

Returning to the *Kampung Halaman*: Limitations of Cosmopolitan Transnational Aspirations Among Hakka Chinese Indonesians Overseas

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Migrants originating from Singkawang, West Kalimantan, Indonesia, experience limitations in their ability to engage in host societies overseas despite their hopes and fantasies of becoming cosmopolitan transnational citizens. Marginality, stemming from the lower status associated with being a migrant, as well as forms of parochialism which hinder the ability to adopt a flexible attitude to cultural difference combine and lead to a significant reimagining of those original cosmopolitan fantasies. Essentializing characterizations of “us” versus “them” reveal some of the difficulties of being received in other societies and come to constitute a recuperative discourse in which migrants can preserve a sense of self – as Hakka Chinese Indonesians – when the value of that identity is called into question. In this context, migrants experience practical limitations in translating cosmopolitan fantasies into lived realities. As a response, a romantic nostalgia for the home is constructed, which in turn provides the imaginative resources used for planning a return to the *kampung halaman* (Indonesian: home/home town).

Keywords: Chinese Indonesians; Cosmopolitanism; Home; Marginality; Migration

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Trotz ihrer Hoffnungen und Wunschvorstellungen, transnationale WeltbürgerInnen zu werden, stoßen MigrantInnen aus Singkawang, West Kalimantan, Indonesien, an die Grenzen ihrer Fähigkeiten, beim Versuch an Aufnahmegesellschaften im Ausland teilzunehmen. Marginalität, die auf dem niedrigen Status beruht, der oft mit MigrantInnen assoziiert wird, wird mit Formen von Provinzialismus kombiniert, die das Einnehmen einer flexiblen Einstellung zu kulturellen Unterschieden verhindern und führt zu einer bedeutenden Neuorientierung der ursprünglichen Wunschvorstellungen. Essentialistische Darstellungen von „uns“ gegenüber „den anderen“ offenbaren manche der Schwierigkeiten, in anderen Gesellschaften aufgenommen zu werden, und bezeichnen einen Diskurs, in dem MigrantInnen das eigene „Ich“ bewahren können – als IndonesierInnen Hakka-chinesischer Abstammung –, wenn der Wert dieser Identität in Frage gestellt wird. In diesem Kontext erfahren MigrantInnen praktische Grenzen der Möglichkeiten, ihre kosmopolitischen Wunschvorstellungen in eine gelebte Realität umzusetzen. Daraufhin konstruieren sie eine romantische Sehnsucht nach der Heimat, die wiederum das Vorstellungsvermögen für die Planung der Heimkehr zum *kampung halaman* (Indonesisch: Heimat/Heimatort) unterstützt.

Schlagworte: Heimat; IndonesierInnen chinesischer Herkunft; Kosmopolitismus; Marginalität; Migration

INTRODUCTION

Hakka Chinese Indonesians from Singkawang, West Kalimantan, Indonesia, move abroad on a large scale for working, studying, and marrying. Many migrants travel with the ambition of eventually attaining a kind of cosmopolitan transnational citizenship exemplified by members of a different class of elite Chinese business people, who act as imaginative role models for young people. These ambitions, despite being vague and seldom supported by financial, educational, social, or logistical backing, nevertheless constitute a powerful motivation for migration. Evidence from long-term, multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork reveals that when these migrants go overseas (to Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, Malaysia, or South Korea, to name a few destinations), they are treated as various kinds of *Others*: as Hakka, as Indonesians, as Southeast Asians, as poor, as rural, or simply as migrants.¹ These labels carry lower status vis-à-vis other groups in the host societies and this negative evaluation occurs despite the fact that these migrants ostensibly share some aspects of the same ethnicity (Chinese) as sizeable parts of these overseas populations. Ambivalent reception abroad impacts migrants' senses of self and compounds other existing limitations they face engaging within the new societies. Initially surprised at feeling alienated, migrants' hopes of actualizing their aspirations of becoming adaptable transnational citizens become significantly undermined.

As a response to the less than favorable reception overseas, migrants begin to construct essentialized characterizations of host populations, which rely heavily on stereotypes (i.e. Singaporeans are arrogant, mainland Chinese are rude, Japanese are authoritarian). Such characterizations are inherently comparative, revealing how the migrants have come to imagine themselves in relation to others. Aspects of both migrants' ambivalent status overseas and their own essentialized portrayals of locals index, among other things, socio-economic differences and dialect group antagonism. In the end, migrants' social marginalization leads to a particular kind of self-portrayal emphasizing the uniqueness, goodness, and integrity of Hakka Chinese Indonesian culture from Singkawang. This paper considers the impact of these "us"-versus-"them" constructs on the self-perception of Singkawang Chinese, and how this self-perception contributes to the schism between hopes and fantasies for transnational engagement, on the one hand, and the vagaries and realities of living overseas, on the other.

1 This study is based on long-term, multi-sited, ethnographic fieldwork conducted primarily in Singkawang, Indonesia, with shorter research trips to Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Taiwan, between 2010 and 2013. The findings are based on in-depth interviews with 60 migrants, combined with a broader range of ethnographic data gathered through informal conversations with friends and family members of migrants as well as participant observation in the field.

SINGKAWANG

Singkawang is a small city in West Kalimantan, which is unique in Indonesia as the only city with a majority Chinese Indonesian² population.³ Hakka, a Chinese dialect, is the main language of the market place and the former mayor, Hassan Karman, was the first ethnically Chinese mayor elected in Indonesia. The Chinese community traces its origins back to multiple groups of overseas Chinese migrants (coolie laborers and pioneers), who came to Borneo from the southeastern coastal provinces of China to mine for gold beginning in the 1740s (Heidhues, 2003; Yuan, 2000). The first generation of these laborers married local indigenous women who adopted their husbands' language, patrilineal and patrilocal family structure, and religious practices, which created subsequent generations that came to constitute the local Chinese community (Heidhues, 2003). Traders, merchants, and entrepreneurs arrived in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries further diversifying the community socially, economically, and linguistically (Heidhues, 2003). Until today, the Chinese population consists primarily of working class and lower middle class petty merchants, farmers, and primary producers, a profile that contributes to both migration practices and cosmopolitan imaginings.

