposedly dispersed and yet targeted group of talent in a certain industry. Sometimes when direct personal ties have established between a member of an ethnic association and a government official in China, the role of the Embassy decreases. Furthermore, on the channels of the transborder talent management, the wired associations help the PRC local governments' goal of recruiting overseas professionals either through assisting them to organise collective events where talent meets recruiters or through passing CVs directly from a member to a specific recruiter in China using existing personal ties and social resources the association key members own. Hybridised virtual and face-to-face *guanxi* is adopted in the process of transborder management of talent through wired ethnic associations. In so doing, a discourse of citizenship-based nationalism and a highlight on China's modernity is utilised to mobilise the transborder flow of professionals.

The second example, Harry's experience with another wired association for ethnic professionals, demonstrates a second dimension of the digital governance of transnational talent. Unlike the experience of members of CFUK and Xiyu, Harry's experience with SMSUK suggests that in addition to being based on the discourse of citizenship-oriented nationalism, the digital governance of transborder talent can also

be built upon a culture-based nationalistic sentiment which then mobilises a larger number of professionals. This cultural sovereignty is not restricted to professionals with political attachment to the nation-state (i.e. citizenship) but is widened to include a broader spectrum of talent with ties to it. Using this discourse, the state's imagery of its overseas talent becomes more inclusive, producing wider-ranging subjects for its power to touch upon.

Finally, compared with the first two cases, the example of the online registration system for overseas professionals demonstrates a more direct process of transborder governance. Students in higher education and professionals in Britain submit their personal information on the internet to be managed by the Chinese Embassy. Without the mediation of *guanxi* and personal interaction, this mode of transborder governance monitors overseas professionals by managing their information online, thus enabling the exercise of biopower upon population outside the national borders. Whereas existing studies on biopower often highlight the collection and management of biological information within the territory of a nation-state, this digital management of individual citizen's personal information demonstrates how information surveillance is made possible across borders.

This willingly submission of personal data is not only resulted from the popularity of internet use among the targeted skilled workers but also resulted from the constructed discursive consensus between the governing agent and the workers. Using the language of legal rights protection, the online transmission of personal information is viewed as modern, convenient and beneficial not for the state but for the informants' access to their economic and social rights, which are viewed as particularly important

in a time of the decline of Western capitalism and the rise of Chinese modernity.

In summary, through internet use, the PRC state is able to imagine new subjects for its disciplinary power as the previously anonymous and dispersed group of overseas talent now becomes much more visible, contactable and manageable. New supporting discourses also emerge to encourage emigrant talent to maintain voluntarily digital contact with the state. Some of these are more inclusive, such as culture-based nationalistic discourses, while others may be restrictive among citizens. New fields of state's disciplinary power are also created through the state's internet use. Online platforms for emigrants function as new spaces where the state exercises biopower by allowing biological data of the professionals to be collected, constantly updated, monitored and analysed.

Although the use of the online system of information management functions to collect overseas users' data, its ability to reach a sufficient number of overseas professionals requires further assessment. Less than 10 informants I talked to have heard of the online registration system for overseas students in higher education and five of them chose to register. All of the eight interviewees came to the UK for postgraduate studies after 2004. This limited range it covers may be a result of the timing the system emerged as it is a relatively new web space and most of the informants left China in the late 1990s and early 2000s. It may also be a result of the channel the PRC government uses to disseminate the information about the system; that is, the Chinese Embassy, which is unable to obtain full contact information of students abroad. While this study examines the ways in which the online system of information control works, future studies are required to explore the variety of such systems and to

what extent they reach out to different groups.

It should also be noted that where there is power there is resistance. In addition to the limited number of informants using the online registration system, among those who are aware of the registration website but chose not to use it, the main reasons reported for the reluctance to register include 'I am not sure what goods or harms it might do to me, so I will wait and see' and 'I don't think it's necessary'. This deliberate distance the informants put between themselves and the state of the country of origin may indicate spaces for resistance. Future research may be required to explore towards this direction.

It is also noteworthy that, like all other internet-based social acts, new modes of internet-mediated governing practices over overseas professionals are emerging. In 2011, a website 'Shanghai Recruitment Web' will be launched by the finance office of Shanghai city council to recruit overseas Chinese professionals to work in Shanghai. According to the recent news released by Shanghai city council, there will be collaboration between this website and a British website 'eFinancialCareers' to attract London-based professionals and to conduct online interviews with the overseas skilled workers. This new way of reaching out to talent abroad may demonstrate novel methods of transborder population management that is not observed in this study. What is the mechanism of this long-distance governance without the intervention of guanxi? Or, how is guanxi deployed in this type of transborder communication in a renewed fashion? Is it more efficient than the current digital governance of overseas talent? Further investigation is required to explore emerging governing technologies.

## **Chapter 6. Gendered modernity, changing intimacy: Networked transnational communication in the family sphere**

Previous chapters have demonstrated that the internet is appropriated by the informants as a tool that integrates them into China's modern projects. In this chapter, I focus on the family sphere and illuminate the unevenly distributed resources of internet technology and differentiated access to the digital modernity among actors in Chinese transnationalism. In so doing, I seek to uncover the other half of the story of China's digital modernity that is marked by the gap in development among various social groups.

This chapter explores the ways in which migrants use the internet to maintain family relationships transnationally and how the differentiated skills of internet use serve to transform the power dynamics in the family between men and women. I examine the intersection of the research areas of transnationalism, digital inequality and family. While the literature on digital inequalities seldom explores them in the context of transnational families, research on migrants and their families rarely investigate the impacts of digital inequalities on the gendered power dynamics.

I start by discussing the literature on transnational families and by exploring the ways in which enquiries about digital inequalities can be integrated in this research area. I then discuss the digital divide and other digital inequalities in today's China. Whereas digital divide refers to access to hardware and software, digital inequalities indicate a wider range of gaps surrounding internet use such as differentiated skills, knowledge and familiarity with the internet. It is, I argue, these latter factors rather than access

that determine the gendered internet use and family structure in this study.

I then provide various examples which support the chapter's central argument — the responsibility of care, affection and emotional support, once considered a key element of femininity and the responsibility of the mother, is now largely reassigned to male family members in transnational families. This is the result of the dependence on internet-mediated communication among transnational families and the different digital competence between men and women.

### **6.1. Linking transnational families to digital inequalities**

A growing literature has explored the rising significance of 'split families' around the world brought by migration. A split-family structure refers to one 'where core members are distributed in two or more nation-states but continue to share strong bonds of welfare and unity' (Huang and Yeoh 2005: 380). These split families, also known as transnational families, are separated by long distances while maintaining their union through remittances, occasional visits and other communication methods that allow the practices of intimacy and care.

These separated families are often theorised as a strategy of accumulation of economic, political and cultural capital. It is common for migrants from Hong Kong, Taiwan and mainland China to obtain a passport from a country with relative political stability, and for one parent to leave other family members and stay in places where economic resources are sufficient to support the family (Mitchell 1997; Olds 1998; Ong 1999). In addition to political and economic reasons, the cultural logics of transnational mobility are also critical in understanding split families. For Chinese

parents, Western education for children is largely considered the best strategy for what Bourdieu terms the 'social reproduction of the family' (Waters 2005). A passport from a Western country and participation in Western education is also considered symbolic capital that signals and leads to the prosperity of the family (Ong 1999; Waters 2005). These families view migration simply as a flexible strategy that maximises the economic, political and cultural capital of their family members. This flexibility links them with more than one geographical location and national attachment, allowing a constant shift among multiple connections without being fixed to either the host or the home country.

Transnational families take a wide variety of forms in the context of Chinese and East Asian emigrants. A significant number of transnational families adopt a lifestyle where both parents migrate for better economic opportunities and the children are left behind in the home country with other relatives taking up the responsibility of care, intimacy and parenting (Yamanaka 2005). In addition to these dual-earner families, there are also families where only one parent is separated from his or her family in order to access better economic opportunities while the other parent stays with the children. In the case of Chinese families, this usually results in a working father being away from the mother who takes up the responsibility of child-rearing. Examples include Taiwanese business men working in mainland China; Taiwanese and Hong Kong investors and entrepreneurs in North America; and Taiwanese and Hong Kong men who remain in Asia earning for the family while their children and wives migrate to North America or other developed countries for education and political certainty (Chee 2003; Huang and Yeoh 2005; Ong 1999; Pe-Pua et al. 1998; Shen 2005). Yet, in some less visible situations, there are also men who are left behind with their children.

This includes examples such as: Hong Kong and Taiwanese fathers who stay with their children in North America while their wives return to Asia and become the sole earner of the family; and the female service workers from Southeast Asia who leave their children and husbands for a developed country and become the most important income source in their families (Lan 2003; Parreñas 2005; Waters 2010).

This chapter focuses on a relatively less explored form in the discussion of Chinese transnational families where both parents stay in the home country while the children study abroad for higher education and remain in the host country for work upon completing their studies. Whereas the literature on split families largely examines families with one parent separated for earning or families where both parents left their young children behind to work away from the home country, it is also critical to understand the structures of care and intimacy of families with young adult children abroad and aging parents in the country of origin (Baldassar 2007; Climo 1992). Although these migrants can also be theorised as single householders, they often maintain close ties with their parents in China as a result of the Chinese familialism and the fact that most of them have not yet formed their own families and that they are the only child in their original families due to China's one child policy which has operated since the 1980s.

The transnational distribution of the responsibilities of family intimacy and care is largely a gendered social process. Among the 'astronaut families' where one parent is away earning, it is usually the fathers who play the role of breadwinner while the mothers take up the responsibility for child rearing (Pe-Pua et al. 1998). In the cases of Hong Kong and Taiwanese families in North America, this often requires a woman

to give up her career as a professional in Asia (Chee 2003; Huang and Yeoh 2005; Ong 1999; Pe-Pua et al. 1998; Shen 2005). In the cases of female-headed transnational families where the mothers travel abroad to work and the fathers stay with the children, instead of the fathers' increasing responsibility of childcare and housework, the role of a caretaker in the family is still largely assigned between a female relative in the home country and the overseas mother. In addition to the help from female relatives at home, these overseas mothers seek to compensate for their absence through various methods of contact to maintain family intimacy (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Lan 2003; Parreñas 2005). As a result, both the feminist scholarship and migration studies have called for attention to these social processes through which the gendered norms of family intimacy and care are reproduced.

In this chapter, I examine the ways in which transnational families are gendered from a different perspective. While the above studies have investigated how transnational families are gendered, this is rarely researched from the perspective of digital inequalities. Instead of examining how family responsibilities are divided between men and women, I investigate how gendered norms are reproduced through differentiated communication ability between men and women.

Family responsibilities of care and intimacy rely on communication. Several studies have found that transnational families adopt various methods to maintain intimacy and take up the responsibility of care. Remittances and regular visits are critical in understanding how the split families are united together with the underlying financial mechanism whether it is astronaut families or dual earner families (Chiang 2008; Lan

2003; Parreñas 2005; Shen 2005). More importantly, communication methods such as letters, phone calls, text messages and, more recently, emails, are all ways in which the transnationals maintain close ties with their families (Parreñas 2005; Wilding 2006).

Partly due to its recent emergence and partly because of an emphasis on physical care, compared with other forms of transborder family communication, new media technology is relatively unexplored. Baldassar (2007, 2008) employs the notion of virtual co-presence or connected presence to theorise the feeling of togetherness ICT brings about to overcome distance. Two other studies examine the role of mobile phone calls, emails and text messages, and focus on the exchange of texts and sounds (Horst 2006; Wilding 2006). Yet, attention to new media in transnational families is still largely required. In addition to the exchange of sounds and texts in more conventional ICT platforms, this chapter argues that other emerging trends in new media require further discussion as they highlight the role of the body. Videoconferencing, web cameras and blogs may generate new uses of the body which are key component of care giving and which were once invisible due to distance.

The role of the digital divide in transnational family settings also requires in-depth analysis. Wilding (2006) has broadly examined various types of social inequalities in transnational communication and identifies how, through computer-mediated family communication, scarce resources may be distributed in ways that not everyone considered appropriate. This chapter focuses on the role of gender in the context of coastal Chinese families. Expanding from Wilding's analysis of the impacts of digital divides, I further investigate the strategy of resistance and empowerment of these

inexperienced users of the internet, thus demonstrating agency under the unbalanced power structure.

## **6.2. The stratified Chinese digital modernity: a background**

Information technology has been a central project of the modernisation in China as elsewhere. Since the early 1990s, information and communication technology development has been understood as a key content of China's industrialisation. On the development of an industry of information technology, China seeks its competitiveness in the world economy by integrating itself into the burgeoning ICT industry in nearby countries in East Asia through investing in this industry.

In addition to the input into the production in the ICT industry, recent resources are also devoted to enhance the prevalence of ICT among its population as high prevalence rate is considered one of the key indicators of digital modernity. The prevalence rate of the internet has grown rapidly in the recent decades. According to China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC 1997)<sup>16</sup>, in 1997, there were only 299,000 computers that were connected to the internet. In 2000, there had been 6.5 million networked computers and 16.9 million people who used the internet on a regular basis. The numbers went up to 45.6 and 103 million respectively in 2005. After a decade of investment in the basic infrastructure of the information industry, recent policies including *Strategies of Informationization 2006 – 2060* continue to list the prevalent rate of internet use as the main project of China's development.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> CNNIC is a state network information centre of China and was founded as a non-profit organization in 1997. It now takes orders directly from the Ministry of Information Industry (MII) in China and releases official statistics on ICT related studies.

<sup>17</sup> The most recent report of CNNIC published in June 2009 reveals that 338 million of China's population have used the internet in the past six months; that is, around 1 in 4 people is an internet user. Compared to the last report published 6 months earlier, there is a 40-million increase in the number of

The statistics demonstrate a trend of fast growing ICT use embedded in the context of rising consuming power of the population and the efforts of the government to support the ICT industry. However, it should be noted that this rising digital modernity is marked by significant digital divide. The access to ICT varies significantly across social categories.

The digital divide refers to the inequality between people with access to a computer and the internet and those without it (Norris 2001). According to the CNNIC report, access to computers and other devices are particularly limited among certain social categories whereas individuals in other social categories enjoy an advanced environment of digital communication. In terms of access to digital hardware and software, rising digital modernity in China is largely dominated by elite groups – the wealthy, white-collar, younger users living the urban areas.<sup>18</sup>

Differentiated access to computers and the internet is not particularly significant among the families I examined as they are from the predominantly middle to elite

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internet users, which means an increase rate of 13.4% for half a year.

<sup>18</sup> The CNNIC survey defines people with access to the internet as Chinese citizens over 6 years old who have used the internet in the past six months. On the digital divide among age groups, young internet users – users under 25 years old – take up just above half of the total internet using population. Users above 50 years old only comprise 5% of the total internet users. The most significant digital divide is between villagers and urban residents. Among all the internet users in China, only 28.3% are based in rural areas. White collar professionals take up about one third of the internet users whereas workers in agriculture, forestry, fishery and animal husbandry comprise less than 5%. The gender divide is relatively moderate. Differentiated access to the internet between men and women is much smaller than that among various groups of age, income and other socioeconomic status. Compared to nearby countries including Korea and Japan, China has a higher prevalence rate among women users (CNNIC 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005; UNCTAD 2006). Moreover, the digital divide between men and women has been narrowing. In 2009, 53% of internet users were male while 47% were female. This divide is relatively moderate considering that the statistics in 1999 indicated that women only accounted for 7% of internet users in China (UNDP 1999).

class in China's coastal urban areas. Most of the informants' families in China have at least one computer in their homes. Of the 53 informants who participated in an interview to discuss their transnational family communication with me, fewer than 10 people reported that there is no computer in their home in China.

However, this does not mean that the social stratification between age groups, generations and gender is not reproduced within and through the transnational process of family communication using ICTs. Rather, digital inequalities are experienced by the informants' families and impact on their family power dynamics in forms other than the ownership of hardware and software.

In addition to access, digital inequalities have been found to exist in a variety of forms. First, efficiency of technical apparatus varies among users who already have access to digital technologies. Having access to the internet does not necessarily mean it is adequate. It is essential to distinguish broadband users from non-broadband users as the benefits of internet use increase with the speed of connection (Horrigan and Rainie 2002). Users who have exclusive use to a computer and the internet and those who need to compete with other users also need to be distinguished (Lessig 1999).

Secondly, autonomy in using the internet is unequally distributed. Users' access to the internet at work tends to be under the constant surveillance of filtering or monitoring systems and hence their usage is often limited (O'Mahoney and Barley 1999). Women users who access the internet from home may also be under the supervision of male family members who are more experienced with the technology (Lessig 1999).

Thirdly, the social support that provides a positive environment for internet use varies across groups. Evidence shows that early internet users surrounded by those with advanced technical sophistication obtain broad and high level involvement in online activities (Kiesler et al. 2001; Kim and Jung 2002; see also DiMaggio et al. 2001). Support from friends and family largely explains the extent to which a new user acquires digital competence later on.

While data on the digital divide in China have been documented for over a decade, there are limited large-scale studies exploring other forms of digital inequalities. The following discussions will exemplify how various forms of digital inequalities in China have shaped the transnational family structure among the informants.

### **6.3. Internet use in transnational families**

The family structures of the informants are largely similar. Most informants left home alone to attend higher education in the UK and stayed on to work after completing their studies. The primary family structure includes aging parents in China and a single, childless migrant working and living in London, most of whom have no siblings.<sup>19</sup> The similar structure of these transnational families partly results from the one child policy of PRC which came into practice in the 1980s as most of them have no siblings.

While these adult informants may be conceptualised as single householders, they maintain strong ties with their parents and sometimes other relatives outside their immediate families in China, both financially and emotionally, as reported in the

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<sup>19</sup> Most informants are unmarried migrants with no children. Only three informants, all male, have started families and have children of their own.

following sections. In addition to single householders who migrated alone to the UK, three informants migrated together with at least one of their parents and spend most of their adult life living with their parents in London or in another Western country.<sup>20</sup> These informants and their parents tend to have maintained close contact with their grandparents and other relatives in China since they migrated.

