



**Hyphenated-Chinese in China:
Western-born second generation overseas
Chinese's ethnic "return" migration**

by

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on Western-born second generation overseas Chinese who “return” migrate to China, their ancestral homeland. Inscribed within the larger social processes and dynamics of Chinese contemporary society, this research aims to understand how their “homecoming” and socio-cultural integration experiences in the parental homeland’s society leads to the re-evaluation of their ethno-cultural identity(ies) and ethno-national attachments.

My research uses a qualitatively-driven multimethod design. Data collection primarily consisted of semi-structured in-depth interviews with 58 ethnic remigrants in Beijing and Shanghai, as well as a variety of document analyses. Guided by the concept of social anchoring, this study thus sheds light on the role of ethnicity in channeling migration and in restructuring the remigrants’ identities in their ancestral country. By examining how this group of highly-skilled migrants’ definitions of self and home evolve along with their transition from being a racial minority in their birth country to a cultural minority in their ethnic homeland, this thesis uncovers the multi-layered experiences of socio-cultural integration (and lack thereof) that trigger unexpected identity questioning, as evidenced by remigrants’ social networks and every day interactions in the homeland. By exploring their integration experiences and overall migration journey, I find that many are in fact paradoxically integrated in China, causing them to experience various forms of emotional in-betweenness and double disconnection challenging the boundaries of their ethno-cultural identities.

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Chapter One – Introduction

1.1. Background

When the aftermath of the financial and economic crises in Western countries, along with discrimination against visible minorities, pushed many to look for better opportunities elsewhere, China, on the other hand, emerged as a nation with flourishing opportunities, consolidating its position in the global competition to attract the talented. Embodied by its rise and economic prowess, opportunity seekers from all over the world were increasingly drawn to China's potential. At the same time, China has multiplied measures to appeal to the highly-skilled and implemented a variety of programs and soft power strategies directed to foreign talents. These included its overseas coethnics, encouraging an increasing flow of migrants from the developed West who are looking for fresher opportunities, and choose China as a destination country to establish themselves (Lehmann, 2014; CCG, 2017). Among those migrants is a particular group which is the focus of this research: the second (and subsequent) generation of overseas Chinese born in Western countries who "return" migrate to China, their parental homeland.

When embarking on my doctoral journey, I realized along the way that this project would involve collecting and dissecting the many singular –yet similar– migration journeys, stories and experiences of my research subjects. The stories are those of Western-born second-generation ethnic Chinese "return" migrants, a distinct and growing group of sojourners that has yet to be researched by academics, and whose experiences and struggles in the ancestral homeland have not been depicted adequately. Nevertheless, these remigrants have, in most instances, made a conscious decision to relocate to China, their parents' country of origin. While in "returning" to China, some remigrants fulfilled their parents' own dream of return¹, others chose to

¹ In many cases, their parents have grown accustomed to their lifestyles in the West, thus choosing to stay while only the child relocates to China.

"return" despite their parents' incomprehension vis-à-vis their decision to leave the life of comfort and home parents spent hard efforts building for their children. Indeed, their parents are for most, part of the first generation of migrants who left China, either in search of a better life, grasping opportunities the developed West offered (Tan, 2012) or to escape from poor living conditions in China (Yang, 2013; Yu, 2013). And yet, in search for a new better, the second generation, born, raised, educated, and socialized in the West, chose to "return" to the place the first generation chose to leave. Colloquially labelled *huayi* in China, which refers to foreign coethnics, descendants of overseas Chinese who are not citizens of the PRC, second generation overseas Chinese remigrating from Western countries are often exposed to a multitude of socio-cultural stimuli when "returning" to the ancestral homeland. These stimuli accompany and sometimes challenge their social and cultural integration within Chinese society, which in turn, is likely to affect their ethno-cultural identity and ethno-national attachments, and the way they understand what being of Chinese ancestry involves, especially after relocating to China. This self-reevaluation in relation to this new society also raises questions with regards to their understandings of home and belonging.

Subject to an intrinsic duality rooted in the combination of their racial heritage and culture within which they have been submerged in their birthplace, Western-born second-generation Chinese are therefore moving from racial foreignness and cultural similarity in their birth country to cultural foreignness and racial similarity in the parental land as they "return" to China. Inscribed within the larger social processes and dynamics of contemporary Chinese society, this research project is an in-depth qualitative study of Western-born second generation overseas Chinese ethnic "return" migration, and seeks to uncover remigrants' multifaceted identities through their migration stories, by focusing on their social and cultural integration experiences in the ancestral homeland. With the purpose of understanding how their "homecoming" experiences and integration in the parental homeland' society lead to the re-evaluation of their identity(ies), this group of highly-skilled migrants' definitions of self and home evolve along with their transition from being a racial minority in their birth country to a cultural minority in their ethnic homeland.