Located three hours by road from the busier provincial capital, Singkawang remains peripheral; lacking a functioning port, airport, or a university it has limited economic prospects. Many houses are not connected to water and electricity out-

2 My usage of the term 'Chinese Indonesians' requires clarification, as there are considerable variations not only in scholarly approaches to ethnicity, but also in the criteria by which people identify themselves and are identified as Chinese Indonesians by others in different areas of Indonesia. In Singkawang, those people whom I shall refer to as Chinese typically and regularly identify their ethnicity or 'tribal-national affiliation' (Indonesian: *etnis, suku-bangsa*) as Chinese (*Tionghoa, Cina*); they trace their lineage and genealogical descent (*keturunan*), whether by blood or by marriage, to immigrants originally from China; they observe customs and kinship patterns (*adat*) that they trace to these immigrants; and they predominantly speak Hakka (*bahasa Khek*) as their first language. The fact that Chinese Indonesians in Singkawang identify their ethnicity, customs, kinship patterns, and language as not simply "Indonesian" does not in itself differentiate them from other Indonesians as a majority of Indonesians speak a first language other than the national language and observe ethnic customs that are more specifically identified with a sub-ethnic group (e.g. Malay, Dayak, Madura, Sunda, Batak). In Indonesia and particularly in the academic literature about Chinese Indonesians, there has been a tendency to think and talk in terms of two groups, *peranakan* versus *tokok*, the former being more assimilated and hybridized with Indonesian regional languages and cultures and the latter maintaining Chinese language and cultural traditions to a greater extent. I have decided not to use these terms because they are inaccurate in the case of Singkawang where individuals display characteristics of both processes of long-term, multi-generational assimilation and acculturation into Indonesian society, as well as persistence and preservation of Chinese language and traditions. Degrees of assimilation, acculturation, hybridization, as well as cultural perpetuation and persistence are not accurately captured by these two identifiers; to use such terms reifies groups and suggests internal homogeneity, where in fact great individual variety exists. It is now increasingly possible, since *Reformasi*, for individuals as well as communities, to reorient themselves towards China, or Chinese cultural identifications, via processes that greatly complicate the idea and reality of *peranakan* and *tokok* communities. An important example is the recent trend for youth from *peranakan* families in Java to study Mandarin after decades of prohibition and despite the fact that perhaps multiple generations in their family had long since stopped using Mandarin and other Chinese dialects.

3 While the official census does not aggregate the population by ethnicity, estimates based on religious affiliation suggest that the Chinese population is approximately 42 percent of roughly 200,000. The former mayor, Hassan Karman, in an interview with the author, claims the percentage is over 62 percent and media reports sometimes claim it is as high as 72 percent.

ages; water shortages are a common, almost daily occurrence. Singkawang is a city of shophouses where people from the surrounding rural areas can buy clothing, furniture, household goods, food, and building materials. However, with little production-based economy, and profits from agricultural and forest products benefiting only a small portion of the population (particularly those who have moved to Jakarta), many people are compelled to go overseas for employment and higher education. There is also a perception on the part of the Chinese community in Singkawang (which is often not shared by members of other ethnic groups) that the local economy is not “busy enough” (Indonesian: *tidak cukup ramai/kurang ramai*) to be able to quickly save money to start one’s own business.

MIGRANTS FROM SINGKAWANG

Several different kinds of migrations collectively comprise the Chinese mobility complex of Singkawang. There are international students studying primarily in Malaysia, Taiwan, Singapore, China, Australia, England, and the United States. There are low-wage laborers in Taiwan, Japan, Korea, and Hong Kong, and there are cross-border brides in Hong Kong and Taiwan (and to a much lesser extent Malaysia). There is also considerable temporary and permanent migration to Jakarta and other parts of Java. These three groups of international migrants – students, workers, and brides – (which are not discrete, but frequently overlapping), form the basis of this research. However, there are other individuals involved in international trade, multinational temple networks, and tourism, whose perceptions of “us” and “them” both at home and away also influence the imaginaries of aspiring migrants.⁴

In Singkawang, there is widespread desire to be wealthy and successful through one’s own business pursuits. To be able to chart a path through the multiple challenges that constitute Indonesia’s struggling economic reality is a commendable achievement, and a frequently recurring subject of city dwellers’ ‘talk’. The dream of prosperity is by no means limited to Hakka Chinese from Singkawang. In a study of migrant workers in Batam, Johan Lindquist (2009) observes that achieving middle-class status, defined by material wealth and consumerism, has become a broad, nation-wide goal, transcending ethnic groups. However, for Singkawang Chinese, one of the ideal routes of attaining this middle-class goal is to become one’s own boss, as opposed to applying for a government sector job, developing a professional career, or working as a wage earner for someone else.⁵

4 This paper is a subset of a larger dissertation research project, which studied multiple dimensions of mobility within the Hakka Chinese Indonesian community of Singkawang, West Kalimantan, Indonesia. This paper will focus primarily on the experiences of temporary labor migrants and overseas students. While marriage migrants constitute a large subset of the research project, aspects of their experiences differ significantly from those of these other types of migrants and are best analyzed separately.

5 In Singkawang (as elsewhere in Indonesia), there are relatively few ethnically Chinese people working in the civil service. This fact reflects a long-standing discriminatory policy as well as sociological patterns that have been handed down over generations. Increasingly, Chinese are involved in local politics, but mainly as publically elected officials, rather than as civil servants. Throughout Indonesia, there are countless numbers of Chinese Indonesians working as professionals and as wage earners for others. However, in Singkawang, the goal of becoming one’s own boss is particularly common as comparison with the working goals of members of other ethnic groups.