There are close ties between the migrants and their families outside the UK. Among the 53 informants who received an interview about their transnational family communication, 45 of them reported that they contact their family in China or elsewhere outside the UK at least once a week. Six informants regularly speak to their family every day before work. Only two migrants contact their overseas family once a month or less (see Figure 6.1). The general tendency of frequent networked communication with overseas families not only highlights the close tie between the informants and their family members overseas but also leads to the centrality of the internet in a transnational setting.

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<sup>20</sup> Among the 53 informants who received an interview, two of them migrated with their family in their teens to the UK and another one migrated with his family to New Zealand when he was in primary school. Other informants left their families and came to the UK in their early to late teens for education. Besides these informants, I have encountered other informants during different events who are mostly those who came to the UK alone for higher education.

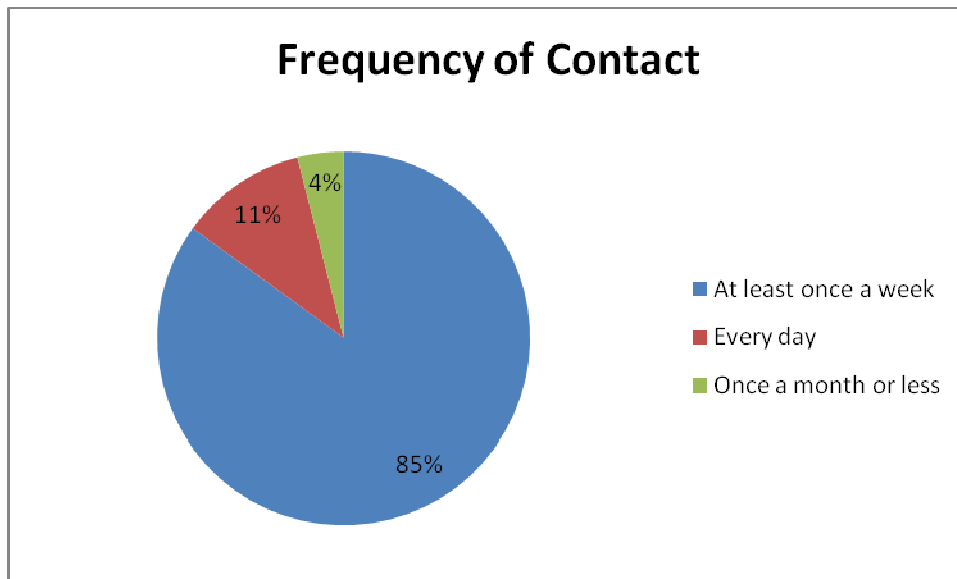


Figure 6.1. Frequency of contact with overseas family

Common tools used in communication with overseas family members include the telephone and various internet technologies. Although almost all the informants have used both, the tendency of substituting internet tools for the telephone is significant.<sup>21</sup> Informants who arrived in the UK in the 1990s report that at first they relied on the telephone to communicate with overseas family members and that they have only turned to the internet in recent years. They obtained international telephone cards that allowed transnational communication at a local rate from Chinese convenient stores and restaurants in the UK. Yet, with the prevailing use of the internet to communicate across borders with no charge or almost no charge, internet use has increasingly become the most important method for transnational communication.

Among the internet tools, SKYPE is the most often used. Internet tools such as Instant Messaging services, emails, blogs and social networking sites are also adopted in

<sup>21</sup> All of the 53 informants have used the telephone to contact home. Only four out of the 53 informants have never contacted their parents via the internet. However, they have all used the internet to contact other family members or friends in China.

family communication (see Table 6.1).

	<b>Number of Adopting Informants</b>
<b>SKYPE</b>	49
<b>IMs</b>	19
<b>Emails</b>	11
<b>Blogs</b>	2
<b>Social Networking Sites</b>	1
<b>No Internet Tools Adopted</b>	4

**Total: 53 informants**

Table 6.1. Internet tools adopted to contact overseas parents

Note: The number excludes internet tools adopted to contact friends and other family members overseas (i.e. siblings, relatives in extended families).

Ted is a 26-year-old accountant who arrived in the UK at the age of 17. He explains how communication methods for transnational contact have changed over the past ten years:

Ted: I use SKYPE to contact my family..... Before SKYPE, I bought those cheap phone cards for international calls. Since I had SKYPE, I have not made calls from my landline. I don't even have a landline now. My company offers me a mobile phone so for calls within Britain I don't need a landline. For international calls, SKYPE alone is enough. It's free. Also, the quality is good. In the first few years the quality was not good, but now the quality is even better than those telephone cards.

Quality and cost are reported to be the foremost reasons for the informants to switch to the internet in recent years. When a free online telephone system gradually enhances its quality, telephone calls – even at a low rate – lose their competitiveness among their transnational consumers.

Migrants' online communication with their family members in China includes various aspects of family life, which corresponds to Finch and Mason's (1993) categorisation of family communication: practical, financial, personal, emotional and moral care. Decision making surrounding career plans and financial practices are a central part of their networked communication. With most informants being the only child in their family, they play a significant financial role in their families. While most are from a well-off background, there are also informants whose parents have retired and receive remittances from their overseas children and relatives.

Parents also support the migrants economically, especially during the recent economic downturn. Among all the 53 informants who have been asked about their transnational family communication, six of them were unemployed at the time of the interview. Besides these 53 informants, there are also various gatherings held for people who have been out of work to share business and job-seeking information. These informants lost their jobs but still stayed in the UK and needed financial support from their parents in China. Among them, some started their own business during the downturn and received economic support to do so from their family in China. These career plans and financial decisions were reported to be one of the most frequent topics of conversation during the informants' communication with family abroad.

Emotional labour is another key aspect of communication in transnational families. The efforts to exchange intimate feelings and emotional support are central to the bonding of a family. During their contact, the informants and their families talk through each other's emotional needs by sharing the worries and happiness of their daily lives. Emotional support and the feeling of intimacy are often expressed through conversation about the trivia of their daily lives.

Lena is another example. She is a 25-year-old project manager who works for an organisation funded by the Communist Party for overseas Chinese businesses and for business opportunities between corporations in China and those in the UK. As the only child in her family and having been brought up by her mother who separated from her father when she was young, she expressed close emotional ties with her mother and explained to me how family intimacy is woven into her daily conversations with her mother:

Lena: We don't usually talk about serious topics. Usually we talk about trivial things. I ask my mother about the weather in my hometown, recent activities of our relatives and close family friends, or just chatting over nothing.....Yes, I know she must miss me quite a lot. She always worries that I'll marry someone here and never go back. But she doesn't really say things like I miss you or stuff like that. Chinese don't do that. We just show that we care about each other through listening to each other's daily life so that I know she feels supported and she knows I am as well.

While the first two aspects of family communication seem to be suitable for either telephone or internet-mediated communication, the third aspect of interaction, bodily care, is made possible only by internet tools. Whereas actual bodily care is prevented by the long distance between the migrants and their family overseas, virtual bodily

contact is enabled by the internet.

Bodily interaction is reported to be another key factor — in addition to cost and quality – that determines the informants' and their families' higher preference for the internet rather than the telephone. While sound is the only content of communication using the telephone, internet communication with family includes various online activities, from voice only communication such as online telephone, text communication like emails to visual communication including blogs, photoblogs and video conferencing.

A wide variety of key elements in family relationships involves bodily contact which is absent from transnational families due to the physical separation. The body serves as a medium for family members to express affections and express intimacy. It is also the key object of care giving in households. It is often argued that most family care is accomplished through visits and physical presence in transnational families as it requires bodily interaction which is absent in long-distance families (e.g. Bengtson et al. 1995; Joseph and Bonnie 1998). Yet, among the informants, computer-mediated bodily experiences have formed a central part of family communication.

One significant example of the central role of the body in family is parenting which largely depends on bodily contact and sometimes bodily surveillance which cannot be achieved using the telephone. Several informants suggest that by using SKYPE, their overseas parents function as caregivers to monitor and look after their bodies despite the physicality of transnational situations. Harry's story is a typical example. He is a 24-year-old doctor in training who has been in the UK since his teens. He best

explains these practices when asked to compare the telephone and the internet:

Harry: I'd say the internet is definitely better for two reasons. First, it is free. And second, you can use video conferencing. The only downside of the internet is that it is not very convenient in an emergency.

Interviewer: What is so great about video conferencing?

Harry: Not particularly great to me but it is very useful for my parents. I have been away since my teens and my parents have always been concerned about whether I can take care of myself and get myself decent foods and good sleep. My mum likes to use video conferencing to make sure I am not losing weight. If I lose weight, she will go on and on reminding me what I should and should not eat. My dad also likes to use video-conferencing to check if my shirt is tidy so that I look well-mannered.

The informant's father performs the role of a discipliner who supervises the overseas son's behaviour through visually monitoring his body. The mother serves as a caregiver who looks after her children's well-being which is only possible through observing her children's bodies.

Harry's example indicates that while parents' main family responsibility is body monitoring and care giving, the overseas adult children's main family responsibility is practiced through submissive responses to parenting requests which include shaping up their own body and communicating with their parents on time. However, there are also examples suggesting that the informants also use the internet to perform bodily care for the older generations in China. Chuan is a 25-year-old former accountant who has been in the UK for nearly eight years. Video conferencing has now been adopted by both his parents and himself to monitor the well-being of overseas family

members:

Chuan: The strength of internet tools is video conferencing, I guess. My mother checks on me with SKYPE almost every day. She just likes to see if I am fine, and she feels like she can't be entirely sure unless she really sees me. I like video conferencing, too. I'll look at my parents and tell them to take a rest if they look tired, or see if my grandmother is getting more grey hair and things like that.

These examples highlight not only the significance of the body and the visual form of communication in the family but also the central role of the internet in maintaining family relationships transnationally. Internet use provides a virtual experience of such visual, bodily contact in transnational families where physical bodily contact is not constantly available.

In addition to videoconferences, photoblogs are also popular among the informants and their families in China and serve as an important medium through which bodily care can be accomplished. Lily's blog is an example. A 23-year-old IT manager with long working hours, she has little time for real-time communication such as video conferencing, due to the time difference. She and her family interact frequently on her blog. On her photos of a winter outing, her mother comments that '[i]t looks freezing. Wear warm clothes and do not overwork'. Similar comments surrounding her well-being presented through her body images are also made, including her thinness, perceived tiredness and other physical traits. Her mother's labour of care migrates to the virtual world through bodily interactions around digital photos.

In addition to parenting and care giving, blogs also lead to the sharing of geographical

experiences between migrants and their family members overseas using the function of visual internet communication. Julie works in an IT business in London. Throughout the interview, she demonstrated strong bonding with her parents and other members of her extended family. She explained to me how blogs and her online photos become an important part of building intimacy with her family through sharing geographical experiences:

Julie: My family likes to read my blog and see photos of my life in the UK. Sometimes it's not even in the UK. They also enjoy the photos of my trips to other European countries..... My grandparents are too old to travel around and they didn't have the chance to travel abroad when they were young so the only way for them to know what my life is like now is through those photos. Some of them are very famous tourist destinations which they have seen on TV but never got a chance to visit.

The use of the internet compensates for the lower mobility of older generations in transnational families. The visual form of communication offers an opportunity for virtual tourism whereby the younger, mobile migrants share their geographical experiences with older members in transnational families.

#### **6.4.Revisiting gendered internet use in the setting of transnational families**

As a result of these families' relatively high socioeconomic status and urban backgrounds, gender rather than class — among all the social stratifications — has the most significant differentiating effect on patterns of internet use in families examined in this study. However, gender seems to have different impacts within different generations of the informants' families.

The gender difference in digital skills tends to be insignificant among the informants in London. All the informants use the internet regularly both at work and during their leisure time and, therefore, both male and female informants tend to spend more than eight hours online, considering the nature of their work, their use of the internet after work and some of the informants' wired mobile phones. Both male and female informants tend to demonstrate an advanced level of knowledge and skills regarding digital technologies.

However, a strong gender difference is found in their parents, and sometimes their grandparents and other elderly members in their extended family in China. Compared with informants' mothers, who usually lack efficient digital skills, the fathers tend to switch to the internet from the telephone earlier. These fathers often work in ICT-using or even ICT-specialist industries and learn computer skills and knowledge about the internet primarily from work. They have access to the internet at work and often send emails and sometimes use instant messaging tools during their work.

Among the 53 informants who have talked in-depth about their family communication, seven of them report that their mother or other elderly women in their families have high digital knowledge and skills that allow them to use the internet without assistance both at work and at home. Five of them report that their mother or other elderly women in their families have even more digital competence than their male family members. These women usually work in industries where digital technologies are central to their job description, including IT and financial services. Other informants' mothers and elderly female relatives tend to lack the opportunities to learn digital skills from work because they are housewives or work in less computer or

technology centred industries.

This chapter focuses on the women who lack digital knowledge and skills and explores the ways in which they cope with the digital inequalities in the environment of transnational communication. Various patterns of internet use have been developed by these women who lack sufficient digital literacy in response to the emerging importance of internet communication in transnational families, which can be categorised into at least three patterns – absence, assistance and development.

### **6.5. Absence: the silenced mothers**

The first pattern, absence, includes the female family members whose role of bonding a family emotionally is substituted by male family members due to their relative lack of digital knowledge and skills. Among the 53 informants who had an interview enquiring into their family communication, 8 of them reported that their mothers have been increasingly silenced after they adopted the internet to contact overseas family members. Informants who used to rely on telephone calls to maintain contact with families in China before the emergence of the internet report that it was the mother who used to play the role of maintaining intimate family bonding. However, with the rising popularity of the internet, migrants have largely discarded the telephone and turned to various internet tools for maintaining contact with family. As a result, the internet-mediated communication that the informants have with their overseas family is predominantly communication with male family members who tend to have more advanced internet knowledge and skills compared to their female counterparts. While mothers were the primary person who maintained long distance contact when telephones were the key media among migrants, the decreasing popularity of the

telephone means male members in transnational families are gaining a critical role in bringing family members together. Hence the supposedly feminine task of affection and care is often reassigned to men in these transnational families.

Chuck best explains this process. He is a 25-year-old former trader who has started his own business. He left for the UK when he was 17 for higher education whereas both of his parents stayed in China. His mother has become increasingly silenced in family communication since he switched to the internet from the telephone:

Chuck: I send messages or talk to my dad on SKYPE every morning. I use the telephone as well but very seldom. My mum does not use SKYPE. She doesn't know how to use the computer so I mainly talk to my dad. If there is anything important, he will tell my mum for me. If I really miss my mum, I'd call her [using the telephone]. But I seldom do so.....She has used the computer. She just doesn't like to use it because she is not very familiar with it. I used to talk to my mum a lot more when there was no computer and we all talked on phone..... My dad is quite busy working so he does not have much time for phone calls. Emails and MSN are a lot easier for him.

In this example, the telephone is used as a feminine communication method whereas the internet signals masculinity. This is partly a result of different digital skills between men and women and partly because of the temporal design of internet technology. Compared with telephones, the temporal design of the internet is suitable for working professionals who lack adequate time for transnational communication and, like the case of Chuck's family, are usually men. The fact that internet-mediated communication, such as emails and offline instant messages, does not require both the communicators to be present at the same time works for the professionals' tight working schedule.

Meng's story is another example with a different family structure. Meng is a 33-year-old consultant who came to the UK in 2003 for a Masters programme in London. Both parents and an older sister remain in China. When he first arrived in the UK, it was reported that low-rate international telephone cards were still the most popular option for Chinese in London to contact overseas friends and family:

Meng: At first I relied on the telephone. It wasn't expensive. But it was inconvenient. I bought telephone cards which were only sold in a number of shops. I still use them but less often now. I use the internet mainly to contact my sister and sometimes my father. But with my mother, I still need to buy telephone cards because my mother doesn't use the internet. It is very inconvenient. I work and live far away from Chinatown or any other places where they sell the phone cards.

Similar to Chuck, Meng's mother has been increasingly silenced since the internet emerged as a key method of communication in a transnational setting. Yet, unlike Chuck, in addition to gender, Meng's story also involves the role of age and generation. When comparing women from different generations, he suggests that whereas his mother lacks the ability to utilise digital technologies to maintain her voice in the transnational family, the sister's role in maintaining contact and intimacy online in the family remains significant. Although the telephone is adopted as a feminine communication tool, it should be noted that that this statement is more applicable in the older generations in transnational families.

## **6.6. Assistance: regaining the voice**

The second pattern, assistance, demonstrates a more dynamic structure of domestic gender relation and identifies a possibility of individuals' agency in the gendered

structure of technology use. In this pattern, rather than being entirely silenced and absent from online transnational communication, these women manage to stay in touch with their overseas children with the help of other family members. Among the 53 informants who had an interview with me to discuss their family communication, 20 of them reported that the mothers usually contact them online jointly with other family members or with assistance from them.

Lacking familiarity with internet tools, these women only use the internet when the assistance of other male or younger family members is available. Instead of replacing mothers and obtaining the key role in emotional bonding in a family, these male or younger internet users utilise the internet together with the informants' mothers and contribute to increasing these women's exposure to the online environment. One informant best describes the process of assistance from younger family members:

Mo: My mother does not know how to use the internet but the good thing is she lives with my cousins. My cousins taught her what software to install and set up everything for her. She asks them to turn on the computer and web camera whenever she wants to talk to me. Sometimes even my grandmother joins them.

Mo is a 28-year-old manager in the IT industry whose mother lives with her extended family. The younger generation tends to have higher digital knowledge and skills and is able to assist women from the older generations to keep in touch with the informant.

In addition to the help from internet users from the younger generation, male family members also assist the informants' mothers and other women from the older

generations to use the internet to maintain family relationships with them. Hanson, a 25-year-old former accountant, explains how his mother starts to use MSN with her father's help:

Hanson: My dad is quite good with the internet. He is in the IT business. My mum is not so familiar with it, though. My mum does not have her own MSN account. She borrows my dad's MSN account and chats with me when my dad has time to get online and type for her. She speaks and he types. Sometimes we use the voice option so that my dad does not have to be around. He just needs to get online for her and let her use the account..... She usually waits until my father has free time to turn on the computer for her.

These examples demonstrate how the use of social support – technical and emotional help from family members who have higher digital knowledge and skills – serves to enhance women users' wider and more intense exposure to the internet. Using the internet with the assistance of male or younger family members who are also experienced internet users functions as a way in which these new users can familiarise themselves with the technology.