Periodically throughout Indonesia's history, the Chinese have been restricted and excluded from professional and government sector jobs, favored and limited to business, managerial and middlemen type roles, particularly under the Dutch colonial regime and then during the post-independence, nationalist governments, including Suharto's New Order (Fasseur, 1994; Reid & Alilunas-Rodgers, 2001; Suryadinata, 2004). Colonial, nationalist, and Suharto era politics and policies have left a powerful legacy (Fasseur, 1994), which continues to play out in the present through a long-standing tendency among ethnic Chinese to mistrust government institutions. This mistrust combines with ideas, passed down over generations, about the inherent values of business ownership, and being able to become one's own boss.

Business ownership, as an ideal, is evident in people's aspirations, in the ways they talk about famous Indonesian businessmen, particularly Liem Sioe Liong, and Phang Jun Phen.⁶ These tycoons are people who have been able to translate their financial success into cosmopolitan lifestyles that have all the material and social forms of prestige entailed and required by such status, including multiple passports,⁷ a transnational business network, and children studying overseas. At the local and national level, people who have become financially independent based on their own business pursuits are looked up to; they are considered heroes and morally upright community leaders (Indonesian: *tokoh*). They are appreciated for their success, materialized in the form of houses, cars, and businesses, and praised for their burgeoning symbols of cosmopolitanism, such as trips abroad, knowledge of foreign languages, and philanthropic activities.

People like to know these individuals, cultivate connections with them, and emulate their behavior, in the hopes of also becoming successful. The desire to become one's own boss is further reinforced in stories, songs, films, and reflected in widely known idiomatic expressions including "*se se sen li cang co kong*" (Hakka: "even the smallest business is better than working for somebody else"). This aspiration is perpetuated by the plans, hopes, behaviors, and choices of relatives, friends, and neighbors in Singkawang, to the extent that nearly all people pursue the same goal of business ownership. This is a socio-cultural pattern that is well documented (Carney & Dieleman, 2008; McVey, 1992; Weidenbaum, 1996) and it is also the result of businesses being owned and operated by families and passed down to children and grandchildren. Small trade shophouse-type businesses are a common inheritance, including the physical space, business partners, and networks, and the skills and experience needed to run a business.

6 Liem Sioe Liong (Indonesian name: Sudono Salim) was a businessman and capitalist. Before his death this year, he was one of the richest Chinese Indonesians and one of the richest Southeast Asians in the world. He started life in a small town in Fujian province in China, the son of a farmer and later he immigrated to Indonesia and became involved in the clove trade. He eventually formed the Salim Group, one of the largest holding companies in Indonesia. Similarly, Phang Jun Phen (Indonesian name: Prajogo Pangestu) is a successful Chinese Indonesian businessman. He was a timber tycoon, who owned the Barito Pacific group, which sold timber from Kalimantan during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. He is a Hakka Chinese Indonesian from a poor family in Bengkayang, West Kalimantan.

7 Indonesia does not permit citizens to hold more than one passport, which limits people's possibilities of becoming transnational actors. However, attaining permanent residency overseas, while maintaining an Indonesian passport, is highly sought-after.

However, Singkawang's shophouse, trade-based economy is saturated and people find it increasingly difficult to actualize their aspirations to be successful local business people. The town faces economic involution, not involution indicative of economic growth, but rather suggesting stagnation of the economy. More and more similar types of businesses start, but without the same rate of consumer growth, fueling competition, which forces the bottom line down and diminishes profits. New shops often close shortly after opening due to economic unviability. Population growth in the 1970s and 1980s also put pressure on families, as family businesses could no longer support all members of the subsequent generations. The town's economic saturation and stagnation is widely and frequently discussed, to the extent that young people readily articulate their confusion (Indonesian: *pusing/bingung*; Hakka: *an fun/an hin*) about what sorts of businesses might be viable, even if they had start-up capital to invest. It is in this context that going overseas has emerged as a major alternative to staying in Singkawang and foreign countries are idealized as places of plenty, bountiful in terms of wages, opportunities, and connections.

Going overseas has several different motivations, mostly related to the ultimate goal of becoming one's own boss either locally, nationally, or transnationally, and each of these goals comes with its own set of imaginations of cosmopolitan transnational citizenship and involves taking a different route. First, people work overseas in order to save money so they can return and start a business (despite the prevailing confusion about what businesses might be viable.) Second, people study abroad (while also working part-time) hoping to enter into a different labor market, or be able to enter into a more professional work force overseas. Such individuals usually choose to study accounting, economics, finance, commerce, and business management, as well as English and Mandarin, which are courses of study that they imagine can be translated into careers in international centers of business and finance like Hong Kong, Singapore, and New York. Third, people go overseas to make connections, which they hope will lead to opportunities later. Thus, young people actively try to be taken under the guidance of an uncle, a wealthier or more successful friend, relative or established boss knowing that, in the short term, this will provide an income and work experience, and, more importantly, in the long term, could provide the capital and connections needed to become one's own boss in the same or an adjacent industry, or in a transnational part of an existing business.

It is primarily individuals from families of the property-owning class (who can afford to attend foreign universities) who explicitly entertain the idea of translating their (often newly acquired) prosperity into forms of cosmopolitan transnational citizenship. However, it would be wrong to assume that it is only members of that class who do so. Labor migrants also fantasize about how their work experiences overseas may lead to richer, more glamorous, worldly, and prosperous lives. This resembles what Appadurai theorizes as 'cosmopolitanism from below', or "the urge to expand one's current horizons of self and cultural identity and a wish to connect with a wider world ... a variety of cosmopolitanism that begins close to home and builds on the practices of the local, the everyday and the familiar" (Appadurai, 2011).

COSMOPOLITAN DREAMS

Susanto lives with his sister in a two-story shophouse. By day, they work in the family bakery downstairs, and by night, they sleep together in a single bedroom upstairs. The bakery is small, but busy and well located in the center of the city and although Susanto's parents only received an elementary school education, they have managed to send both him and his sister to university in Malaysia.

The first time I met Susanto, he was 17 years old and about to graduate from high school. I asked him what he wanted to do after graduation and whether he would take over the family business. He replied quickly and confidently, "I plan to be an international businessman. I will not continue to run the bakery. I want my own business, with branches in many countries around the world. I want to live in a mansion and drive a Mercedes", he announced. "What will this business be", I asked him. "Do you have any ideas yet?" "No, not yet", he replied. "I have to go to business school first."

It is now two years later and Susanto is studying business management overseas. He speaks fluent English, Mandarin, Indonesian, and Hakka and aspires to learn even more languages. He is of a small minority of young people from families slightly wealthier than the average. However, his tuition and expenses abroad place a significant financial strain on the family, and Susanto's living arrangement in Malaysia is substantially less luxurious than he originally imagined. Whereas he thought that he would be able to rent a single detached two-story house in the city and live with a group of friends who would each drive their own car to school, the reality is significantly different. When I met him in Kuala Lumpur, he was sharing a small single room with only one bed with another male student from Indonesia in a shared apartment near the campus. He could not afford to eat in the modern food courts boasting Western foods, but instead was limited to 'economy rice' to keep to his daily budget.

The subject of Susanto's fantasy is an international businessman made in the image of an elite overseas Chinese transnational akin to the kind of subjects that Aihwa Ong and others have studied (Ley, 2010; Ong, 1999; Ong & Nonini, 1997). This is a wealthy, well-connected cosmopolitan, who is adorned with symbols that both constitute and communicate that identity: a transnational business network, multiple houses in multiple countries, multiple passports, luxury cars, Rolex watches, expensive brand-name clothing and jewelry, hobbies, and philanthropic pursuits. While it is not difficult to understand the allure of the socio-economic status of this kind of individual, particularly for poorer, or lower middle-class individuals, the fantasy does not consist merely of the material conditions of wealth alone; there are also several immaterial qualities involved in this fantasy, which have a role in people's imaginings and aspirations, things which guide, more than other factors, the trajectories of their lives and motivate new forms of mobility.

Material symbols of wealth and status are alluring and powerful because of the kinds of social and cultural capital that go along with them, and make them possible (Strassler, 2008); being able to travel, being accepted and taken seriously in contexts that are not one's home, being able to negotiate multiple levels and kinds of difference with ease, and being able to transcend that which is local. These are qualities that scholars such as Hannerz (1990) identify in theorizations of cosmopolitanism.

Hannerz (1990) portrays the cosmopolitan as a figure who is flexible, and adaptable, open to a plurality of cultures and demonstrates a willingness to engage in new and multiple cultural forms. Likewise, Appadurai explains that cosmopolitanism contains “a certain cultivated knowledge of the world beyond one’s immediate horizons ... the product of deliberate activities associated with literacy, the freedom to travel, and the luxury of expanding the boundaries of one’s own self by expanding its experiences” (Appadurai, 2011). Salzar (2010) shows how people can use knowledge of the world beyond Indonesia to cultivate cosmopolitan selves without even traveling abroad, an observation which illustrates the role of the imagination (Appadurai, 1996) in accumulating symbolic capital.

Hakka from Singkawang, despite forms of marginality in Indonesia, are nonetheless powerfully influenced by images and ideas of cosmopolitanism circulating in the media. Overseas Chinese transnationalism, of the sort exemplified by studies of Hong Kong business elites (Ley, 2010; Ong, 1997) as well as the image of ‘rising China’ have implications for Chinese communities overseas, including Singkawang, where by “imagining oneself as part of a globally significant, transnational Chinese diasporic community” (Dawis, 2009, p. 35) one can find, or at least imagine, a kind of symbolic inclusion (Ang, 2001) and/or a form of cosmopolitanism that may be lacking at home. In these images and imaginings, people also find a model for the kinds of economic and professional success, as well as lifestyles that constitute the middle-class dream life (Lindquist, 2009). Individuals actively pay attention to and position themselves in relation to these images and ideas about rising China and overseas Chinese transnationalism as part of their identification practices (Dawis, 2009). However, when people from Singkawang try to transform these imaginings into realities, when they attempt to self-make themselves into the kind of successful transnational subjects of their fantasies, a disconnect appears between what is imaginatively possible and what is practically possible given their idiosyncratic social, cultural, economic, and geographical location. What emerges from this disconnect is a complicated set of behaviors, experiences, and adaptations that account for the realities of people’s lives and not simply their imaginings.

Fantasies of becoming elite cosmopolitan transnational subjects are practically limited by an inability to develop the flexibility and willingness to engage with a plurality of cultures. Partially, this inflexibility is a response to conditions of marginality overseas and partially, it stems from inherent limitations and lack of experience. As I will show below, the lack of willingness to develop the flexibility needed to engage in new societies is best viewed as a coping strategy that helps to deal with cultural difference and allows individuals to preserve a sense of self and self-worth under conditions in which that worth is called into question by majority/minority politics. The practice of making judgments, both negative and positive, is also a way of performing one’s discernibility.

FOOD

Once overseas, and upon returning, imaginings about the allure of foreign places have started to transform into complaints, dislikes, and ambivalences. One of the main ways this is expressed is through appraisals of food. Singkawang people com-

miserate together by talking about food and the difficulty of finding food to suit their tastes overseas. They miss food from home and talk incessantly about the unique flavors and ingredients from Singkawang. A desire for food from home is an axiomatic experience among migrants internationally and has resulted in networks of restaurants, shops, and super markets catering to the tastes of specific ethnic communities (Quayson & Daswani 2013). What is striking, in this case, is the fact that people describe the food overseas not only as not delicious, but that, in fact, it cannot be eaten (Hakka: *sit ng gan*). Talk about food reveals both implicit and explicit comparisons between “us” and “them”. Whereas our food is delicious (and, therefore, superior), their food is difficult to eat (and, therefore, suspect). The difficulty to find suitable food both contributes to and can be seen as a manifestation of other kinds of barriers to engaging with and integrating in new societies.