However, this does not mean regained voice without constraints. The dependence on other family members often leads to a lack of autonomy in communication. Although not entirely silenced, these mothers or elderly women in transnational families have the chance to contact their overseas family members only when other male or younger family members are available. Their experiences of love, care and intimacy are arranged around the timetable of the young and the male in the family. In addition to the time limitation, the contents of communication via the internet are also largely dominated by men. Hui is a 29-year-old accountant who left home for postgraduate

studies and stayed in London to work. He explains:

Hui: My mum talks to me when my dad is online. She always sits next to my dad, listens to our conversation and interrupts. My dad talks a lot about work – his and mine. When he speaks with me, it's mostly about work and he'll give me some advice on my career. My mum will interrupt occasionally, trying to get a word in and ask questions about my recent life, such as weather, food, or my relationship with my girlfriend. My dad sometimes complains about her talking about insignificant things. [laugh] She doesn't ask about work.

(male, accountant, 29)

In this example, the dominance is deployed in the form of surveillance of the contents of the female user's communication with the informant. Topics that are considered feminine are trivialised by the male family members. As a result, women's practices of care and intimate emotions are closely policed during the online communication.

Although these mothers' internet use is largely limited, the informants develop various strategies of internet use in response to their mothers' weakened communication ability as a way to express affection and take care of their mothers' well-being. Lena's story is a typical example. Her mother has separated from her father and lives with her extended family in China. She explains how she manages to adjust her patterns of internet use in order to obtain quality time with her overseas mother:

Lena: I manage to get up early and talk to my mother before work during weekdays. It's usually my uncle who helps my mother to use SKYPE and he is only available in the afternoon during weekdays. So I get up at about 6.00am when I want to talk to my mother. It's about 2.00 pm in China. I do talk to my mum at the weekends. But it would be great if we could talk not

just at the weekends.

Upon perceiving her mother's limited autonomy over digital communication due to the dependence on others, Lena distinguishes the pattern of her internet use during weekdays from that during the weekends in order to fit into their timetable. When asked why it is important to maintain contact with her mother both during weekdays and at the weekends, she explains how intimacy and care within the family is now maintained and expressed mainly through regular and frequent computer-mediated contact:

Lena: It's important to contact my mother on a regular basis. In our generation, we are all the only kid in our families. My mother is not working and her attention is all on her child now. I'll talk to her about everything.....It doesn't matter what we talk about. It is the fact that I call and speak with her regularly and frequently that is important. That keeps her secure and happy.

In this case, the mother-daughter bonding is reported to be crucial to family intimacy partly because of this family structure. Maintaining contact with parents on the internet serves as a method through which she satisfies her overseas parent's emotional needs and takes care of her parent's physiological well-being.

### **6.7. Development: empowerment and its limit**

In addition to adjusting their own schedule of internet use, other informants adopt a more active method to address the unbalanced communication power in their families, thus further disrupting the gendered norms of family communication and showing agency in resisting the unbalanced structure of internet use. This is the third pattern of family communication, development. In this category, informants respond to the

weakened communicative role of their mothers by assisting them gradually to obtain digital literacy of their own and regain their voice in transnational communication. In so doing, the informants help to transform the gender norms of family communication brought by internet use and challenge the existing power structure where mothers and elderly female relatives lack the ability and autonomy in transnational communication. These women seek gradually to obtain digital literacy through various sources most of which are offered by their tech-savvy sons and daughters overseas.

Upon perceiving their mothers' absence from the transnational family setting, the informants offer resources for their mothers as a response to their lack of voice in family communication. Harry spends long working hours in hospital where overseas phone calls are not allowed but internet use is less restricted in terms of time and access. As a result of the restrictions regarding transnational communication at his work environment, he expresses frustration when talking about the fact that his mother used only telephone calls to speak to him. Without his mother's autonomous skills and knowledge of internet use, it is more difficult for him to speak to his mother or engage in any other forms of communication with her as there are no other family and friends who are available whenever he and his mother need to speak to each other.

Harry: I taught my mother how to use the internet. At first, she didn't know how to use it and only used the telephone to contact me. It was inconvenient. I don't really have time to talk on the phone. But I can still use MSN and the likes at work even in the surgery room.....My mum likes SKYPE now. It's easy for her. It's like the telephone. The only difference is you need to turn on the computer. So I taught her how to turn on the computer, click on the icon of SKYPE and use web camera. My dad also told her where she can download useful programmes. Now she uses it all day. Sometimes it's with me but most of the time she is just talking to

her sister.

In addition to delivering key information of preliminary knowledge and skills relating to a certain internet tool as Harry does, other informants also transform the unbalanced distribution of digital power in their households by providing a long-term supportive environment for their mothers and other elderly women relatives to advance their digital literacy. Li's story is a typical example. She is a 27-year-old medical professional who migrated with her parents when she was eleven years old. Whilst she does not need the assistance of digital technology to communicate with her parents, she was strongly emotionally attached to her grandmother in China who brought her up before she migrated. As telephone use also has its limits in terms of time and cost, she decided to help her grandmother to obtain digital skills. To do so, she has not only purchased the basic apparatus for using SKYPE and supplied the basic knowledge of SKYPE and similar software but also provided an enduring communication environment where her grandmother can practice and advance her digital literacy regularly.

Li: I talk to my grandmother at least once a week. She knows a lot of internet tools, such as QQ, SKYPE, etc. At first, she just wanted to talk to us at a low rate but now she is getting to know more and more internet tools..... I guess what I can do is to stay online whenever she is able to go online. After all, I am the reason she wanted to learn about the internet in the first place. I figure if I stay online longer, she'd be more interested in going online. I also send her information about new functions and products of SKYPE to make sure she has updated knowledge about it. I love the idea that she has become good with the internet. There are so many things for her to spend time on with the internet. It's good for her. Elderly people may get lonely sometimes and miss their overseas children.

Assisting her grandmother to obtain digital knowledge and skills serves as a critical way in which Li takes care of the emotional needs of overseas family members. Li encourages and assists her grandmother to spend time on the internet to help ease her grandmother's loneliness and the pain brought about by the fact that she and her parents are not around her. In so doing, care, intimacy and emotions are practiced through helping mother and female relatives overseas.

Compared with the second pattern, where the women need constantly to negotiate their use of the internet with other family members and are largely constrained by their helpers, women in the third category manage actively to develop internet knowledge and skills of their own. They continue to advance their digital literacy even when the assistor is absent, which is different from the women in the second category. These cases tend to demonstrate a long-term effect of the helper's assistance with computer and internet use. The direct help with setting up the hardware and software is discontinued after these women's first few uses.

It is essential for the female internet users to combine the informants' efforts with resources obtained from other social networks of theirs, education institutions and other self-learning techniques. In Li's example, in addition to her efforts to provide a continuous environment for internet-mediated communication, it is important for her grandmother actively to seek assistance from her various social networks and participate in formal or semi-formal digital education.

Li: My grandmother is a very energetic lady. She even went to evening school to learn basic computer skills. My uncle bought her a computer and set it up for her. She is old and doesn't really work so she has plenty of

time staying on the internet.

In this case, the woman's learning strategy includes the initial help from family members in China and in the UK and evening school together with continuous social support from the informant and an independent experience of going online by herself. While ICT education at an institution offers her preliminary computer literacy, it is also important to explore independently the online world and to have continuous contact within her technically advanced social network.

In summary, compared with the first two patterns, women internet users in the third category adopt a strategy of resistance and demonstrate agency in the gendered structure of internet use. They demonstrate relatively more autonomy as it is not necessary for them to rely on a helper every time they use the internet. Among the 53 informants who have talked in-depth about family communication, twelve of them report that their mothers or other elderly relatives have actively sought to obtain their own digital literacy using various sources. The informants' assistance together with the resources from other social networks and institutions subvert the gendered family structure not only in the field of ICT usage but also in family communication. This autonomy allows the women to be free from male domination in transnational communication. The acquisition of digital knowledge and skills is, in this sense, empowering.

However, at a closer look, this agency and empowerment may have its limits. The digital knowledge and skills obtained by these women are often restricted to certain types of internet tools and certain social scenes. I highlight the concept of 'ghettoised learning' to discuss the gendering process of segmented digital literacy.

In Harry's examples, the internet tools the mother is familiar with are often restricted to a number of similar online applications. They are largely associated with audio and visual communication between two users, including the online telephone and video conferencing functions of SKYPE and MSN. As Harry identifies, although his mother seeks to improve her digital knowledge and skills by learning to use the computer and the internet, this learning process is discontinued when she becomes capable of using an internet tool that allows transnational communication.

James, a 30-year-old consultant, best describes this limited learning process. As the only child in the family with both of his parents staying in China, his mother seeks to advance her digital skills mainly for conducting transnational communication with him. As a result, her learning process ends once she acquires preliminary skills to conduct conversation and video conferencing on the internet.

James: Yes, my dad learned how to use the internet at work. My mum saw him using email with me so she wanted to learn. We told her how to download the programmes she needs, how to install them, and how to use them. She has explored it by herself for a while and now has her own computer and installs SKYPE on it. All she does is chatting now.

Interviewer: So your father contacts you by email while your mother speaks with you with SKYPE?

James: My father also uses MSN, SKYPE and other stuff but he did not learn it from me. He uses it with his friend and for work as well. My mother mainly uses SKYPE. That's all she does with the internet. I think she just sees it as a tool that allows her to contact me more often and more conveniently. It doesn't make any difference to her whether it is the telephone or SKYPE. She just treats it like a telephone.

As James has elaborated, the male and female internet users in the household have a different understanding and usage of digital tools. While the father has extensive exposure to various online applications, the mother only seeks to familiarise herself with one internet tool that allows her communication with her overseas son. She understands the internet as a modern and convenient substitute for the telephone in present-day transnational communication and only learns to use those tools with similar functions as the telephone.

A gender ghetto is thus produced. It delineates the boundary of a feminine space in computer-mediated communication which is associated only with the exchanges of voices and images between friends and families. The improved knowledge and skills of digital technologies among these women are less likely to expand to areas outside video conferencing, instant messaging, and online telephone. While these mothers manage to learn to use the internet to contact their family members overseas, there is significant difficulty in using internet tools involving text typing. Although some of the informants' mothers, like James's, use instant messaging tools, such as MSN, many of them prefer the function of audio communication and only type texts that are short. As Harry, Li and James all point out, their mothers or grandmothers spend most of their time online chatting. Among the twelve cases that are categorised in the third group, all the internet tools that are mentioned in the mothers' learning process are interpersonal communication tools, including SKYPE, MSN, QQ, and emails.

Not only do these women tend to be restricted to limited types of internet applications but their use of the internet is often within a number of social scenes associated with private, intimate social situations between friends and families. In the above three

cases, the informants' fathers learn how to use the internet at work and are largely engaged with computer-mediated communication to maintain work-related interpersonal relationships. However, the acquisition of autonomous internet use among these informants' mothers is often incentivised by the need to contact the informants and other friends and family abroad. They spend most of their online hours on maintaining private, intimate relationships. Among the twelve cases that are categorised in the third group, when asked about what their mothers do with the internet after gradually obtaining digital skills, only two of them reported that their mothers also use the internet on a regular basis to receive information or conduct communication outside the family sphere. This includes one mother who uses the internet to research information about real estate and another mother who reads news online.

As a result, there is a ghettoised area of digital literacy where these women learn knowledge and skills. Advanced literacy of the internet includes knowledge, skills and familiarity with a wide variety of internet applications, from emailing, gaming, posting on a newsgroup, browsing information-disseminating websites to participating in interactive websites in the Web 2.0 era. Yet, women in transnational families, even though they have managed to secure autonomous use of the computer and the internet, tend to be restricted to certain digital technologies. Moreover, these technologies are often used in a limited number of social situations primarily within the private sphere. As a result, the supposedly empowering effects of gaining ICT knowledge and skills largely diminish. They are marked by the lack of broad exposure to the online world.

## **6.8. Discussion: digital modernity revisited**

In conclusion, previous chapters have demonstrated the ways in which the internet is utilised as a tool that integrates the informants into rising Chinese modernity and that signals their status as key actors in the Chinese digital modernity. This chapter offers evidence into the differentiated ability to use the modern technology among diverse social groups which is highlighted through a transnational process.

It illuminates how digital technological development is dominated by particular social categories, demonstrating a digital modernity that is overshadowed by social stratification. In particular, this chapter focuses on the role of gender – especially on its impact within the older generations – in the stratification of digital knowledge in transnational households.

Due to the relatively high socioeconomic status of the informants' families, the digital divide is relatively insignificant in the study and almost all the informants have networked computers in their home in China. However, other forms of digital inequalities are prominent within the households. Except for a small number of women in transnational families who have high digital knowledge and skills, most informants' mothers and other elderly female family members have had difficulty communicating with their family members overseas since the internet largely replaced the telephone and became the most often adopted method in transnational communication.

In summary, the ways in which the informants and their mothers in transnational

families cope with the difficulty can be categorised into at least three patterns – absence, assistance and empowerment. In the first category, women in transnational families have been unable to contact their migrant sons and daughters in the UK since they turned to the internet for transnational communication. In these cases, fathers' roles are gaining increasing significance in maintaining a family bond across borders and the mothers are largely silenced in most family scenes in a transnational setting.

Other women seek assistance from their family members in order to contact the informants online. This assistance is often from spouses and other younger family members and primarily restricted by the time frame of the male and the younger internet users and constantly under surveillance. To respond to this limited autonomy over transnational communication with their mothers, a number of informants have adjusted their patterns of internet use to fit into their mothers' usages which are often characterised by a lack of time and available internet tools. This is interpreted by the informants as a way to express intimate feelings to family and take care of their mothers' physical and psychological well-being.

Largely through the informants actively intervening in the unbalanced power in family communication, there are also another group of mothers who seek to develop their own digital knowledge, thus identifying a possibility of resistance and agency under the gendered structure of technology adoption. This assistance is often combined with help from the mothers' social networks and formal and informal education. This learning process is empowering in that the need to communicate within the family leads to the women having longer, more frequent and independent exposure to internet technology, free from the surveillance of other assistors. Through

this analysis, this chapter does not view female users of the internet as passive victims. It emphasises dynamics and theorises the transnational users of the internet as actors with potential to renegotiate power and to intervene in distribution.

However, the acquisition of digital knowledge is focused on a largely ghettoised area associated with one-to-one personal communication, leaving other forms of online activities less explored, such as seeking information on various web pages, social networking on newly emerging web sites or shaping public opinion on open online forums.

It should be highlighted that while mothers and other elderly women in China lack adequate skills and knowledge about information and communication technologies, young, skilled female migrants in London tend to demonstrate digital literacy that is as strong as their male counterparts. Female informants in this study are as frequent users of similar internet tools as male informants. Male and female migrants contact their families in China via the internet with similar frequency.

The only potential difference between the male and female migrants in London may be the ways in which they respond to their mothers' weakened role in transnational families. Among the eleven cases where the migrants report that they have adjusted patterns of their internet use to increase the time and quality of communication with their mothers or have assisted their mothers to gain digital literacy, seven are female migrants. However, considering the relatively moderate difference in number, there is not adequate evidence to support the hypothesis that female migrants tend to demonstrate stronger bonding with family overseas on the internet.

It should also be noted that the conclusion drawn here may be particularly applicable to the context where this study is based. The findings are based on migrant Chinese professionals under the age of 36. Together with China's one child policy, this group of informants has a rather homogeneous form of family structure; that is, a prime age migrant in the UK with aging parents in China and no children of their own. In this sample, migrants are from a relatively better off class. This makes the digital divide – the access to hardware and software – a less significant problem, thus highlighting the effects of differentiated digital knowledge. Moreover, as most of the migrants are in industries that use IT, these overseas sons and daughters generally demonstrate an excellent command of digital technologies and show insignificant gender difference in digital knowledge and skills. This highlights the gender difference among the older generations. The one child policy also leads to a more straightforward structure of the distribution of family care, financial support and emotional interactions.

There are diverse structures of family and internet use among transnational families around the globe which require further research. They have various communication needs, plans of distribution of family responsibilities and other aspects of gendered power dynamics in the family. For example, it has been found that life course has determined the migratory strategies of transnational families (Mulder and Cooke 2009). While the informants have stayed in the UK from their teens to their twenties or mid thirties and their parents are mostly in their fifties and early sixties, the family responsibility of care may still be maintained simply through communication technology. Yet, for migrants who came to the UK for education before their teens and for informants whose parents are older and need intense care, the contents of care may

largely vary and, hence, the contents and strategies of transnational communication may be significantly different. Future research is needed to continue to explore how digital inequalities impact on the family sphere in various family structures.

## **Chapter 7. Reproducing homeland: The geography of migrants'**

### **internet use**

Whilst previous chapters demonstrate migrants' internet use in the spheres of community, state and family, this chapter examines the geographic implications of these networked practices. In particular, I focus on these internet uses as acts of homeland reproduction. I explore how the migrants' use of the internet to reproduce their homeland in the city of London engenders various new modes of geographic experiences, from home environment building, the flexibility of temporal practices to the mobility of collective co-ethnic activities.

Geographers have long explored the relations between communication tools and geographical experiences. In the digital age, authors from within the discipline further contribute to this literature by focusing on the role of the internet in shaping space, territory and landscape. This chapter engages with the relation between geography and the internet in the context of migration and transnationalism. It seeks to contribute to the literature by examining the topic from a being-in-place perspective which examines the relation between media and geography by illuminating people's perceptions and practices surrounding physical, place-based environments.

I begin with a discussion on the literature of the relation between space, place and ICT use. While key theorists in the early to mid 1990s suggest that place and space have been largely replaced by wired environments and have gradually lost their significance, a second generation of literature has emerged to argue for the continuing significance of place and space in the digital age and to explore the renewed

geographic experiences brought about by ICT use. Several works on diasporic internet studies can be understood from the latter perspective. Drawing on Paul Adams's (2009) typology of geographical studies of media uses, I categorise these works into media in space, spaces in media, media in place and places in media. I then highlight the limited attention to the area of migration and transnationalism and the limited discussion from a being-in-place perspective in understanding how ICT use impacts migrants' spatial flexibility and travel patterns.