Alang is a middle-aged mother of four children. She is energetic, independent, and loves to travel and she has been on tours to Europe, Asia, and America. She and her husband have prospered economically in Singkawang via several entrepreneurial pursuits, including a garage, land speculation, bird's nest cultivation, and stock investments. They live in the center of the city, own a large house and a car and have enough money to send their children overseas to Australia and Singapore to study. Alang prides herself on having exotic foreign things such as red wine bought in France and cheese bought in the Netherlands. However, despite owning these, she has not developed a taste for them nor does she want to. They are simply symbols of her burgeoning cosmopolitanism.

I had the opportunity to meet up with Alang in Taipei, while she was visiting a relative. We walked around for hours visiting tourist sites, shopping, and gossiping about Singkawang. When it was time to find dinner, I took her to a popular night market, where she and her relative began a lengthy process of inspecting all of the food options, sizing up each restaurant and food stall, peering into the dining rooms, scrutinizing what others were eating, and glancing at the Mandarin menu (which was mostly incomprehensible to them). In an attempt to broker the exchange, I suggested a busy medium-priced restaurant with indoor seating and a wide selection of standard Chinese fare. They agreed and judiciously ordered steamed dumplings, rice, soup, and vegetables. When the dumplings arrived, Alang's face lit up with a smile, but after she took her first bite, it looked as if she might spit it out. She chewed and swallowed but said nothing, then gobbled up her rice and picked at a few vegetables, mostly moving them around on the plate until others finished eating. Claiming not to be hungry, they got up and started to leave, with at least half the food still on the table.

Alang cut her trip in Taipei short because of the difficulty of finding food that she could eat. She struggled to communicate what she wanted to order in restaurants because of her broken Mandarin and she was visibly disturbed at how different the reality of the cuisine was compared to her expectations. Seeking recognition and verification from me, we talked constantly about how much better the food is in Singkawang than in Taiwan. Now, two years later, she is planning a trip to Canada and has asked me repeatedly whether or not she will be able to find rice once she arrives.

Lily is 42 years old, a high school graduate who worked in an insurance company before entering local politics. Now she makes fairly frequent overseas work trips to places like

Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Australia. She is a well-known, well-connected individual with significant political aspirations and she considers herself an adaptable person who can move between various circles of people.

I asked Lily to tell me about her overseas travel experiences. In response, she asked me whether I liked to eat bread dipped in olive oil. I said I did and she shook her head and grimaced in response. She told me about her recent trip to Italy and said that she absolutely cannot eat that bread dipped in olive oil and vinegar. She said it was very difficult to find food (read: rice). That was the only thing she told me about Italy as well as her other overseas travels.

Food may seem trivial, or obvious, but food preferences and attitudes communicate a lot about people's experiences overseas and are directly implicated in the processes of developing cosmopolitan sensibilities.⁸ Food is intimately connected to the affective dimensions of belonging, memory, and nostalgia (Mannur, 2007; Mintz & Du Bois, 2002; Raman, 2011), despite the fact that anthropologists are still working to pin down the precise mechanisms through which food and belonging become so intricately bound. Jon Holtzman (2006) wants to know how "real or perceived resilience in foodways speak to understandings of the present and imaginings of the future", particularly in relation to concepts of the past (p. 363). For studies of migration, this important question must be extended across transnational space in order to shed light on how food mediates migrants' senses of belonging in multiple locations. Mannur (2007), for example, explores this theme by explaining how identity politics of Indian American immigrants gets expressed through nostalgia for imagined culinary pasts that are linked to national and ethnic identities. According to her, culinary concerns, which were initially of little importance, take on greater significance in new host societies as food and food memories allow individuals to imaginatively recreate connections to their former homes and pasts. According to Saunders (2007), "eating and talking about eating are both communicative acts ... creating new understandings of the ways in which food shapes those who eat it" (p. 204). Narratives about food can be used to create a sense of community, both real and imagined, even across transnational space (Saunders, 2007). Communication and practices related to food and eating are also ways to mark distinctions between groups of people along lines of class, ethnicity, and other forms of identity. Talking about food (in the form of complaints about foods overseas and praises for foods from home) with other people from Singkawang is a form of communication that strengthens their group identity.

For Hakka from Singkawang overseas, the logistic of getting food that one likes is difficult for some migrants, because of language, cost, and taste barriers. People have a limited budget for food and face challenges when trying to order food in foreign languages (English, Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean, etc.). This generates, often repeated, disappointment, which leads to cooking at home, or only eating in the cafeterias of the factories where they work or the schools where they study, that is, generally not venturing far from these familiar locations. In this context, a discourse about the superiority of the food from home is developed and acts as something of a cipher for the

⁸ For an interesting analysis of the ways that Jewish American immigrants use eating Chinese food as both an ethnic identity marker and as a sign of cosmopolitanism, see Liu (2010).

experiences of the migrants abroad. This discourse is also common in Singkawang as people regularly perform their ability to make extremely subtle distinctions between foods, thereby demonstrating their discerning tastes.