In the section on findings, I begin with an in-depth discussion of the geographical implication of the transnational, digitised *guanxi* and other migrants' practices demonstrated in previous chapters. Then I provide examples of how the informants use the internet to reconstruct their homeland in various physical, place-based environments in London, thus exemplifying the relation between internet use and geography from a being-in-place perspective. In the migrants' personal spaces, such as their own rooms, online tools of visual and audio sharing function to convey Chinese cultural products transnationally and hence play a key role in the informants' transformation of their desks, walls and rooms in London. These digital cultural products include the spatial arrangements of Chinese kin and family order, the vision of Chinese modernity, various tourism and materials that aid in Chinese temporal practices.

In public spaces, digital photos and other digitally transmitted visual-audio products are hybridised with the built environment of traditional Chinese public spaces, such as London's Chinatown. I discuss the example of the mural art project of '1888 photos' which contains digital photos collected online from a wide range of Chinese migrants.

This mural art is then projected onto the buildings encircling London's Chinatown, blending the virtual and the physical spaces together and thus providing a new way of theorising the relation between place, space and the internet. This hybridity between virtual and physical spaces also provide a largely diversified and democratised articulation of Chineseness and the Chinese identity due to the transparency and openness of internet-mediated cultural production.

I will then provide a second example of how internet use transforms migrants' experiences of public spaces. The use of the internet to organise co-ethnic activities around the city largely transforms the patterns of mobility among the Chinese migrants and extends collective cultural practices outside the ethnic enclave of Chinatown. In so doing, I highlight the subversive power of internet use in transforming the politics of place, landscape and territory among migrants.

### **7.1.Space, place and internet use**

There are several ways in which geographers engage with the relations between space, place and ICT use. The first set of debates emerged in the mid 1990s when ICT first became popular among global users. Key authors on globalisation and media argued that geographical places are losing their significance in producing culture in the age of large-scale migration and media globalisation. With the rise of neoliberalism, transnational migration has become one of the most prominent phenomena that shapes the contemporary social landscape. Migrants' cultural practices away from their homeland have led to the detachment of cultures from the places where they were thought to be fixed (Appadurai 1988; Clifford 1992, 1997; Giddens 1990). The growing popularity of digital technologies is also theorised as facilitating

border-crossing transmission of images, voices and cultures. Users of these media are now allowed to 'stay home while going abroad' (Moore 1993, 1996). As a result, the internet has been identified as a key factor that separates cultural experiences from the geographic place where they originate (Moore 1993, 1996; Stratton 2000; Thompson 1995).

According to these authors, transnational migrants in the information age are living a 'timeless time' in a 'space of flows' (Castells 1996; Uimonen 2003). By using the internet to transmit information globally, migrants are today connected transnationally and are less constrained by the boundaries of either the sending country or receiving countries. Borders of nation-states decrease and social activities become less bounded by territorial boundaries (Castells 2000; Webster 2006). Both the theorisations of global migration and the perspective of the internet are often thought to be leading to an era of 'de-territorialisation' that, according to Nestor Garcia Canclini (1995), refers to 'the loss of "natural" relation of culture to geographic and social territories' (p. 29).

This argument then encouraged debates surrounding the continuing significance of geography in a digital age. Several cybergeographers have agreed with the above authors and argued that the information technology has produced a space that lacks geographical quality. Online spaces are seen as a new environment for people to meet and interact that bears no resemblance to geography outside the wired environment and hence requires a new discipline of virtual geography to investigate (Morley and Robins 1995). It is argued that internet use acts as a destroyer of the boundaries of time and space (Benedikt 1991; Robin and Hepworth 1988). Cyberspace is thus understood to be anti-spatial as users are 'nowhere in particular but everywhere at

once' (Mitchell 1995: 9). Yet, other geographers challenge the above view, arguing against the idea of networked environment as placeless (Brunn and Cottle 1997; Jackson and Parcell 1997; Slater and Taylor 1999; Starrs 1997; Taylor 1997).

While the above literature demonstrates how an earlier generation of geographical studies addresses the relation between space, place and ICTs by centering on the question of the continuing significance place and space in human experiences in the digital age, there are several other approaches to disentangle this research area. Another approach emerged in the 2000s which is premised on the above debate and moves on to explore more diverse patterns of the interaction between ICT uses and the key research concepts in geography.

To discuss this literature, I highlight Adams' (2009) typology for geographical studies of communication technologies — media in space, spaces in media, media in place and places in media. First, the literature of media in space explores the geographic layout of communication infrastructure relative to the earth. The signals of communication technologies can be understood as nodes and the linear flows. Among them is communication traffic, which can be shown in a map. Key issues in this approach include the diffusion of communication technologies, ICT user density, ICT host distribution and the uneven development and distribution of ICT. Examples of this include Dodge and Kitchin's work (2000, 2001) which maps internet infrastructure and traffic flows. This approach has not been a focus in diasporic media studies — possibly a result of the difficulty in obtaining aggregate data regarding communication data of dispersed diaspora groups unbounded by census data of a nationalistic scale.

Secondly, the literature on spaces in media, like the above literature, investigates nodes and flows but it explores the social aspect of them; that is, the social space and boundary produced in the mediascape. These authors explore how geographically-grounded contexts, such as geography identity, are reflected online.

Several authors of diasporic internet studies have explored towards this direction. It is found that geography identity is significantly performed in the formation of online diasporic communities and diasporic political actions. Users with the same geography identity tend to concentrate in the same online community (Van den Bos and Nell 2006; Parham 2004). In a similar vein, Aouragh (2008) explores how landscapes give meanings to the formation of online communities, demonstrating the ways in which geographical experiences serve as a determinant in predicting the social cohesion on the internet.

Whereas the above two approaches are fundamentally spatial, other authors also contribute to media geography by thinking in terms of place instead of space. A third literature can be understood as places in media. Images, sounds and verbal expressions of a certain places are constantly represented in media, from songs like 'Sweet Home Alabama' to TV series featuring various places around the globe. Research in this category demonstrates the ways in which a physical place is represented online and consists of digitised sounds, images, moving images or a hybridity of the above.

The approach of places in media can also be found in the literature of diasporic internet use. For instance, Helland (2007) explores the form of cyber pilgrimage and examines websites where migrants practice religion collectively in a digital ritual room using online images of religious places. These online spaces offer a virtualised ritual space which serves as an alternative to traditional geographically-based religious places. This attempt to produce a virtual cultural space among diasporic groups may be a result of their experiences of frustration in finding a geographical place for collective ethnic cultural practices. It is also found that diasporic individuals link physical spaces to virtual ones by bringing spatial practices disallowed in physical environments to the virtual environments. As collective ethnic cultural practices are often marginalised in physical public spaces, they consider these geographically-grounded practices unsafe. As a result, diasporic groups seek to reproduce ethnic spatiality in an online space by using texts as well as visual and audio tools online in order to re-territorialise home and culture within the networked environment (Alinejad 2011; Mitra 2006; Mitra and Schwartz 2001).

Finally, media in place is the least researched area (Adams 2009). Media is used and consumed in places. The media in place perspective examines how media use shapes the physicality and the social and cultural principles embedded in various physical places. Communication is always being in place, which serves as a useful perspective in analysing the particular forms of mobility, working and dwelling brought about by media use. Compared with other more popular approaches, the freshness of this approach arises from 'looking at communication not as texts, discourses or metaphors (place images), nor simply as flows (communication in space), but as practices (Adams 2009: 8). Main examples of studies adopting this approach include the

research on mobile phones and the changing patterns of people's daily travels (Graham and Marvin 1996; Katz and Aakhus 2002; Kopomaa 2000; Kwan 2007).

Another study is also written from this perspective. Dodge and Kichin (2004) draws on Castells' (1996) idea of 'real virtuality' to discuss how air travel now becomes assemblages of digitised geographical experiences, from travel websites, check-in points, flight desks, air-traffic control to immigration check points. Formulating the concept of code/space, the authors highlight how places are constructed by digital media and how digital media are also reproduced through places. This mutual constitution is embodied through the performances of the people within spaces. To explore code/space means to examine the discursive regime that supports its production and to explore power relations of people who experience it. This approach examines how our lived, embodied experiences of the materiality of 'real space' are shaped by information technology. As Grosz (2001:81) wrote, the task is to 'negotiate how these spaces (the virtual and the real) are to exist in contiguity with each other and how we are to inhabit them'.

The approach that meshes digital technology into physical places is rarely explored in the context of migrants' spatial experiences. However, this being-in-place perspective offers an approach that examines closely how the reproduction or subversion of power relations surrounding places and spaces can be practiced through uses of communication technologies. For this reason, the being-in-place perspective requires further examination in migrants and ethnic minorities' everyday spatial experiences. This approach is crucial to assess how the experiences of a place are articulated in the digital age across social groups and cultural variations; that is, how the use of the

internet in various city places may empower or disenable power struggle among migrants' spatial experiences.

## **7.2. Locating digitised guanxi: the local versus the global, the digital versus the geographical**

The informants' practices surrounding family, state and co-ethnic sociality have significant implications for the dynamic interaction between the global and the local. The events arranged by Chinese government officials and business contacts from China make good examples. As shown in Chapter 5, the PRC government constantly seeks to build intimate linkages with its overseas population which they view as valuable human capital. These transnational linkages are today largely initiated across borders, move onto face-to-face events in London and sometimes in a Chinese city, and then continue to be maintained and managed across border via the use of emails, websites, instant messaging services, and social networking spaces.

This highlights the localisation of transnationalism. Transnationalism is often viewed as unbounded by geographical locations. On theorising the Chinese transnationals, Nonini and Ong (1997) uses the idea of ungrounded empire and envision transnationalism as deterritorialised organisation, which emphasises travel not village and focuses on the global not the local (Zhao and Tseng 2001). In this theorisation, localisation is viewed as a mere tool of nation-states which the flexible migrants seek to evade.

Yet, it is noteworthy that local specificity is central to transnationalism (Guarnizo and Smith 1998). While the nature of the connections between the government agents or other business contacts in China and the London-based informants is largely

border-crossing, their bridging and framing must be built through collective social rituals in a geographical locality – the networking events in either China’s main coastal cities or London. This is further highlighted through a discursive emphasis on place-based bodily interaction in forming interpersonal connection in the Chinese business culture. This discursive emphasis is exemplified in the repeated use of the saying ‘meeting in person brings extra closeness’ in various interviews and talks with the informants. Together with an advanced digital literacy in a wide range of Web 2.0 tools, the constant cultivation of *guanxi* in an offline, city-based environment is central to the construction of the Chinese transnational modernity.

The digitally initiated and maintained transnational connection needs to be bounded in the locally-forged social networks; that is, a process of the crystallisation of the global in the local social scenes (Zhao and Tseng 2001). This demonstrates that cross-border social coalition formulated through a complex transnational process requires geographically-informed social skills.

In addition to bringing together the global and the local, the practices demonstrated in previous chapters also serve as an intermingling process between the online and the offline. According to Dee and other informants, the transnational management of human capital through government practices and through co-ethnic sociality is enabled first by online ties and then by *guanxi* developed in a geographical place. A meeting in a physical place where face-to-face interaction is allowed is considered critical to the cultivation of *guanxi* in Chinese culture. However, when asked how this geographically-based sociality is maintained long term as the government officials and business contacts return to China after their short visits to London, informants

maintain long-term *guanxi* with them online. Because of the nature of its transnationality, connections between PRC officials and its overseas population need to be managed over a distance without constant maintenance of face-to-face sociality.

This novel form of *guanxi*, which is initiated online, developed in place and then maintained long-term online again, shifts constantly between the online and offline sociality. It would be misleading to theorise this digitised *guanxi* as either online sociality or offline sociality. It demonstrates how the online and offline serve as a continuity where the centuries old interpersonal reciprocity is deployed in a novel way.

### **7.3. Transforming personal spaces**

The informants report using a wide range of internet sources to obtain cultural products that represent the sights and sounds of their homeland, including websites for news, social networking sites, blogs, P2P and video sharing spaces. Among the informants, online news is one popular method of obtaining information about their country of origin. Websites for online news that are popular among the informants include news on major Chinese portal sites and websites for Chinese overseas and Chinese in the UK. The most popular portal site where the informants obtain updated news is Sina (<http://www.sina.com.cn>). Websites for diasporic Chinese around the globe that are most often visited by the informants include Powerapple (<http://www.powerapple.com>) and Chinaren ([www.chinaren.com](http://www.chinaren.com)). Informants also often view blogs written by friends and family in China and visit blogs of several well-known, popular bloggers in China. P2P and video sharing spaces hosted in Chinese languages are used to exchange Chinese music and videos. Although the

music, videos and other cultural products exchanged online are predominantly Chinese-speaking, there are also other cultural sources exchanged, including music and TV programmes from nearby Asian countries such as Japan and Korea, popular English-speaking TV series, and movies mostly from the United States. Popular P2P and video sharing sites among the informants include the P2P software PPStream, Xiaoli (<http://www.xiaolu.cc>), and YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com>). These sources allow informants to share information with and sometimes start online discussions with other Chinese diasporic users of similar migratory backgrounds.

Among these internet uses, several serve to reproduce a physical space of Chineseness – both in the informants’ personal spaces and in certain public spaces in London. In personal spaces, internet use transforms the migrants’ immediate living spaces in several ways. Firstly, most informants constantly visit blogs of their family spaces in China and download electronic photos. These electronic images of home spaces in China become the primary sources of the informants’ home decorations in London.

Lily explains:

Lily: I view and download photos from my sister’s blog a lot.....  
Usually these photos are the themes of my screen saver and desktop.  
Those photos in the frames [on the table and shelves of the informant’s living room] are also from her blog...I miss my family a lot.

(female, project manager, 23)

One photo, which she once chose as her desktop on the computer, was taken at her last visit home and showed her and her sister decorating the front door of their family home in China with Chinese calligraphy written on red paper – a style of home

decoration celebrating New Year. Another photo she downloaded and displayed in her room was taken at her grandfather's birthday in her family home in China. In this photograph, her extended family wore colourful clothing and sat around a round dining table in the dining room which is a spatial arrangement of birthdays and family reunions signalling the happiness and longevity of the family.

As Tolia-Kelly (2004a, 2004b) suggests in her work on South Asian diaspora's photo displays in their homes in London, the visual materials, such as photographs, ensure that after migration, the landscapes in London are continually remade through the aesthetics and textures of the landscapes of their pre-migration homes. Landscapes and the visual representations of them serve to signal their sense of belonging and structure their identification. Memories of multi-sensory experiences of pre-migration places and the events and social relations in them - the scent, the touch and the visual - are recalled through the text of such photos.

In Lily's example, the representations of the layout of a Chinese home are imported into the informant's London-based room. The informants obtain these electronic photos in order to incorporate images of their family members in China into their London-based living space. In the meantime, they also incorporate in their homes in London the spatial rituals and landscape arrangements through which Chinese kin and family order can be enacted. The Chinese away from the geographical location that fosters their identity are now using the internet rapidly and efficiently to bring the Chinese locality into their living rooms in London. Identity that is formed and performed through a series of spatial rituals surrounding kin and family order can then be reaffirmed.

Yet, compared with Tolia-Kelly's work on conventional photography, Lily's digital photos and the identification process they provoke demonstrate a different time-space relation. The South Asian diasporans Tolia-Kelly focuses on display photos that were taken in the diasporans' pre-migration days and brought to London as a souvenir to memorise the past and the history. Photographs here are 'a social record of the fads of that time. [They] are experienced in the everyday lived environments as essential nodes of connecting South Asian women to lived landscape of the past, pre-migration' (Tolia-Kelly 2004a: 685). However, Lily and many other informants in this research view photos online or download them from blogs or websites. Although some of them are photos of their pre-migration lives, these internet-transmitted images are more often the constant updates of events, social relations and places in their homeland. For the informants, photos are no longer an object that travels with them at the time of migration but a digital signal that instantly crosses the borders with a click. While Tolia-Kelly's example on conventional photo displays conveys memory, history and the past, the digital forms of diasporic photo displays demonstrate a new time-space relation in diasporic visual cultures. That is, to gaze upon a space of the homeland that is temporally parallel to their lived space in London. This then disrupts the imagery of homeland as the past whereas London as the present.

This renewed time-space imagery is also evident in the second example of importing the homeland. In addition to the spatial arrangements surrounding China's family and kin order, another type of online images of China's landscape is also popular among the informants because these digital images construct a vision of China's modernity which is also displayed as a way of performing their identity. Ted, for instance,

bookmarks several websites that provide digital photos of the latest development in Qingdao, his hometown in Northeastern China:

Ted: I watch photos of Qingdao. There is a website where you can find photos of several places in Qingdao and obtain updated images of its latest developments, buildings and so on. It's called Qingdao News.<sup>22</sup> It's in my bookmark menu on my PC at home. I watch it and check the website quite often. I am from Qingdao. I only go back once a year. In recent years, it has grown so fast. I'd like to know how it looks like now. Otherwise I can't even recognise where those places are these days. New buildings, new developments, everything is changing.

Being away from his hometown, he emphasises the constant need to see the landscape of it in his personal living space in London. Compared with Lily, who emphasises the landscape of the hometown that is closely knitted with Chinese kinship and family scenes, Ted's emotional attachment to the landscape of his hometown is underlined by an emphasis on its modernity and the economic development. His emotional attachment to his homeland and his geography identity is thus performed not through the consumption of visualised kin-based spatial arrangements but the envisioning of a modernising homeland. The state-funded web space provides a platform for overseas Chinese to witness China's economic success by producing the vision of modernity; that is, digitised and hence transnationally transmitted images of modernising landscapes in China's major cities.

There is yet a third type of digital image of China's landscape popular among the informants and often integrated into the informants' or their families' daily living space. Digitised images of abroad are displayed in the living space of home as a mode

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<sup>22</sup> <http://www.qingdaonews.com/>

of vicarious tourism; that is, displaying online photos abroad in order to compensate for the limited ability of actual travel. The transnational reproduction of the visual form of a locality via the internet not only takes place in London but, more often, in the informants' hometowns where their families experience the migrants' daily lives and the surrounding environments using the internet. Several informants' families view and download their blog photos not only to monitor and view the informants' daily lives as a parenting practice but also to obtain the surrounding geographical experiences. As shown in the last chapter, Julie explains that her grandparents view the photos of her trips to Europe and various tourist destinations in the UK because the older generation in China has less mobility and seldom travel abroad due to political, economic, and health reasons. Viewing the digital photos of Julie's daily life in the UK thus becomes a major way of compensating for the older generation's reduced mobility.

Kuan similarly describes how his parents in China express their constant need to download and display the London-based photos of his daily life in order to keep themselves updated about his life abroad:

Kuan: I never write letters or send things home. So online photos become the only way for them to see what is going on with me in London. They view my blogs regularly. And they download photos of significance and hang them in the living room. These are things like my graduation ceremony at the LSE, my birthdays, the photos we took together at the airport. It's their way of saying that 'I have a son but he is temporarily not here.' .....When friends visit, they'd proudly explain the photos to the guests. It's basically a way of saying my son is in England..... Having a child working abroad is considered worth showing off. It's what parents do. They don't have many opportunities to go abroad. When their son does, they think of it as an honorary thing in the family.

(male, investment banking, 31)

Downloading and displaying digital photos of Kuan at significant events in various London's locales is a way for his parents to signal simultaneously the absence and presence of Kuan in the family. Kuan's family in China constantly download the photos that highlight his current locations in London, which signals his physical absence, and yet integrate these images into their living room at home, which reassures his presence as a member of the family symbolically. This use of the internet among his family in China, like what the informants do in London, brings the geographical experiences of overseas family members in various public spaces into their personal home territories.

More importantly, the display of the digital photos of the informant's life abroad also indicates the mobility of this family, which then functions as a sign of its social status. As the parents' generation tend to lack mobility and the experiences of travelling and living abroad, having a son with increased mobility is celebrated for its symbolic meaning of earned social status. This mobility is thus demonstrated through visualising various locales in England where the informant visits and through the spatial arrangements in the family house in China that integrate and display the visualised mobility.

Fourthly, migrants also utilise online tools to reproduce the spatial experience of homeland in London by bringing China's time zone into their London-based residence. Online live radio broadcasts reproduce a Chinese linguistic environment in migrants'

living rooms in London, and make these living rooms extensions of places in China by mitigating the effects of differences in time.

James: During important sports games, I was like living in the Chinese time zone to listen to the online radio broadcasting of the games.....Ball games usually take place in the afternoon in Asia which are around very early morning in England.<sup>23</sup>

This real-time audio broadcast shapes James's temporal practices. Practices surrounding time in his personal spaces are significantly transformed and new modes of time-space coordination emerge. Whilst temporal differences and time zones used to serve as a key element in differentiating localities, the temporal differences between Asia and London are now diminished. As a result of expressed national sentiments and identity (through sports and other everyday mundane practices), some of the informant's temporal practices become similar to those in the locality of the home country.

Like online radio broadcasts, YouTube and some P2P applications are also popular online sources that contribute to the mitigation of the differentiating effects of temporal differences. Migrants rely on YouTube and popular P2P applications, including Xiaoli and PPStream, for popular cultural products from their homeland. On YouTube, soap operas, sports and news are uploaded quickly by users in China a few minutes after the programs air in Asia. P2P applications used by the informants also allow live broadcasting of popular television programs in China. Many informants follow the timeline and hence receive popular cultural products from their homeland without perceiving the time differences brought by the geographical distance. Feiyu

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<sup>23</sup> China is eight hours ahead and seven hours ahead during daylight saving time.

explains to me:

Feiyu: I watched Chinese New Year special TV show this year. We watched it live. A lot of websites do that. TudouWeb, YouTube, and so on. We used PPStream.<sup>24</sup> There are fireworks every year. It is the highlight of Chinese New Year. It's a must.....We also watched some Chinese drama. I like historical dramas, my girlfriend watched those love stories. She still follows them because she is still a student. She watches it every day late afternoon or evening in the UK. By that time, Chinese drama of that day has been uploaded because of the time difference. I did that, too, but not now. It was when I was a student. I can only do that during weekends now.

(male, accountant, 30)

Cultural practices that are closely knitted with temporal practices, such as the countdown celebration of Chinese New Year, are now experienced by migrant internet users without delay caused by geographical distance. The fireworks that mark a significant cultural event in the informant's hometown, Beijing, can now be experienced simultaneously in his living room in London, which highlights the ways in which the visual, audio and temporal elements of a built environment are transmitted and reconstructed in a remote locality. Yet, it should be noted that these temporal practices are sometimes compromised because of the informant's daily life in London which is required to follow the timeline of a working Londoner.

#### **7.4. Public places revisited**

In addition to making homeland in intimate personal places, the physical contexts of homeland are also recreated in various public places in London through migrants' internet use. Chinatowns, for example, are such places where large-scale

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<sup>24</sup> Tudou Web <http://www.tudou.com/>; PPStream <http://www.ppstream.com/>

digitally-enabled re-territorialisation occurs.

Public spaces in Chinatowns have long been a place for Chinese cultural practices and expressions of identity. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Chinatowns across Britain served as a leisure space for Chinese sailors and workers. Chinese catering businesses, small stores for Chinese products, as well as the gambling and sex industries dominated the landscape of the urban space (Newell 1989). In the post-war era, Chinatowns in North America and Britain have been transformed from ‘vice districts’ to tourist attractions, with the rise of the idea of minority cultures as a spectacle in consumption and leisure settings (Light 1974). In both eras, urban space was re-territorialised mostly in the ways of bodily practices (costume-wearing during Chinese cultural events), commercial activities (Chinese restaurants and stores) and the physical construction that draws boundaries between the Chinese ethnic space and the rest of the metropolitan city (the Chinese-style entrances built to encircle the area).

While Chinatowns have been a central place for re-territorialisation since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, new technologies have been adopted in recent years to produce more diverse forms of spatial experiences of being Chinese in this urban ethnic space. With online radio and video broadcasting, the environment in Chinatown is closely linked with those in China. With the help of online broadcasting, radio programmes in Hong Kong are often broadcasted live in several main stores and restaurants, which extend the temporal and linguistic experiences of China into the London-based urban area.

The informants also go to London’s Chinatown to participate in speeches and collective actions that take place in China in the form of online video sharing. A

recent example is the public support from the London-based Chinese community for the earthquake victims in the Sichuan province in mainland China in May 2008. The informants who visited Chinatown during this period listened to speeches from political leaders in China that called for national and international support. These speeches were downloaded and played in several stores and offices in London's Chinatown using various video-sharing applications. Photos of the affected areas in China were also downloaded from the internet and disseminated across Chinatown within days of the incident. Fund-raising organisations gathered in Chinatown and used laptops and handouts to display images and live coverage of the earthquake, which were obtained through email, video-sharing websites, P2P applications, and websites of Chinese TV stations and newspapers. All of these practices serve to reproduce the political landscape of China in London's Chinatown, transmitting the visual, audio, and cultural experiences across borders with minimal time difference (see Figure 7.1). London's Chinatown is thus meshed with a mainland China which is formed through a series of digital codes, seamlessly blending the material and the virtual (networked communication). It is thus a space 'in which the materiality is produced through information and communications technologies (ICTs) and software systems, which are themselves produced through spatial mobility (they are created by interactions and transactions)' (Dodge and Kitchin 2004: 197).



Figure 7.1. A fundraising event in London's Chinatown, May 2008

Source: [http://vweb.youth.cn/cms/2006/2006news/08wcn/raa/200805/t20080523\\_722485.htm](http://vweb.youth.cn/cms/2006/2006news/08wcn/raa/200805/t20080523_722485.htm)

Note: For an edited digital video that was played in Chinatown after the event, see [http://www.bcproject.org.uk/website/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=59:london-chinatown-earthquake-fundraising-event&catid=38:fundraising&Itemid=64](http://www.bcproject.org.uk/website/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=59:london-chinatown-earthquake-fundraising-event&catid=38:fundraising&Itemid=64). The images of Sichuan's earthquake, Beijing's major fundraising and political events during the period, and the major fundraising events in London's Chinatown are edited together in a short clip to be played at the continued smaller-scale fundraising events in Chinese community centres and their websites. It links Chinese across border through the display of images that synchronise several different localities, from Sichuan, Beijing, to London, which, when put together, produce a sense of collectiveness and cohesion among Chinese viewers across border.

Secondly, another example of code/space in public place is the physical constructions that mark the boundary between the 'ethnic space' of Chinatown and the urban area outside of it. These constructions have increasingly appropriated digital technologies and incorporated digital products. The physical boundary enclosing London's Chinatown used to be marked mainly by the construction of ethnicised buildings, walls and halls (see Figure 7.2). Now, digitally edited images consisting of images of landscapes and major cultural events that signal Chineseness are projected onto the walls that mark the boundary of the ethnic territory. These digital constructions of public places are drawn from a wide range of sources using the internet. Various digitally coded versions of Chineseness and Chinatown are blended with the built construction of London's Chinatown. The idea of Chinatown becomes an interlocking assemblage of the digitalised Chinatown of different time and different interpretations and the physical, present public space there. A recent example is an event of the mural art display in Chinatown (see Figure 7.3, 7.4).



Figure 7.2. Ethnicized Entrance Hall in London's Chinatown

Source: [http://www.search.com/reference/Chinese\\_New\\_Year](http://www.search.com/reference/Chinese_New_Year)

## PHOTO COLLECTION FOR CHINATOWN

1888 photos to collect. 1888 stories to tell. Together we make London's Chinatown special!

We would like to invite you to take part in making a photo mosaic that represents the vibrancy and history of London's Chinatown, using your photos, old and new! Each photo submitted will be entered into a lucky draw to win cash prizes - £20, £40 and £100, with a special £50 bonus prize for the artist's favourite old shot!\*

Please send your photos taken in connection with London's Chinatown. With each photo submitted<sup>†</sup>, please include your name, contact details, when and why the photo was taken.

**Deadline:** 25 June 2008

**By email:** chinatown1888@yahoo.com (300dpi, or in 1024 x 768 min. jpeg format)

**By post:** PO Box 279, Esher, Surrey, KT10 8YZ

- please enclose a stamped addressed envelope if you would like the photos returned

For further information:  
contact the artist, Wing Kei Wong, on 07523 211 995 or chinatown1888@yahoo.com

The photo mosaic will illustrate a full bowl of rice, a simple yet important staple food for all of us - just like Chinatown! It will be on display in Horse and Dolphin Yard.



Figure 7.3. Digital artwork for the transformation of the physical environment of London's Chinatown

Source: <http://www.chinatownartsspace.com/downloads/mural-flyer.pdf>

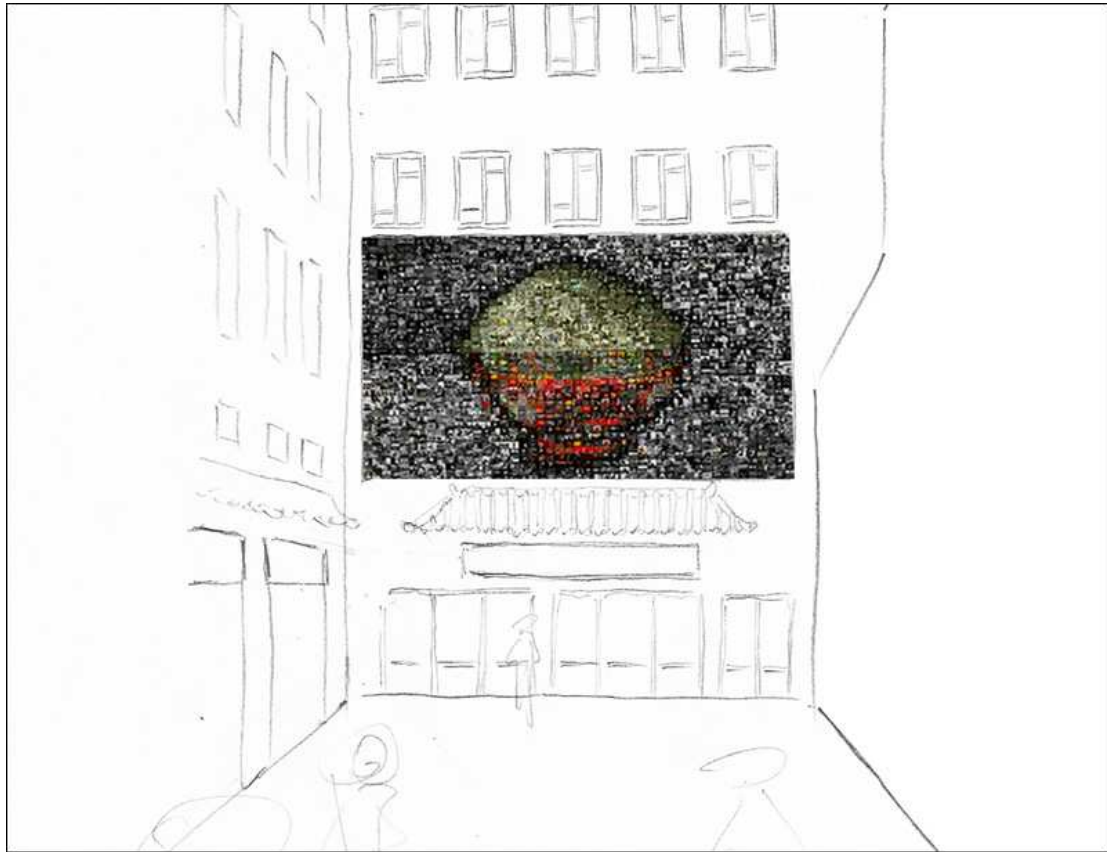


Figure 7.4. A sketch showing how the digital mural piece is displayed on a building in Horse & Dolphin Yard

Source: <http://www.markwu.com/chinatown-art-vote-mural/entries.html>

These digital artworks displayed on the physical environment of Chinatown include 1,888 digital photos collected on the internet. This project of public space transformation is hosted by the Chinatown Arts Space (CAS), a company formed with support from Westminster City Council, London Chinese Chinatown Association and Shaftesbury PLC.<sup>25</sup> This digital mural artwork is part of a long-term project ‘Horse & Dolphin Yard Mural Commission’ which invites British Chinese artists to display their

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<sup>25</sup> London Chinese Chinatown Association is a non-profit organization for the London-based Chinese community and for commercial and cultural activities in Chinatown. Shaftesbury PLC is a property investment company focusing on London’s West End, with one of its key areas in Chinatown.

artwork in this corner yard of London's Chinatown. The main sponsor of this project is CAS and Shaftesbury PLC with a list of non-profit Chinese organisations, such as London Chinese Chinatown Association, and a list of Chinese ethnic businesses, such as Chinese Spectrum Radio.

While previous artworks displayed in the Horse & Dolphin Yard also involve digital editing and digital prints and display, this particular piece of 1888 photo collection further utilises the digital technology by using sources collected online from a wide audience to produce a democratised visual product in the public space. Advertisements of this photo collection were circulated online, which called for digital photos that represent the spirit of London's Chinatown. The event was advertised on the websites of several London-based Chinese communities and photos from various viewers of the Chinese diasporic websites were collected online.<sup>26</sup> It was also advertised on the Facebook page of this project and the Facebook pages of various Chinese associations in Britain.

As a result of sourcing on the internet, diverse interpretations and experiences of transnational Chineseness in public spaces from various sources are built into the space of Chinatown. Submitted photos range from images of London's Chinatown four decades ago to very recent avant-garde edited photos, and from photos sent by the third-generation Hong Kong Chinese in Britain to images produced by an Australian man who married an Australian Chinese woman and came to London's

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<sup>26</sup> The event was advertised in Chinatown arts space (<http://www.chinatownartsspace.com>), London Chinese community network (<http://www.chinese-network.net>), Spectrum Chinese community network (<http://pswu.com>), and the British Chinese community websites ([www.dimsum.co.uk](http://www.dimsum.co.uk)).

Chinatown for a temporary job assignment. The photo mosaic illustrates a simple bowl of rice, which the artist describes as the core of Chinese culture.<sup>27</sup> Whereas the artist uses the symbol of rice bowl to represent Chineseness, this symbol of rice bowl consists of thousands of other visual symbols of Chineseness that are interpreted and produced by a wide population on the internet. This diversity is a result of the internet's potential to reach a large number of users in the community. Using this method to construct an ethnic public place, interpretations of Chinatown are democratised as the relatively open access to the internet serves to invite a wide range of voices and perspectives to the construction of a public ethnic place. The public space of the built environment of London's Chinatown is then democratised with heterogeneous articulations of Chineseness.

In addition to the efforts to recreate China within the public space of Chinatown, the internet is also used to expand migrants' spaces for public activities and events outside the ethnic enclave of Chinatown. In other words, it shapes the patterns of ethnic Chinese's mobility around the city. This is because the use of the internet to organise co-ethnic activities has brought about new choices for the locations for meetings and gatherings among the migrants, which leads to renewed ways in which they experience urban space.

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<sup>27</sup> The artist, Wing Kei Wong, is a Hong Kong-born architect and designer who is now based in London. She explains her choice of the symbol of a rice bowl in an interview, saying 'I was looking for an image to symbolise the Asian community, and it occurred to me that the reason so many people come to Chinatown is for food – either to visit restaurants or to buy ingredients. I did some more research about the different countries and cultures mentioned in the competition brief and I found out that rice, as their main staple food, was a common denominator. So the rice is a simple image but it's one that represents Chinatown very well. In the same way that Chinatown is an important base where lots of interesting things happen, rice is a simple thing that enables you to appreciate a huge variety of tastes when they're put next to it.' In the same interview, she also identifies why she chooses to use the internet as source for this piece. It is argued that diversity and transparency is required in interpreting Chinatown spaces which the online collection method enables her to do so. (Source: [http://www.chinatownlondon.org/people\\_my\\_chinatown\\_wkw.php](http://www.chinatownlondon.org/people_my_chinatown_wkw.php))

Activities organised by Xiyu, for instance, demonstrate the increased mobility of collective activities among the Chinese migrants. Face-to-face ethnic events are usually held in various geographical places outside Chinatown – usually a consumerism-oriented city place, such as bars, hotel conference rooms, pubs and restaurants in London. These event venues are expanded outside the ethnic enclave of Chinatown for several reasons. The symbolic meanings of Chinatown are often associated with dated forms of ethnic culture among the informants, against which the middle-class young migrants position themselves. One of Xiyu’s founders explains:

Karl: We do go to Chinatown because they have some of the best and most authentic Chinese foods in London. But usually our event venues are somewhere else. We don’t work near Chinatown. A lot of members’ offices are near Liverpool Street or Bank. That’s why we usually have our monthly drinks there. After work, no one wants to travel far. And most importantly, restaurants in Chinatown do not feel official. It’s a place for a couple of friends to hang out in the weekends. It’s for leisure time. But we have lots of business-related activities and business networking events. It does not feel right to do that in a restaurant in Chinatown. It does not feel professional.