Ubiquitous complaints about foods overseas also reveal people's inadaptable palate, and their inability to develop the flexibility needed to consume new things, a major part of becoming cosmopolitan and transnational. Images of elite businessmen talking on cellular phones, dining on gourmet food in executive airport lounges en route from one country to another underline the following personal traits: Mobile, flexible, confident, they are at home anywhere in the world. Not liking new foods, and not being able or willing to cultivate a taste for new foods, constitutes one of the front lines where people must come to terms with the practical limits of their ability (and, subsequently, their desire) to actualize their transnational fantasies. Surprisingly, these issues surrounding food play a major role in influencing the decision to return to Singkawang, the *kampung halaman*, and the ability to find food that one likes, or to develop a taste for the food away from home becomes a marker of bourgeoning cosmopolitanism. For those who can cultivate flexible tastes, this ability becomes a hallmark of their success in living and integrating into the host society in multi-dimensional ways; these more adaptable migrants become important culture brokers for others who have just arrived. For those who stay overseas for long periods of time but remain limited in their ability to develop a palate for local food, there are now small companies, as well as networks of friends and relatively on-hand ready-to-mail food from Singkawang to other places in Indonesia and overseas.⁹

MARGINALITY OVERSEAS

Temporary overseas labor migration is currently the largest form of migration from Singkawang and has some unique characteristics. Most Hakka migrants do not join official government-administered TKI/TKW (Tenaga Kerja Indonesia/Tenaga Kerja Wanita – Indonesian workforce/female Indonesian workforce) programs, which send workers overseas via legally sanctioned schemes involving agents, fees, visas, training programs, wage deduction, and remittance plans. Instead, they travel independently of government involvement, using packaged tours sold by Hakka agents in Singkawang and Jakarta, which are specifically designed as routes for labor migrants to enter foreign countries with the intention of forfeiting the return ticket and staying on to work illegally (Indonesian: *gelap* (dark) or *tidak resmi* (not official); Hakka: *si theu si het* (expired visa)). These migrants work in low-level labor market jobs in the service sector, construction, and factory production. Unlike Indonesia's largely female official overseas workforce, Chinese from Singkawang almost never work as domestic cleaners and nannies. Instead they use networks of friends, rela-

9 In Hong Kong and Taiwan, there are special Indonesian food stores, some of which have buffet-style dining areas. Some of these stores are run by people from Singkawang, or West Kalimantan, and carry or make the Singkawang foods, which migrants overseas most crave, including wheat noodles with pork (Hakka: *jam mian*), fried rice noodles (Indonesian: *kwe tiau goreng*; Hakka: *chau pan*), as well as snacks such as durian candy (Indonesian: *durian dodol*). Fermented fish paste, fish sauce, different kinds of curries and sambals as well as pork meat and pork fat are more likely to be sent directly to individuals by relatives, or friends using special remittance parcel services that link Singkawang with popular destinations overseas.

tives, and fellow city folk already in those host countries to help them find jobs, low-cost living arrangements, food, recreation, and remittance agents. Many people leave Singkawang empty-handed¹⁰ (Indonesian: *tangan kosong*; Hakka: *khung siu*) and are only 'brave enough' (Indonesian: *berani*) to return once they have become successful (Indonesian: *sudah sukses*), meaning once enough capital has been saved to invest in a small business in Singkawang or Jakarta.

Living overseas as illegal migrant workers means having a *pariah* status, which limits people's daily engagements and mobility. People are afraid of being discovered by the police, or being asked to show identity cards, or being at the mercy of employers who sometimes withhold their wages or passports, or being required to communicate in a foreign language. The experience of living under these conditions and migrants' economic marginality powerfully shape the daily activities that are considered possible and not possible. Their economic and social limitations (a subject which has been well investigated in the literature on migrants and migration),¹¹ however, are not the only source of disappointment. There is also the problem of not having one's ethnic and national identity recognized or recognized accurately¹² in the new society. This was a recurring theme among the migrants that participated in this study.

Ajung is the father of four children and has a computer servicing business in Singkawang. He lives in a small house on the outskirts of the city, with his wife, children, and his father-in-law. He is an avid gardener and likes to go fishing regularly. At the age of 18, he went to work illegally in Korea. This was directly after the anti-Chinese riots in Indonesia, in May 1998. He travelled to Korea with a tour group from China and worked in different factories for two years, before moving to Taiwan and working illegally for another three years. He said it was easy to get a job and easy to make money there but Korea was very cold, language was always a barrier, and he never went out, even when he was invited. He only thought about saving money and he did not want to be caught by the police. Ajung's journey was directly linked to the economic and political situation in Indonesia at the time of Reformasi¹³ and his desire to save money to return to Indonesia to start his own business. During our interview, he succinctly articulated a common frustration that Hakka migrants experience: "In Indonesia, there are problems from Islam and from Malays. They

10 Migrants often borrow money from family members in order to pay for their initial travel costs to go overseas. Once overseas, they must work full-time, sometimes more than one job, in order to save money, not only to remit home and bring home at the end of their sojourn, but also in order to pay for their travel home and the penalties they may incur if they are caught crossing the border as illegal workers. For those who find it difficult to find employment quickly, they often undergo long periods of poverty overseas, in which they rely on the charity of friends, relatives, city folk, or church groups to meet their basic daily needs.

11 See, for example, the recent compilation edited by Philip Kretsedemas, Jorge Capetillo-Ponce, and Glenn Jacobs, *Migrant Marginality: A Transnational Perspective* (2014). For a report on the effects of socio-economic factors on health among Samoans overseas, see McGarvey and Seidin (2010). For a discussion of the role of the state in producing migrants' social and economic insecurity, see Tseng and Wang's (2013) case study of guest workers in Taiwan.

12 For Hakka Chinese Indonesians from Singkawang, this inaccurate identification by others took the form of not always having their sub-ethnic identity recognized, and/or valued by individuals in the host societies.

13 *Reformasi* is the Indonesian term for the political transition and democratization process that began during the fall of President Suharto in 1998.

don't consider us (i.e. Chinese Indonesians) to be real Indonesians. But when we go overseas to Taiwan, and to Hong Kong, the Chinese there don't consider us to be 'real Chinese', they think we are Indonesians."