(male, financial analyst, 27)

Karl’s account combines an emphasis on the functional role of a locality as well a symbolic one. While a place outside Chinatown is more suitable for their events because of the geographical proximity between the professionals’ workplaces and the chosen locality in the financial area in London, it is also preferable because of its symbolic meanings fit into the professionalism the organisation emphasises.

The mobility that allows co-ethnic activities to expand into a variety of city places

instead of a community centre in Chinatown is also a result of the key feature of the wired sociality. Karl discusses the role of the internet in mobilising its members, and compares it with the roles of word-of-mouth communication:

It's difficult to call more than ten people for one event. You either need a fixed office where everybody knows where you are and where the event is going to take place like what the older organisations in Chinatown do. Or you need something like Googlegroup or similar email list. That's why we use Googlegroup and combine it with other online platforms. Everyone feels free to visit, which functions just like an office. The only difference is Googlegroup keeps our cost down because it doesn't get us phone bills or cost us the rent.....In those older Chinese organisations, they usually have an office in Chinatown and hold events there. People visit the Chinese community centre in Chinatown to participate in their events there at a fixed time every week because they are unable to circulate event information quickly. But we are different. We are quite flexible. We are able to explore the city and choose our event places as we like.

According to Karl, a fixed social space for co-ethnic activities is closely associated with the communication method of telephone whereas greater group mobility is linked to group emailing. Co-ethnic activities tend to be fixed in one location among traditional Chinese organisations which have limited ability to offer an online platform for members to socialise and hence require a physical space as a site of collective activities. Lacking the ability to contact a large number of members rapidly regarding event information also means a predictable, routinely used event venue is required. Compared with them, the social activities of the wired organisations enjoy relatively more freedom as to where ethnic sociality is experienced, thus extending the experience of Chineseness outside the ethnic enclave.

Online-organised events shape the ethnic group's patterns of mobility also for their ability to produce safe places outside Chinatown. Sergei, an active member in Xiyu who often organises events for Xiyu members, explains how urban spaces outside Chinatown used to be considered unsafe for ethnic cultural practices:

Sergei: The large social gatherings we organise do not necessarily take place in Chinatown. If it's five or six people who want to hang out and relax and perhaps do some Chinese karaoke or shop some Chinese foods, yes, you go to Chinatown. Why? Just imagine five or six of us hanging out in, say, some posh, old-school restaurant in Chelsea or Knightsbridge. You just don't feel right. You speak a different language loudly and everything. But if you advertise it on Facebook, you can get a sufficiently large number of people, and then we usually rent an entire restaurant or pub, usually some fancy places that are not necessarily in Chinatown. In events for 50, 60 people like the one I just organised, we'd conquer whichever party places we like.

Interviewer: Are these large events all advertised online or there are other methods adopted to organise such events?

Sergei: Almost entirely online...I guess if you just use the word-of-mouth method, it's not possible to get so many people together for a party. Or at least it will take you three months to do that. That's why I like to advertise parties on Facebook. Simple, efficient, and fun.

(male, accountant, 29)

According to Sergei, Chinatown serves as a 'safe place' for Chinese cultural practices such as Chinese leisure activities and language speaking whereas urban spaces outside Chinatown are usually considered unsafe places for these co-ethnic activities. The distinction between the concepts of safe and secure should be noted here. The security of a place is often associated with its ability to eliminate threats or forces to the political, bodily and/or economic activities within it. It is thus ensured through

policing and control. The safety of a place, however, is discussed here as a cultural and symbolic term. As noted in several key authors in cultural studies, culture can be understood as a series of stable, predictable material practices which are considered appropriate practices by the dominant groups of people of a given space (Hall 1980; Fiske 1989). Drawing on this theorisation, Mitra (2006), when examining the ways migrants find a social space online to practice culture collectively, argues that:

“the connections between safety, stability and cultural practices are particularly important for people who are ‘outsiders’ in a place and do not belong to the location’s dominant culture. As such, the marginalized cannot feel safe because there is no guarantee that their practices will retain the stability that offers a specific cultural identity when the dominant culture might not support or tolerate those practices, simply because they do not ‘belong’ to a place” (254).

This perceived lack of cultural safety – the safety that assures collective cultural practices free from symbolic challenges within the environment – is highlighted by the informants.

Mitra discusses the concept of cultural safety to illuminate how migrants replace culturally unsafe urban places with anonymous (thus safe) online space when practicing culture collectively. Unlike Mitra, this present study examines the ways in which the migrant informants create a safe physical place and transform a supposedly unsafe urban place into a place of cultural safety with the use of the internet.

According to Sergei, large-scale co-ethnic activities for Chinese migrants are enabled by the internet. With conventional word-of-mouth communication, most co-ethnic activities tend to be limited in terms of number of participants and venue.

Internet-mediated communication allows for quick and easier organisation of co-ethnic social events among a large number of participants. This large number of participants subverts the pre-existing definition of cultural minority and majority in an urban place, albeit these are largely commercialised places available mainly for social groups with spending power.

Online organised events sometimes obtain exclusive access to an urban space. In these events, migrants come together and practice culture outside the ethnic enclave and produce new urban spaces for being socially and culturally Chinese without the perceived lack of cultural safety. This, according to Sergei, allows the group to ‘conquer’ a certain urban place outside the ethnic enclave of Chinatown to practice culture and thus challenges the boundary between minority and majority users of an urban place. In other words, different communicative methods entail different decisions about urban space usages. Face-to-face co-ethnic activities organised using the internet produce a sense of collectiveness that transform unsafe urban streets, restaurants and other public settings into places where migrants belong, empowering migrants’ marginalised spatial experiences.

## **7.5. Conclusion and discussion**

This chapter demonstrates the ways in which migrants use the internet to reproduce homeland in various physical environments in London, exploring the relations between internet use and geography from a migrants’ perspective and a place-based approach. Internet use transforms migrants’ experiences of place, territory and landscape in the host country by helping to create the visual, audio, physical and social contexts of their homeland in both personal and public spaces.

In personal spaces, four modes of spatialisation are adopted by the informants to transform their living rooms and bedrooms in London – kin and family spatial arrangements, vision of modernity, vicarious tourism and temporal practices. Firstly, the spatial arrangements of Chinese kin and family order are brought into several informants' room decorations via blog reading and downloading and digital photo editing. Secondly, a vision of Chinese modernity is imagined and constructed through constant visit to China's city websites where China's urban development is made visual and transmitted transnationally.

Thirdly, vicarious tourism also constitutes the cross-border production of space. The older generations in the informants' family in China compensate their reduced mobility by viewing and downloading the images of the daily life of the informants in various tourist destinations in Europe and integrate these images into their homes in China by displaying them at home. Fourthly, new modes of time-space coordination also emerge. The informants remake their London-based personal spaces with temporal practices resembling those of China's time zone by using live online streaming to receive TV and sports programmes and other cultural products in Asia. These Chinese temporal practices, although often compromising because of the informants' daily routine in London's time scale, largely loosen the connection between a transnational's physical location and the cultural space he or she produces. As temporal distinction is one of the key elements that produce boundaries between places, these cultural experiences with minimal time differences serve to re-territorialise China for migrants in the host territory.

In public places, new digital technologies are adopted to transform the traditional Chinese public places such as Chinatowns; they also extend public places for Chinese cultural practices into wider urban areas. The landscape of Chinatown is now shaped primarily through digital technologies, from the visual to the audio, highlighting the concept of code/space in the context of Chinese migrants' urban experiences. Social activities for Chinese migrants now rely on the internet's openness to involve a larger number of members within this dispersed group and thus redefine minority and majority culture and cultural practices in a given urban space. This then shapes the patterns of mobility of Chinese collective cultural practices around the city and destabilises the power relations surrounding Chinese migrants' spatial experiences in the metropolitan city of London.

This chapter also identifies the geography of the informants' daily practices surrounding co-ethnic sociality, the state and family presented in previous chapters. These practices foreground continuities between the global and the local and between the online and the offline. Transnationalism is primarily viewed by several authors as de-localised acts. Yet, the online-organised and yet place-grounded practices presented in previous chapters suggest the ways in which transnational practices are crystallised in a local place. This emphasis on place-based sociality also highlights how the online is embedded in the offline.

In conclusion, this chapter revisits the relation between place, space and internet use from the perspective of migrants' urban living. Moreover, it seeks to add to the literature from a being-in-place perspective, thus exploring the relation between media and geography by illuminating people's perceptions and practices surrounding

physical, place-based environments. According to Adams's (2009) categorisation, several theorists and empirical studies have engaged with the connection between the wired and the geographical by examining places on the internet, spaces on the internet and the internet in space. This chapter discusses where the existing literature of cybergeography and media geography has focused less; that is, the ways in which the media of the internet is used in physical places and how this thus transforms our experiences of urban dwelling. Examples in this chapter demonstrate a variety of ways in which the internet shapes geographical experiences for ethnic culture.

As suggested in previous chapters, research on the internet requires constant updates as the technology rapidly evolves. New internet tools that have significant implications to the geographical have emerged since the end of my fieldwork. The online StreetView service that offers visualised landscape of almost every city places may transform the ways in which users imagine the city. For ethnic minority groups practicing culture in and around the city, Twitter may have significant impacts. This micro-blogging service provides updates every second regarding ongoing social events in every corner of a city. It has been reported that it is used for city travellers to navigate through cities affected by natural incidents, such as the recent California fire, and by social incidents, such as the protests in Egypt and Tunisia. This potential of real-time categorisation of city spaces into different socially-shaped areas may help an ethnic minority to promptly identify safe places for collective cultural practices. Future research may be required to explore these emerging internet tools.

## **Chapter 8. Transnational Chineseness 2.0: Accessing Chinese modernity through digital transnationalism**

### **8.1. Remodelling Chinese modernity**

The central argument highlights a new generation of transnational Chineseness that emerges through the exchange between the macro political economy of China's rise and the micro everyday practices surrounding the internet. It contributes to two literatures. The first is the intersection between transnationality and modernity. There are different approaches to this research area. A prominent approach is by Paul Gilroy. In *The Black Atlantic* (1993), he examines how African diasporas serve to form the 'other' half of modernity, a concept that used to be dominated by Western-based development model where the role of African diasporas has long been masked. It revisits the history of a diasporic group against which the idea and history of the West is built and articulated. In so doing, Gilroy builds an inclusive theory of modernity that incorporates the groups of diasporas which are traditionally excluded from the Western-centred concept of modernity.

Whilst also challenging the Westerncentric linear conception of modernity, this study, however, is associated more closely with a second tradition in the literature. Grounded in the context of the Chinese transnationals from East and Southeast Asia, this approach views them as modern subjects with their own values, trajectories and histories alternative to those of the Western modernity. These authors focus on transnationals from middle to elite class migrants who bridge the world and their homeland through cross-border entrepreneurial and other capitalist practices (Mitchell 1997, 2004; Olds 1998; Ong 1999, 2006; Nonini and Ong 1997; Ley 2010). From

petty business persons, skilled professionals to tycoons of multinational firms, these subjects seek to maximise their capital gains through flexible linkages to multiple nation-states. This is conceptualised as ‘transnational Chinese modernity’ (Nonini and Ong 1997) or ‘overseas Chinese capitalism’ (Hamilton 1996).

These concepts portray transnational Chinese practices as an alternative modernity/capitalism. Unlike its Western counterpart, they accumulate capital and participate in the global market not by following the Western model of capitalism but by developing its own trajectories and logics (Ley 2010; Nonini and Ong 1997, 2005; Ong 1999).

Whilst this study draws on the above literature, it should be noted that the discussion of Chinese transnational modernity is mostly based in the 1990s when what China and the West meant was significantly different from what it means today. There has been a new global politico-economic context and technological changes ten years on, and this is where this study begins. This thesis adds to this literature in the following ways.

Firstly, I would argue for an alternative paradigm in conceptualising the relation between the Chinese transnationalism and modernity. The structure of Chinese modernity has been remodelled, with its centre(s) diversified and shifting. Based on the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, Nonini and Ong (1997), key authors in the literature of overseas Chinese capitalism, propose ‘Chinese transnationalism as alternative modernity’, which locates modernity among migrants and views transnational spaces as a site for modernity. However, this study proposes a second point of view that understands

‘transnationalism as a way to negotiate access to the modernity in the homeland’. Whereas the former positions modernity among migrants, the latter views modernity as increasingly associated with the home country of the Chinese diaspora, particularly the mainland.

Nonini and Ong theorise Chinese transnationals as ‘the third culture’ which, according to Featherstone (1990: 8) involves ‘new types of flexible personal controls, dispositions and means of orientation, in effect a new kind of habitus’. This third space is described as evading the disciplinary power of multiple nation-states. With the metaphor of ‘ungrounded empires’, the transnational Chinese professionals, entrepreneurs and workers in other forms are portrayed as seeking flexible capital accumulation without having to be grounded in locales or under surveillance of sovereign power. As Nonini and Ong (1997: 12) wrote, the conceptualisation of Chinese transnationalism as modernity is to ‘decenter the Middle Kingdom as the ultimate analytical reference for an understanding of diaspora Chinese’. Modernity is perceived and constructed among these translocal, unbounded mass of diaspora rather than within the grounded territory of any nation-state.

This research challenges the conception of the hyper-flexibility with the discussion of the rising power of China. The findings demonstrate a group of transborder migrants increasingly submits to the PRC’s disciplinary power with their discursive construction of China as a promising land for economic gains and success in the new millennium. The transnational linkages with the homeland and the plans for return are underlined by a mainland Chinese triumphalism which strengthens their ties with the mainland. Thus this study argues for the regrounding of the ungrounded empires and

in a sense re-territorialises Chinese transnationalism.

When these authors refer to the concept of transnational Chinese modernity, there is an implied geography of Chinese modernity. With transnational migrants as the core, many of whom are from Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan and the ASEAN countries, mainland China in this map of modernity is portrayed as a periphery.<sup>28</sup>

Several key articles theorise the mainland as a mere recipient of modern global forces, viewing the cultural imageries and capital flows brought by the Chinese diaspora as something flowing from the modernised group to a less developed, less globalised land (for example Liu 1997, Hsing 1997, Yang 1997). There are studies that include emigrants from coastal mainland China, along with emigrants from other areas with long association with capitalism such as Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan, in the discussion of transnational Chinese capitalism. Yet, findings of other studies in this literature often show that the Chinese transnationals associate travelling out of mainland China with capital gains and social power while they view those staying in the mainland as lacking economic opportunities (Liu 1997; Hsing 1997).

This may have changed. The ways in which Chinese modernity is imagined are shifting. In academia and popular culture, the rise of mainland China and the ‘threat’ it may pose to the existing world powerhouse, the US in particular, has become a major theme (Ikenberry 2008; Jacques 2009 among others). What it means to be

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<sup>28</sup> Perceiving the West as lacking economic opportunities and homeland as full of them may be familiar to certain Hong Kong migrants in Vancouver during the economic downturn in Canada (Ley and Kobayashi 2004). Yet, still it should be noted that such perception was prevalent among migrants from the conventional ‘core’ in Chinese modernity, such as Hong Kong. The rapidly rising role of the mainland has not yet been included in this discussion, thus reifying the conventional mapping of Chinese transnational modernity.

Chinese and modern is no longer disconnected from the mainland for it has largely replaces the conception of Greater China and become a focus in the discussion of prosperity and global competitiveness.

In this study, the narratives of home and the globe produced among the middle to elite class mainland Chinese transnationals have reflected this. The migrants no longer view the mainland in terms of poverty and lack of mobility and the West in terms of hopes for economic success. Whilst based in London, they actively seek economic opportunities in their homeland. Connecting with mainland China, for the informants, is to be part of the rising modernity with which they adopt various tools to form a transborder synergy.

Like the Hong Kong and Taiwanese migrants focused on in previous studies of transnational Chinese modernity, the mainlanders seize economic opportunities not only in London but also constantly reach their homeland through cross-border networks. Yet, compared with the Hong Kong, Taiwanese migrants and other Chinese sub-groups emphasised in earlier studies, there is a distinction. These migrants seek to secure their share in what many of them discursively construct as the land of this century. In so doing, I highlight the shifting relation between modernity and the Chinese transnationals – from ‘Chinese transnationalism as modernity’ to ‘transnationalism as a way to access the mainland-based Chinese modernity’.

This study calls for the re-conceptualisation of the relation between modernity and Chinese transnationalism with the narration of mainland China’s rise. Through analysing the narratives and practices of the informants, it has demonstrated how

transnationals portray their homeland as modern, full of global capital and connected with world economic forces in a time they see as a relative downfall of Western modernity during the financial crisis.

In section 8.3 of this chapter, I will summarise the findings of each previous chapter and demonstrate how the informants' turn to the homeland for imageries of modernity is expressed and practiced by the informants through various use of the internet. From social, political to familial practices, I illuminate how the findings of each previous chapter add up to the picture of the internet-mediated transnational building of Chinese modernity.

Secondly, this thesis adds to the literature of transnational Chinese modernity by highlighting a missing element in the literature - a key element in forming transnationality and modernity today; that is, digital technology. I demonstrate the role of information technology plays in the changing structure of the Chinese modernity and how this restructured Chinese modernity gives meaning to internet use. It illuminates the ways the socio-economic and geographical composition of Chinese transnationals has changed and how internet use is embedded in this context. The recently increasing number of well-educated mainland Chinese professionals, a result of the rising economic power of the mainland, is intertwined with the symbolic meaning of internet use in the broad idea of the Chinese diaspora; that is, tech-savvy, younger, modern and more mobile. The rise of the mainland also means internet technology serves as a tool to reach home modernity. Thus, to add to the literature of transnational Chinese modernity, this study links another scholarship to it; that is, diasporic internet studies.

## **8.2.A geographical perspective to the intersection between migration and the internet**

The second literature where this study is positioned is diasporic internet research. There is a growing body of literature that debates diasporas' internet use. This thesis adds to this expanding literature not only by introducing the research agenda of modernity but also through using a geographically-grounded approach. The literature on diasporic internet use emerged in the mid 2000s and has contributed significantly in illustrating how diasporic users with no or little prior connections meet and assemble in online communities; that is, diasporic sociality that stays within the virtual world. It conceptualises networked spaces as a new social field discontinuous with the social settings that predate it. However, this present research is not a study of this kind. It is, rather, a study that focuses on the types of relations that have existed long before migrants' internet use. It demonstrates how these relations may be experienced differently with their internet use patterns.

Before the prevalent use of the internet in transnational settings, Chinese migrants had formed ethnic associations, responded to policies of their country of origin and contacted family with various other communication methods, from travels, mails, telephones to mobile phones. A reader may ask, 'is there really a difference between using the internet to do these and using other communication methods' or 'what is it so special about internet use'.

To argue for the significance of internet use in shaping migrant users' experiences, two approaches can be adopted. The first approach is to look at activities that emerged with the internet, exist only in the online world and absent from other communication

methods. This is what several key authors in current diasporic internet research have done (Bernal 2006; Brinkerhoff 2009; Enteen 2006; Franklin 2001, 2003, 2004; Helland 2007; Ignacio, 2006; Kim 2003; Lieberman 2003; Mallagaprada 2006; Ong 2006; Tynes 2007 among others). These studies examine diasporic online communities and explore their dialogues and collective practices that emerge on the internet. They conduct research in online forums, newsgroups, blogs and websites for diasporic individuals who have never or rarely met in offline settings. These are communities that are built solely within a networked space that is primarily disconnected from a world outside it. The social connections among these internet users are usually anonymous and initiate and maintain primarily online.

These online spaces are termed as ‘virtual diaporic cultural sphere’, ‘diasporic public sphere’ or ‘cyberpublic’ by authors (Brinkerhoff 2010; Chan 2010; Yang 2002). This body of work is now often referred to as digital diaspora studies – a literature that looks into the ‘virtual networks of contacts for a variety of political, economic, social, religious, and communicational purposes’ (Laguerre 2010: 50) or the ‘distinct online networks that diasporic people use to re-create identities, share opportunities, spread their culture, influence homeland and host land policy’ (Alonson and Oiarzabal 2010: 11; see also Brinkerhoff 2010).

This research focus coincides with the rise of the first generation of internet research in the 1990s and early 2000s. Howard Rheingold (1993: 62), a key author in forming this generation of internet discussions, focuses on internet-mediated communities that are ‘social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions [using the Internet] long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to

form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace'. It is implied, in this research focus, that community is no longer bounded by geographic locality as it examines social formation that has no or little linkages to place-based human interactions. Diasporic individuals who have multiple or dispersed geographic locations can now belong to the same host-land sites.

This thesis proposes a second approach to argue for the significance of internet use in shaping migrants' experiences of being away from home; that is, to study the internet not by going there directly, but by starting from somewhere outside of it. This is the central theoretical and methodological argument of this study; that is, bringing a geographically-grounded perspective into the current diasporic internet studies. This perspective examines internet-engendered social phenomena not as something entirely innovative, contrary to the first-generation internet research which focuses on the novelty of communities emerging and existing only online. Rather, it looks at research areas where the internet is embedded in banal daily life. Bringing in the perspective of the second wave of internet research which disrupted the online and onsite binary in the early to mid 2000s, this study looks into diasporic internet use that is embedded within mundane social structures and relations (Miller and Slater 2000; Woolgar 2002).

In this study, I do not focus on diasporic online newsgroups, discussion boards or other web spaces that emerged mainly for users disconnected from each other in the offline environment. I examine users' existing social, political and familial relations – the basic social relations, regardless of the technological milieu. While the literature on diasporic internet use tends to focus on networked interactions that are largely

separated from their pre-existing social relations, I based my observation on key aspects of informants' everyday lives. From networked ethnic sociality, wired governance to online family communication, I view what they experience online as continuity with geographically-grounded social, cultural and political inscription.

In section 8.4 of this chapter, I highlight the contribution of this thesis to the existing studies of diasporic internet use by demonstrating four key features of the informants' practices that predate the internet and are now mediated by it, thus illuminating what differences internet use has made to the mundane, generally offline-based practices. These include the symbolic meanings of internet use, the transformed formation of sociality, new fields for power struggle and control and new forms of inequalities.

In the final section, I discuss the limitations of the research and identify possible directions for future research. I highlight the changing contexts in technological infrastructure in China and among Chinese migrants and the shifting paradigm in neoliberal technologies adopted in Britain to structure migration and skilled labour.

### **8.3. Building today's Chinese transnational modernity with the internet**

The empirical findings in this thesis show how internet use among Chinese professionals in London is a way of responding to the rising modernity in their country of origin and to the consequent intensified political and cultural attachment. Chapter 4 explores the informants' ethnic organisation building. It examines the network sociality among transnational Chinese and how this plays a significant role in sustaining the migrants' economic success locally and transnationally.

Social ties that aid the informants' access to China's increasing business opportunities and economic resources need to be bridged among a wide-ranging, dispersed group of the elite class transnational Chinese. Previous studies have suggested that co-ethnic professional organisations are key to the career development for migrant professionals (for the case of Taiwanese and Chinese in the Silicon Valley see Hsu and Saxenian 2000; Saxenian 1999, 2001, 2006). As the role of internet use in shaping the efficiency of these organisations is less examined in these studies, this thesis brings Wittel's (2001) concept of network sociality into the discussion of transnational Chinese professionals. It found that participating in internet-mediated ethnic associations has significant impacts on the efficiency of ethnic social networks in career development and entrepreneurial success because cross-border networks are widened and made easier with the internet.

Wired Chinese associations help to quickly identify the needed and trustworthy social capital. In addition to facilitating the access to economic resources transnationally, wired co-ethnic sociality also aids to enhance the migrants' economic performances locally. Wired interpersonal connection with co-ethnic professionals is utilised to bypass the ethnic glass ceiling and the disadvantages in London's labour market brought by the informants' migratory status.

In other words, the wired associations for the Chinese professionals build a circuit where the London-based, localised interpersonal networks bring in transnational social and capital flows. Through this circuit, the transnationals reproduce their privileged socio-economic position within rising Chinese modernity. By building

digital ties with the London-based co-ethnic professionals from the middle to elite class backgrounds, the informants reproduce the privilege brought by their family's economic resources accumulated through China's rapid development. This obtained capital among the informants in London then flows back to China as digital networks are adopted to form business collaborations between the informants and their contacts in China, such as Ted's entrepreneurial plan.

Whilst Chapter 4 demonstrates how the internet aids in the migrants' access to China's new found wealth through establishing social connections among co-ethnic professionals and entrepreneurs, Chapter 5 reveals that internet use also mediates migrants' access to China's modernity by facilitating the connection between the migrants and the PRC state. Using a Foucauldian approach, Chapter 5 demonstrates two different modes of internet-mediated connections between the state and the transnational talent.

The cases of CFUK, Xiyu and SMSUK exemplify how the state's modernity projects – the modernisation of financial market and medical profession - are accomplished with the intervention of wired ethnic communities. These wired associations use the internet to reach as many professionals in London as possible, enabling the state to better target this rather dispersed and anonymous group. Overseas talent hence becomes more imaginable and manageable subjects for the state. The case of Chinese state's online registration system illuminates how overseas population management can also be accomplished with the use of aggregate data collected online. The information surrounding overseas talent's productivity and bodies is thus better organised by their state of the origin.

Both measures cannot be accomplished without the migrants' compliance. This compliance is, as demonstrated in Chapter 5, formed through a discursive consensus of China's economic power between the states and the informants. Perceiving China as rising to replace the West as a major market for the financial industry, the informants maintain that building social ties with PRC officials and responding to their diaspora engagement practices is vital to their future career development.

In summary, Chapter 5 discusses the conjunction of governance, internet use and the project of modernity. In classical theories of modernisation which are largely based on Western societies, modernity means economic liberalism accompanied by democratisation. However, according to the informants' discursive construction, modernisation in the political sphere in this study is more significantly associated with the modernised, technologically-forward techniques of governance. From traditional word-of-mouth management of the diaspora to the current efficient online management of overseas talent, the methods adopted by the state to facilitate neoliberal market calculations are transformed from primitive communication to technologically advanced practices. A sense of modernity among the narratives of Chinese officials and migrants highlights the neoliberal economic achievements unaccompanied by lax state control.

While Chapter 4 and 5 delineate migrants' role in building modernity transnationally, Chapter 6 highlights how this cross-border digital modernity is unevenly distributed. The above two dimensions of the digital construction of transnational modernity — wired ethnic associations and digital ties with PRC state — are both underlined by a

celebratory discourse of China's economic success. In Chapter 6, I use the third dimension, transnational family communication, to demonstrate how this Chinese triumphalism is fragmented through transnational use of the internet.

Because of differentiated ability and knowledge of internet tools between men and women in transnational families, women of older generations become increasingly silenced in a transnational setting where the internet has dominated communication. Migrants' mothers and other elderly female family members have had difficulty communicating with their family members overseas since the internet largely replaced the telephone and became the most often adopted method in transnational communication.

In other words, the digitally-mediated Chinese transnationalism rests upon the reworking of family labour. Care, affection and emotional support, once considered a key element of femininity, is now largely reassigned to male family members in a transnational setting.

There has been an established literature revealing how the institution of Chinese family is reshaped in a transnational process. Prevailing examples include the astronaut families where a working father being away from the mother who gives up careers and takes up the responsibility of child-rearing (Chee 2003; Huang and Yeoh 2005; Ong 1999; Pe-Pua et al. 1998; Shen 2005; Waters 2002). There are also female-headed transnational families where the mothers travel abroad to work and the fathers stay with children, instead of fathers' increasing responsibility of childcare and housework, the role of a caretaker in the family is still largely assigned between a

female relative in the home country and the overseas mother. Chapter 6 further explores the transformation of Chinese transnational family by examining the ways the internet has intervened, demonstrating how the transborder modernity is accommodated into a family setting that is maintained through digital technology.

This chapter notes that the digital modernity explored in this study is segmented through a transnational process. It illuminates the differentiated access to digital modernity among actors of Chinese transnationalism, uncovering the other half of the story of China's transnational modernity that is marked by the gap in digital development among various social groups.

Finally, Chapter 7 examines the spatial side of the internet-mediated practices of transnational modernity building, illuminating how these internet uses shape the migrants' ideas of borders, places and the city. This chapter discusses the geographical implications underlying the above three types of internet use. From internet-mediated practices of ethnic sociality, bonding with overseas governments to family communication, these activities constantly shift between online and offline environments, producing new modes of geographic experiences.

Digitised *guanxi* demonstrates the continuity between the virtual and the geographically-grounded sociality. This *guanxi* is first established online but then required to be extended to offline-grounded ties cultivated through social events in various city places as geographically-based sociality is valued in Chinese culture. This bonding based on face-to-face social reciprocals is managed long term again through various online contacts, which allows frequent maintenance of interpersonal

relationships at a distance.

The construction of digitised guanxi is also a process of hybridising the local with the transnational. While the nature of the connections between the London-based informants and their contacts in China is largely border-crossing, the bridging and framing of them are built through collective social rituals in one geographical locality – the networking events in either China’s main coastal cities or London. Transnationalism, whilst often associated with ‘ungrounded empire’, is crystallised in locales (Zhao and Tseng 2001). As Sassen (1994:123) wrote, ‘globalization processes assume concrete, localised forms’. Transnationality needs to be bounded in the locally-forged social networks, thus blending the global into the local social scenes.

Internet use transforms migrants’ experiences of both personal and public spaces. Internet use further extends public places for Chinese cultural practices into wider urban areas, efficiently involving more participants in each event, the internet helps the Chinese migrants to hold social activities and practice culture in public places outside Chinatown, as the larger size of the events enabled by the internet allows migrants to practice culture in urban places outside the ethnic enclave without feeling unsafe. These uses of the internet destabilise the power relations surrounding Chinese migrants’ spatial experiences in the metropolitan city of London.

#### **8.4. Is it really different with the internet? The contribution to diasporic internet research**

To contribute to the literature on diasporic internet use, this study focuses on institutions that were once mediated through other media but now largely move online.

My research puzzle here is to explore what distinguishes ethnic sociality, transnational family and cross-border governance that we have already known from the same practices that are mediated by internet use? If these relations predate the internet, then does it really matter if they are now intersected by the internet? What, if any, is the significance? The answer provided in this research contains four arguments:

Firstly, compared with all other media used by the informants, the internet, or Web 2.0 tools in particular, serve as a symbol of a new form of Chineseness which is young, modern and mobile. Internet use draws boundaries and identifies the Other. Being wired and using up-to-date internet applications is a gesture that signals the different social and cultural positions of the informants from members of unwired ethnic associations. Internet use dissects the broader concept of the Chinese diaspora into smaller sub-ethnicity, highlighting the internal heterogeneity within the blanket idea of the Chinese diaspora.

The longer-existing Chinese organisations in London often recruit migrants from Hong Kong who arrived for less-skilled jobs as a result of the history of Hong Kong's colonial past and use no web tool or simple web tools such as an official webpage with little space for user interaction. Xiyu and CFUK recruit the growing group of mainland Chinese professionals and adopt tools of the Web 2.0 generation as their communication methods, including Facebook, Googlegroup and interactive websites. This context of socioeconomic and historic formation of the Chinese diaspora is thus articulated to be weaved to the symbolic meaning of the Web 2.0 networked communication.

The informants identify the internet as a symbol of modernity mainly through building a sense of economic success, professionalism, technological optimism and spatial mobility with it. Using the internet is a way they maintain the boundary of their privileged status in China's new economic, political and social order transnationally. Using the internet distinguishes the informants from other segments within the Chinese diaspora. It serves to maintain the group boundary between the wealthy, young mainlanders from the older generation of Hong Kong and other Chinese in Britain, and hence strengthens their in-group accumulation of capital and social resources.

This is a contextualised reading of the relation between modernity and the internet. While the internet can be read broadly as a symbol of modernity globally, this specific process of symbolic dissection of sub-ethnicity – Hong Kong Chinese, mainland Chinese and so on – brought by internet use is intertwined with the history and culture of the Chinese diaspora. It highlights the historical and geopolitical conflicts between Hong Kong, mainland, Taiwanese, Singaporean Chinese and Chinese of other migratory backgrounds, which intersects with the different sub-ethnic groups' socio-economic formation. It is this specific context of the heterogeneous formation of Chineseness that makes the relation between modernity and internet use significant in the case of Chinese migrants.

Secondly, compared with other media, migrants' use of the internet brings about innovative patterns of social formation, such as the power structure and mobility of ethnic sociality. Migrants' sociality mediated by internet use demonstrates a flattened

group structure. Existing studies on overseas Chinese professional associations show that co-ethnic sociality is mediated by a hierarchical group order, where the connections between two or more members are largely shaped and restricted by a centralised group authority (Saxenian 1999, 2001, 2006; Sexenian et al. 2002). While networked ethnic sociality still has its centres and peripheries – there are still website managers for instance, the internet enables migrant groups to establish their centrality in networks in new ways.

There is an affinity between the features of Web 2.0 platforms and the ways in which the network sociality of Xiyu and CFUK is organised. As the longer-existing Chinese associations adopt telephone calls, flyers or very simple web tools such as an official webpage to disseminate information, it implies a web manager who generates event information and the vast receivers of the information. The use of Web 2.0 tools, however, indicates the users/members serve not merely as information receivers but also largely generators of social activities and group solidarity. Social networking sites, group emailing sites, interactive webpages and blogs are characterised by their web-as-participation feature. Compared with the Web 1.0 tools, users are allowed to exercise some control over their data. Not only the group leader but also each individual group members contribute to the contents both online and offline sociality that initiated and organised using the internet. Its mobility, cohort-sharing and member-generating features indicate autonomy in social grouping.

Internet-mediated interpersonal connections also mean specifically-targeted co-ethnic and transnational social capital. These digital connections make pre-existing ethnic

linkages more far-reaching. The migrants then deploy this new form of social capital to create social, political and business assemblages. The urban spatial experiences of ethnic groups are changing with the rise of the wired form of co-ethnicity. This is because internet-mediated co-ethnic events generally mean increased number of participants, shortened time and thus increased sense of spatial safety for collective gatherings which then leads to greater spatial flexibility among the migrants.

Thirdly, I should highlight that the above findings on the transformation of ethnic sociality do not mean simple technological optimism. While internet use may create less centralised social structures for ethnic grouping as presented above, they can also serve as new fields for control and power struggle. These emerging fields of power and resistance, to argue from a Foucauldian perspective, accommodate discourses that construct migrants as new types of subjects in transnationalism. For example, emigrant professionals once seemed remote and unmanageable to the state of their country of origin become much more imaginable through their use of the internet. In other words, they are produced as new subjects to be gazed upon for governing power in the digital age. A renewed discourse surrounding power and its territorial limits hence emerges. These individuals are now under closer surveillance of the state.

Fourthly, closely linked to the third argument, internet use brings new forms to existing inequalities in a transnational process. The family sphere can be an example. Transnational families have long been theorised in terms of well-defined gendered division of labour. As digital inequality intervened in this transnational division of family labour, existing gendered norms in family communication are reworked. Communication is central to social activities; communication technology is critical to

the making of a long-distance social bonding. Hence inequalities in the use of communication technology are brought into the transnational sphere and reinforce the existing inequalities in it.