Andy has had a similar experience. He is 19 years old. He is currently studying accounting at a small university in the UK. On a trip home for the summer, he told me that there is a lot of discrimination in England. According to him, people there do not like the Chinese, so when he meets white people he tells them that he is from Indonesia and speaks Indonesian. He strategically downplays the ethnically Chinese part of his identity. However, when he meets Chinese people, including his Cantonese boss, he tells them he is Chinese Indonesian, and speaks Mandarin and Hakka, downplaying the Indonesian aspects of his identity, and emphasizing the ethnically Chinese aspects in order to find acceptance and a common ground. This relational shifting is a daily experience in his life. By day, he is one of only a handful of Asian students at the small local university and by night he works at a Chinese restaurant. With customers and fellow students he speaks English, but with his boss and the other staff he speaks Mandarin.

Andy is in an advantageous position because he can speak Mandarin, which is not the case for many older people who grew up during the Suharto era when schools that taught Mandarin were banned. This older generation is often called 'the lost generation' because they were denied the ability to study Mandarin, which is perceived as an important part of becoming a Chinese person, especially in overseas Chinese communities where Chinese dialects are often the dominant languages within the Chinese community. The politics of speaking or not speaking Mandarin have generated problems for people who want to work overseas in places that have a majority population of ethnic Chinese, and this limits people's cosmopolitan dreams. This gets expressed as anger at the Indonesian government, embarrassment, and a sense of personal failure, as well as frustration with not having one's Chineseness recognized and affirmed by other groups of ethnic Chinese. People frequently contrast their situation with that of Malaysian Chinese, many of whom are fluent in English, Mandarin, and Malay, as well as a Chinese dialect.

Afui is 40 years old. He lived in the United States for six years and then in Hong Kong for three years. He told me that when he goes overseas and he cannot speak Mandarin, he feels ashamed. He feels embarrassed and he feels like he is not a real Chinese person. He said, "I am so fucking angry. The Indonesian government is so stupid. They don't think far. They don't want us to develop. It is because of Indonesia that I cannot speak Chinese."

Amin only received an elementary school education, but taught himself Chinese by speaking with elderly people and watching satellite TV. While working in a factory in Malaysia, he joined a local mutual aid society. He said that he felt that Malaysian Chinese consider Chinese Indonesians to be stupid, uneducated, and unable to speak Mandarin. But he was able to impress a group of people by giving an impromptu public speech in Mandarin. This instantly increased his status and allowed him to make friendships, which, years later, he still maintains.

NEGATIVE JUDGMENTS OF OTHERS

In descriptions of their experiences overseas, migrants often make essentializing characterizations of host populations, which rely heavily on stereotypes (e.g. “Singaporeans are arrogant”, “Taiwanese are aggressive”, “Chinese are rude”). These are common shorthand expressions that distinguish “us” from “them” and these negative judgments are made in the context of the migrants’ own marginality and their perception of also being negatively evaluated by the local populations. The experience of living as low-status non-citizen foreign ‘others’ who are limited in their engagements within the host society fuels these characterizations, which are inherently comparative, reflecting how migrants come to imagine themselves in relation to others. While judgments relate to ethnic or national group characteristics, they also index the difficulties of fitting in that stem from socio-economic, dialect, and sub-ethnic group differences and frustration at not having one’s identity recognized and valued.

Not having aspects of the Chineseness of migrants’ Chinese Indonesian identity recognized is a problem, but another problem arises when a sub-ethnic identity, while recognized, is negatively evaluated. Hakka identity (which is both a dialect and a sub-ethnic group designation) carries certain stereotypes, which vary depending on historical, geographical, and intergroup relations, but can be generalized as associated with working class socio-economic status, labor-intensive jobs, lack of education, sojourning, and rural lifestyles. These characterizations only make sense in relation to those of other groups, such as Cantonese, or Hokkien, who are often afforded a more favorable characterization, as refined, cultured, hard-working, educated, and enterprising. When people from Singkawang travel to countries with other groups of Chinese people, the politics of these sub-ethnic group stereotypes play out in terms of how they are perceived by locals and therefore whom they feel comfortable associating and communicating with.¹⁴ As a way of refuting these negative stereotypes of Hakka sub-ethnic identity, people frequently cite the fact that some famous people including Sun Yat-Sen, Deng Xiaoping, and Lee Kuan Yew were/are Hakka.

In addition to being Chinese Indonesian and being Hakka, migrants overseas must also contend with the politics of being Southeast Asian, which carries the stigma of coming from a developing country and implies poverty, corruption, and lack of discipline. I do not want to suggest any truth in these claims. The reason for focusing on the negative characterizations of migrants, and the negative judgments that they, in turn, make about host populations, is merely to understand the context in which these characterizations are imagined and reproduced in talk, eventually becoming common shorthand understandings for groups of people. Young people go overseas with hopes, dreams, and fantasies of being able to adapt and be included in the new societies where they live, work, study, and marry. They imagine they will make friends and connections, start businesses and seek better lives (Indonesian: *cari kehidupan lebih bagus*). At one end of this spectrum of dreams is the image of cosmopolitan transnational citizenship. At the other end is the hope of living temporarily in a more affluent society, working, and saving money. However, Hakka from Sing-

14 These politics play out in the Indonesian context as well, as reflected in negative judgments and animosity between the Hokkien Chinese communities in North Sumatra, Jakarta Chinese, and the Hakka communities in West Kalimantan.

kawang face significant limitations in becoming transnational and they often lack the financial, educational, social, logistical as well as cultural credentials needed to create the kinds of cosmopolitan sensibilities of their fantasies.

Among such limitations is the tendency of Hakka from Singkawang, much like other Indonesians, not to spend a lot of time alone, both inside and outside the home. In Singkawang, people live with their extended families, sleep together in a room of many, and do not expect or imagine much in the way of personal or private space. When going out, people travel with a friend or a group of friends. Continuously, they seek social engagements that are busy or crowded (Indonesian: *ramai*; Hakka: *an nao*), generally considering them happy affairs. While overseas, Hakka from Singkawang also reproduce this sociality. They sleep in rooms with other people from Singkawang, they go out in groups of people from Indonesia, they chat and SMS and take funny photos in funny places as often as possible, as they would do at home. The majority, however, do not have any local friends,¹⁵ nor have they ever been to the houses of locals, nor have they accessed social or medical services that would allow them to develop a more nuanced, insider view of the mechanics and nature of the host society. They feel unable to mix with local people (Indonesian: *susah bergaul*; Hakka: *an nan kak phan*), because of the fear that they would be negatively judged and therefore not received graciously as potential friends, acquaintances, or business partners. While cross-border brides from Singkawang make greater inroads in these new societies in terms of making local friends, they also tend to rely most heavily for social support on their networks of friends and family who are also, originally, from Singkawang.

RECUPERATIVE DISCOURSE

Migrants' social marginalization and their wish to subvert hegemonic structures and discourse leads to a particular self-portrayal that emphasizes the uniqueness, goodness, and integrity of their own culture. They self-identify with 'traditional' Chinese culture, strong kinship and family structures, unique religious practices, and they describe themselves as loyal and fraternal, engaging in group solidarity and mutual aid among friends. Such descriptions do reflect, to some extent, the realities of Singkawang's "traditional", small-scale Chinese society as defined by concrete social, cultural, and economic arrangements. However, this characterization also reflects ideals that have emerged from experiences overseas, and the assertion that some of these qualities have been lost in other societies.

In Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, and the USA, for example, migrants witness states of development and modernity that are very different from home. They see, first-hand, the advanced industrial and post-industrial economies, the prevalence of famous international export brands, the international centers of business and finance, middle-class and upper middle-class professionals who appear well-dressed, disciplined, hard-working, and sophisticated. Migrants who fantasized about being able to enter into this world before going overseas instead find work in service sector jobs,

15 While this is not designed to be a quantitative study, it is significant to note that 98% of the 60 migrants interviewed said they did not have any local friends.

selling noodles or bubble tea to these wealthier office workers, who occupy social and economic space as the ideal citizen-subjects: productive, consuming, and self-disciplined. Within these daily interactions, people feel the practical limitations of converting their more humble origins into lives resembling their original cosmopolitan transnational fantasies as represented by these established elites.

As a function of these encounters, migrants sense the uniqueness of their own culture and sociality and begin to emphasize “us” versus “them” through a discourse about the preservation of culture at home and the loss of ‘culture’ overseas. Whereas they describe Japanese as technologically and economically advanced, they depict Singkawang as preserving filial piety, respect, honor, and care for the elderly. Whereas they call Singapore alienating and competitive, they see Singkawang as relaxed and friendly. Whereas they herald mainland China for its rapid economic growth, authoritarian leadership, and strict laws (which some migrants valorize as being better than Indonesia’s weak political system), they praise Singkawang as a center of Chinese folk religion (something believed to be lost in China and preserved in Singkawang). This recuperative discourse highlights positive characteristics of ‘home’. Culture, sociality, and behavior become valuable resources they can identify with, but which are lost or diluted in modern industrial places overseas. Home becomes something to be proud of in situations where the society challenges their parochial, small-town status – a status that limits their ability to fit in. Reorientations towards home are ironic given the ambiguous position of the Chinese ethnic minorities in Indonesia, and the historic and persistent challenge for Hakka from West Kalimantan to be considered anything other than “strangers at home” (Hui, 2011). Nonetheless, overseas migrants indulge in nostalgic daydreams of home, which include all these cultural characteristics as well as memories of delicious food, socializing with friends, and the familiarity of the town and the environment. Just as the fantasy of becoming a cosmopolitan transnational subject powerfully motivated migration, so too does the allure of returning to the newly reimagined *kampung halaman* motivate their return journeys.

CONCLUSION

Going abroad initiates a process by which migrants come to learn about their own idiosyncratic patterns of behavior, sociality, and cultural adaptations as Hakka Chinese Indonesians from an out-of-the-way small town. This happens through the dynamics of their encounters overseas where they experience, first-hand, a new society, new people, new living and working conditions. During these experiences, migrants must confront the practical limits of their ability (and, consequently, their desire) to build lives overseas. So what happens to the fantasy of being a cosmopolitan transnational subject when the very transnational encounters they imagined wanting to attain challenge their ability to be open, flexible, adventurous, accepting, and enjoying forms of difference? Rather than recognizing the role of class, education, and experience, they resort to essentializing stereotypes of “us” and “them”, and a discourse of cultural difference emerges. They also readjust their plans to accommodate what might be described as parochialism. No longer imagining the life of wealth and success in Taipei, Hong Kong, or Seoul, people instead bring back small influences to Singkawang by opening bridal salons, photography studios, bubble tea cafes, by in-

roducing Korean fashion trends, or starting English language schools. People reorient themselves to local industries such as bird's nest cultivation, rubber and oil palm plantation, and decide to put more energy into cultivating wealth and social status at home where their specific culture logic is readily recognized and respected, not challenged or undermined. Based on this case study, we can reflect back on Appadurai's observation that imagination has become an axiomatic social practice in modern life (Appadurai, 1996), and one which is not limited to elites, but increasingly used by non-elites to formulate their own "cosmopolitanisms from below" (Appadurai, 2011). In this paper I have illuminated a schism that exists between the imaginings and the realities of people's cosmopolitan transnational fantasies. While Hakka from Singkawang endeavor to build their own cosmopolitanism from below, in practice, what occurs is a reimagining of home, a reorientation towards the social and cultural settings that are familiar, and actual, physical returns from overseas. Through this circuit of imagining, experiencing a disconnect, and then reimagining, people's transnational imaginaries ultimately fuel the continued construction and reconstruction of home, as an idea, as a physical place, and a social space.



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