In addition to gender, the digital gaps between the haves and the have-nots are also augmented in transnational settings. Studies have argued that while the focus of transnational Chinese modernity mainly centres on professionals and elites in the globalised knowledge industries, it is important to also point out the less skilled transnationals who concentrate on the dirty-job end in the transnational knowledge sphere and are largely absent from the theoretical framing of transnational modernity (Ong 1999, 2006). The discrepancy between the wealthy and the deprived is enlarged through the globalisation of knowledge and technology. In this thesis, internet use functions as a symbolic group boundary through which the young, wealthy and mobile socialise and accumulate capital and privileges within the maintained group border, excluding the less tech-savvy symbolic Other.

The technology of the internet is not inherently good or bad in social settings. Arguing against technological determinism, this study found a variety of internet uses among migrants which have diverse social implications. Some of the uses may imply greater social exposure and less hierarchy, such as the flattened structure of ethnic organisations and greater socio-cultural safety in the city. Yet, other uses may serve to strengthen regulation, control and inequality. The examination of technology and its social consequences needs to be grounded in each contextualised case. The key conception here is that technology and innovation itself may not be inherently imposed with one social feature. It is, rather, the socio-cultural appropriation of it that

produces various social consequences.

## **8.5. Discussion, limitation and some directions**

It should be noted that this study examines the dynamic relations between Chinese migrants' internet use and the ways in which Chinese modernity is imagined. In so doing, it focuses on the the informants and their linkages with their homeland and co-ethnics; in other words, it explores within the scope of Chineseness. This inevitably leaves out other aspects that form critical parts of migrants' life experiences in Britain. By examining Chinese associations and the networking practices within this arena, this study chooses to narrow its scope down to a specific dimension while leaving out the ways in which they develop social capital at work or in leisure settings with individuals of other ethnic backgrounds. It should be acknowledged that these social networks form an equally significant portion of the informants' daily life. Most informants report that they have a social life outside Xiyu and CFUK. Analysing and reporting mainly the informants' practices surrounding Chineseness may portray the informants as particularly longing for their homeland and highlight a sense of belonging to it. Yet, it should be noted that the unreported materials also indicate a diverse cultural exposure among the London-based informants.

Another limitation of this research is also found in almost all studies of technology. The environment of internet technology is rapidly changing. Whilst this study is situated in 2008 and 2009, several innovative trends of internet use have emerged since then. These trends may have significant impacts on the ways internet use is articulated and experienced among migrants. This research is rooted in a time when the concept of web 2.0 arrived. Since then, new uses have added to our understanding

of the idea of web 2.0 and complicated the imageries of what it means to its users.

Firstly, mobile phone with internet connectivity was not common during the study is now widespread among professionals working in cities. Even among informants who used smartphones a few years' ago, a mobile phone with internet capacity back then usually meant sending and receiving emails via phones. Nowadays, wider use of internet tools becomes popular on mobile phones, allowing for freer and more mobile use of a variety of internet tools. The geography of internet use prior to the popularity of smartphones is a spatial experience of individualism – sitting alone in front of a fixed computer. Internet use now is more likely to be a travelling, mobile experience of the city in an open space.

This popularity of mobile phones with internet capacity has great impacts on migrants' life experiences. In Chapter 7, I discussed how migrants' gatherings become more mobile by using the internet to disseminate event information. The recent example of Egypt's protest in 2011 seems similarly to demonstrate the power of internet use in shaping participants' mobility pattern in a public event. Hence the sociality of groups like these may be shaped significantly by the popularity of smartphones. For example, co-ethnic events organised using internet tools can be even more efficient if members use mobile phones to receive and produce information rather than having to wait and find a computer. This requires future research to investigate the new trends in internet technology.

Not only does the technology itself - the materiality of technology - evolve, the context where technology is grounded is also changing, which means new social

encounters, political practices or power struggles have been experienced by Chinese internet users since the study. The pattern of China's control over the internet has transformed throughout time. Prior to 2007, the PRC's main measure of monitoring the internet media was through censorship. Words containing political implications disallowed by the authority were removed. Articles containing such words might also be blocked by PRC's internet police. During the research, the informants rarely complained about their experiences with this online censorship. This could be because the informants are primarily based in Britain and are free from such close control of the information they receive and produce online.

However, the mode of internet censorship has gradually expanded to include more diverse measures of control since the end of the research. Major Western internet service providers, from the search engine Google, micro blogging site Twitter, online video sharing site YouTube to social networking website Facebook, withdrew or are now blocked from their China-based users. These web spaces were available or only unavailable sporadically at the time the research began. YouTube has been blocked entirely since August 2009 following its broadcast of a protest in Northwestern China. The PRC then released a document condemning Facebook, Twitter and YouTube as the broadcasting tools of its Western enemies and has blocked these three websites since. The search engine company, Google, chose to withdraw from Chinese market after the failure of the negotiation with the PRC regarding lifting its censorship on Google's contents. In addition, new modes of intervening in internet communication have been reported. In July 2011, Yahoo News reported that China's sovereign fund seeks to buy significant amount of shares in Facebook with 1.2 billion US dollars. With its new found buying power, the ways the PRC state manages internet

technology in the global age may continue to evolve and diversify.

It is a vital question for studies of diasporic internet use to examine what impacts this may have on transnational Chinese subjectivity. Has it impeded the transnational formation of digital modernity as Western-based diasporas and the China-based individuals use different internet tools and produce distinctive online cultures? Is China becoming excluded from the supposedly globalised space of the internet? If so, what is the effect it brings to its building of diaspora relations? These are critical questions for future research to answer.

The communication strategy of both Xiyu and CFUK is also changing. During the fieldwork between 2008 and 2009, both associations establish their own official websites along with the use of a range of free online platforms, including Facebook and Googlegroup. The official websites which possess less interactive functions have been gradually discarded. Xiyu now announces on their official website that the best way to stay updated about Xiyu is through Facebook. CFUK also discarded their website and, in addition to Facebook that mainly targets university students, expanded into social networking sites for working professionals, LinkedIn.

The London Alumni Council, an association that targets alumni from British universities not only in London but in major cities in China, still remains active on Facebook. Yet, its main body of members, although globally mobile and constantly in travel, are based in China. As a response to the recent blocked access to Facebook in China, its information dissemination, member interactions and sharing of data regarding their offline events have largely migrated to China's main social

networking sites that are Chinese capital and legal, Renren Web and Kaixin Web.

These transformations in the technological environment in which ethnic network sociality is embedded require examination. They serve both as a result of and a cause contributing to transnational social bonding. Why did they evolve and what are the implications of these changes in media strategy in a transnational setting?

In the meantime, the transnational process experienced by Chinese migrants in London are being transformed. The aftermath of the financial crisis and a regime shift in the UK means strengthened protectionism for Britain's labour market. Tighter measures of border management and immigration regulation continue to be adopted. Skilled migrants were once an exception to the citizenship-based discourse of rights as governments tended to grant them citizen-like benefits and greater mobility in exchange for their skills. They are now, however, faced with even more tightened population control. Most of the professionals included in this research came under the immigration category of Tier 1 while a smaller number of them hold a Tier 2 work permit or British citizenship. This means the majority of them may soon need to leave after the government's announcement of the recent closing down of most Tier 1 channels of immigration.

This has significant implications to the formation of transnationality. In the case of Chinese professionals working in Britain, how does this affect their migratory plans which they view as flexibly travelling between two or more destinations where they can best accumulate cultural, economic and social capital? Will there be another wave of motivated skilled migrants flowing back to its country of origin following the last

major wave of outflow during the financial crisis years. Will the PRC state strengthen its management and contact with its overseas skilled population at a time this population has stronger motive to connect with it? We have seen various modes of digitally-enabled measures adopted by the PRC government to attract its overseas talent. In addition to the online registration system reported in Chapter 5, it is reported that several city-level governments in China have started their own online recruiting sites to utilise video-conferencing and other tools to motivate overseas talent to return. While informants in this study arrived primarily via an immigration regime largely dominated by neo-liberalism, for future research, it is worth exploring how migrant professionals' environment of internet use is shaped when neoliberal logics have to compromise for rising protectionism in the post-recession era.

## Appendices

### A.1. Background information on 53 key informants:

Name	Age	Gender	Employment	Note
<b>Binkung</b>	33	Female	Binkung owns a language training school in London	From Shenzhen
<b>Chris</b>	27	Male	Chris runs an Anglo-Chinese business consultancy firm	From Shenzhen
<b>Chun</b>	27	Male	Analyst	
<b>Chuan</b>	25	Male	Former accountant	
<b>Dee</b>	28	Female	Works at HSBC	Founder of FCUK
<b>Feiyu</b>	30	Male	Accountant	From Beijing
<b>Gao Feng</b>	33	Male	Computer engineer	Gao is married and has a 7-year-old daughter. He is from Guangzhou.
<b>Gehung</b>	22	Female	Human resource	
<b>Gia</b>	25	Female	Engineer	From Guangzhou
<b>Grace</b>	24	Female	Investment banking	
<b>Hanson</b>	25	Male	Accountant turned entrepreneur	From Beijing

<b>Harry</b>	24	Male	Doctor in Training	Harry migrated to Malaysia and Singapore with his parents before coming to Britain.
<b>Hui</b>	29	Male	Accountant	
<b>Jin</b>	26	Female	Engineer consultant	From Harbin
<b>Jun</b>	22	Female	Formerly working in a fashion retailer	From Guangdong
<b>Jai</b>	27	Female	Analyst in investment banking	
<b>Jake</b>	36	Male	IT industry	Married
<b>James</b>	30	Male	Business consultant	
<b>Jerry</b>	28	Male	Business consultant	
<b>Jie</b>	27	Female	Investment banking	Founding member of Xiyu
<b>Jinxi</b>	31	Male	Financial analyst	Jinxi returned to China in 2010.
<b>John</b>	24	Male	Intern at a law firm	From Hebei
<b>Julie</b>	24	Female	IT Consultant	From Guangdong
<b>Karl</b>	27	Male	Investment banking	Founder of Xiyu
<b>Kuan</b>	31	Male	Investment banking	From Beijing

<b>Lance</b>	28	Male	Accountancy consulting firm	Lance co-founded a company with Ted.
<b>Lee</b>	24	Male	Business development	Lee arrived first as a worker in a Chinese shop run by his relatives. He is from Fujian.
<b>Lena</b>	25	Female	Project manager at a China-funded association in Britain	
<b>Leon</b>	26	Male	Venture capital	
<b>Li</b>	27	Female	Doctor in training	Li migrated to Britain in her teens with both her parents.
<b>Lily</b>	23	Female	Project manager	From Shenzhen
<b>Lijun</b>	36	Male	Retail	Lijun is married with children. He is from Zhejiang.
<b>Ling</b>	30	Female	Financial service	
<b>Lu Ming</b>	29	Male	Technician	
<b>Luo</b>	27	Male	Analyst in investment banking	
<b>Meng</b>	33	Male	Consultant	

<b>Mengren</b>	25	Male	Engineer consultant at a Business consulting firm	From Guangzhou
<b>Mo</b>	28	Female	IT industry	
<b>Shang</b>	23	Male	Research and development in an IT firm	
<b>Sergei</b>	29	Male	Accountant	
<b>Sindy</b>	22	Female	Journalism/Media	From Shanghai
<b>Steve</b>	26	Male	Software engineer	Steve migrated to New Zealand with his parents before coming to Britain.
<b>Ted</b>	26	Male	Accountant turned entrepreneur	From Qingdao
<b>Tom</b>	26	Male	Accountant	
<b>Xia</b>	26	Male	Investment banking	From Shandong
<b>Xiang</b>	34	Male	Import trading firm	From Shanghai
<b>Xue</b>	24	Female	Investment banking	From Shanghai
<b>Yan</b>	24	Male	Formerly in retail. Yan then started his own company to import goods manufactured in China.	
<b>Yang Jia</b>	35	Female	Finance	

<b>Yao</b>	25	Female	Head hunting firm	Yao also works as a consultant for Ted's start-up accountancy consulting firm.
<b>Yi</b>	27	Female	Dentist	
<b>Yuan</b>	29	Female	Human resource	
<b>Ziyu</b>	30	Female	Investment banking	From Zhejiang

## **A.2. Interview Protocol**

### **A.2.1. Introduction**

1. Thank you for participating in the study on ... (explaining the project)
2. Confidentiality is guaranteed

### **A.2.2. Sequence of Questions**

#### *Section 1 Family and kinship system*

1. Which of the following Internet applications have you used to contact your family or kin?
  - A) Diasporic web sites
  - B) Social networking sites
  - C) IMs
  - D) Video sharing spaces
  - E) Blog/photoblog

(If more than one application is selected, the following questions will be repeatedly used to explore each application separately.)

2. How often do you use this specific Internet application to contact your family and kin?
3. How is this Internet application useful in contacting family and kin, compared with other methods of communication and compared with other Internet applications?
4. Where do you use it and where do your family and/or kin use it?
5. What have changed about your relationships with your family and kin since the use of this Internet application to maintain contact with them? Can you make examples?
  - Nature of relationships
  - Quality of relationships (frequency, intensity, other)
  - Changing racial and ethnic identity or the identity of being diasporic due to the changing relationships with family and kin

- Other changes

6. Other things you would like to add to the topic?

**Section 2** *Diasporic community building*

1. Which of the following Internet applications have you used to maintain relationships with other diasporic Chinese or obtain information about organizations for Chinese diasporic people?

- A) Diasporic web sites
- B) Social networking sites
- C) IMs
- D) Video sharing spaces
- E) Blog/photoblog

(If more than one application is selected, the following questions will be repeatedly used to explore each application separately.)

2. How often do you use this specific Internet application to maintain relationships with other Chinese or obtain information about organizations for Chinese people?

3. How is this specific Internet application useful in maintaining relationships with other Chinese or obtain information about organizations for Chinese, compared with other methods of communication (face-to-face, telephone, mobile phones, and so on) and compared with other Internet applications?

4. How is this specific Internet application used to contact relationships with other Chinese or obtain information about organizations for Chinese people? What sorts of interactions between you and other diasporic people or organizations take place on the Internet and what kinds of the interactions off the Internet?

5. What are the impacts of using this specific Internet application on your relationships with other Chinese people or your participation in Chinese organizations? Can you make examples and tell me more about the friendship or other type of social contacts between you and the people you've used this Internet application to contact before and after use of this Internet application?

- Nature of the social ties (relatives, friends, other)
- Initiation of the social ties (on the Internet: which Web site, blog, etc., off the Internet, other)
- Intensity of the social ties (acquaintances, friends, intimate friends, other)
- Changing racial and ethnic identity or the identity of being diasporic due to the changing social ties with other diasporic Chinese
- Other changes

6. Other things you would like to add to the topic?

### *Section 3 Body images and bodily practices*

1. Which of the following Internet applications have you used to watch the images and/or discussions of bodies, styles, and other bodily practices?
  - A) Diasporic web sites
  - B) Social networking sites
  - C) IMs
  - D) Video sharing spaces
  - E) Blog/photoblog

(If more than one application is selected, the following questions will be repeatedly used to explore each application separately.)

2. How often do you use this specific Internet application to watch the images and/or participate in discussions of bodies, styles, and other bodily practices?
3. How is this specific Internet application useful in terms of receiving information about bodies, compared with other methods of information transmission (televisions, print technologies, other) and compared with other types of Internet media?
4. Who are other participants and information providers on these online spaces?
  - Place (people who are also diasporic, people in mainland China, Hong Kong, Singapore, or Taiwan, people in other part of the world)
  - Ethnicity
  - Class
  - Gender
  - Other description of participants in these online spaces
5. What are the impacts of use of this particular Internet application to receive information about bodies?
  - Nature of relationships with other participants in these online spaces
  - Changes of the ways in which your own body is perceived
  - Changes of your own bodily practices (clothing styles, tattoos, piercing, and so on)
  - Changes of perceived relations between bodies and racial or ethnic identity and the identity of being diasporic
6. Other things you would like to add to this topic

### *Section 4 Experiences of places and territories*

1. Which of the following Internet applications have you used to produce experiences of places and territories?
  - A) Diasporic web sites

- B) Social networking sites
- C) IMs
- D) Video sharing spaces
- E) Blog/photoblog

(If more than one application is selected, the following questions will be repeatedly used to explore each application separately.)

2. How often do you use this specific Internet application to produce experiences of places?
3. How is this particular Internet application useful in producing experiences of places, compared with other media (televisions, films, other) and compared with other Internet applications?
4. What kinds of experiences of places and territories are produced using this particular Internet application?
  - Virtual experiences (experiences of places within networked spaces), offline experiences of place that are produced by applying sources on the Internet to transform physical spaces (downloading sounds, images, and other sources), or mixed experiences of physical and digital places (GPS, other )
  - Reproduced experiences of places of homeland, places of London, other places in Britain, other places in other parts of the world
  - Reproduced experiences of private space, reproduced experiences of public space, other
5. What are the impacts of using this particular Internet application on your experiences of places?
  - Intensity of emotional attachment to a specific place (places of homeland, places in London, places in other parts of the world)
  - Changing identity of being diasporic due to changing relations to places of the country of origin, places of the receiving country, and places in other parts of the world
  - Other changes
6. Other things you would like to add to this topic

#### *Section 5 Encounters with state power*

1. Which of the following Internet applications have you used to contact state apparatuses or have they used to contact you?
  - State apparatus of the country of origin
  - State apparatus of the receiving country

- State apparatus of other countries

(If more than one application is selected, the following questions will be repeatedly used to explore each application separately.)

2. How often do these contacts using this particular Internet application happen?
3. How is this particular Internet application useful to contact state apparatus(es), compared with other methods of communication (face-to-face through official government organizations, written letters, telephone, mobile phones, other) and compared with other types of Internet applications?
4. What are the contents of the communication with state apparatus using the particular Internet application?
  - Information you offer (information about your human capital, personal lives, tax, immigration status, other)
  - Information they offer (information about recruitment of a position in government, tax, financial aids for overseas citizens, border control, other)
  - Purposes of communication
  - Intensity of contacts (frequency, quality, other)
  - Other description of the communication
5. What are the impacts of communicating with a government using this particular Internet application?
  - Changes of relations with the state of the country of origin
  - Changes of relations with the state of the receiving country
  - Changing national identity or the identity of being diasporic resulted from changing relations with a state
  - Other changes
6. Other things you would like to add to this topic

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