1.2. Motivations

It is important to look into second-generation Chinese ethnic “returnees”’ socio-cultural involvement in China, and subsequent questions of identity and belonging insofar as the study of their experiences in the ancestral homeland represent both an opportunity and a challenge to better understand the current transformations of contemporary Chinese society in relation to ethnic “return” migration. Indeed, China’s idiosyncratic combination of social, cultural, and political heritage produced a society with unique features and ways of thinking and behaving, which, put in contrast with the West, wherein ethnic “return” migrants were socialized, makes an interesting case to study. Driven by the “integration paradox” which refers to the theoretically contradicting nature of highly-skilled migrants turning away from the host society (Verkuyten, 2016), this research challenges classical theories of integration whereby one’s structural integration – through their educational and economic improvements– should encourage subsequent forms of integration (Gordon, 1964; Alba and Nee, 2003), such as developing a more positive attitude towards the host society, increasingly engaging and committing to it, to developing a sense of belonging. However, insofar as Western-born second generation Chinese in China tend to be educated migrants employed in highly-skilled positions, high education levels and economic integration seem to represent hindrances to the development of closer ties with the host society. Additionally, in the case of Chinese ethnic “return” migration, shared ethnicity with the host natives adds another layer of complexity influencing the integration process, often obstructing it rather than facilitating it.

If migrating generally held a more permanent characteristic for the first generation, for the opportunity-oriented, highly skilled and highly mobile second generation, migration has become more temporary, sometimes closer to sojourning. One of the consequences of such ephemerality gradually trending over straightforward linear migration is how it impacts on socio-cultural integration, as temporariness affects sojourners’ engagement towards the host society (Pietilä, 2010). Moreover, with people increasingly moving back and forth across borders, more and more diasporas and communities of overseas nationals emerge as individuals migrate and create new homes, new spaces within national borders. These new spaces may then challenge migrants’ understanding of

home and belonging, since the spaces wherein they were socialized used to be nation-bound. Ethnic “return” migration to the ancestral homeland triggers new challenges and remigrants develop new understandings of who they are in relation to where they are, and most importantly, in relation to who they surround themselves with. Many thus live increasingly transnational lives that are no longer nation-centered (focusing mostly on the “new home” as opposed to “back home”), but live lives gravitating around communities instead, with national boundaries becoming increasingly permeable (Bashi, 2007).

This research is worth conducting insofar as the case of Chinese ethnic “returnees” to China mirrors the social sciences’ growing attention to the everyday lives and transnational experiences of those in the “middling” level (Smith, 2001). The “middling” level refers more specifically to those who can neither be considered as disempowered forced migrants such as refugees, or underprivileged unskilled labor migrants, nor do they fit in the higher strata and selected few of the transnational elite. However, as Lehmann (2014:1) pointed out, this group of transnational migrant workers is for most, middle-class well-educated and privileged individuals who “increasingly impact on the way the world is shaped and the way that perceptions of cultural and social difference are interpreted and recreated everyday” (Ibid.). And with China becoming a global economic hotspot of opportunities, more and more of these middle-class individuals from the developed West are likely to be attracted Eastwards, as it is the case for Chinese ethnic remigrants, making this case all the more significant. This thesis thus explores the personal socio-cultural experiences of Chinese ethnic “return” migrants from the West to China’s two major metropolises, and investigates how such experiences results in ethno-cultural identity changes.

1.3. Research questions

The main research questions organically emerging relative to second-generation Chinese ethnic “return” migration, socio-cultural integration, and identity construction, are the following ones:

“How do Western-born second generation overseas Chinese remigrants’ experiences of “homecoming” and socio-cultural integration impact on their ethno-cultural identity construction after they ethnic “return” migrate to China, their ancestral homeland; and in what ways do encounters between ethnic brethren from different cultural backgrounds impact on the remigrants’ integration and identity?”

To understand how Chinese ethnic remigrants live and experience their everyday in China in relation to their local coethnics, subsequent questions that stem from the above ones can be developed into the following two sets of sub-questions. The first set encompasses issues linked to socio-cultural integration, and the second set focuses on questions related to ethno-cultural identity repositioning after remigrating to China.

(1) Social and cultural integration in the ancestral homeland after remigration

In order to better understand the integration experiences of Chinese ethnic “returnees”, it is necessary to investigate the sequence of questions listed below, which look into what impacts on Chinese remigrants’ socio-cultural integration, and what encourages or hinders their integration, or lack thereof. This would thus shed light on the roles of social networks for ethnic remigrants. These questions also aim to evidence how Chinese remigrants are ‘paradoxically integrated’ (Verkuyten, 2016) in China, which is the situation where highly-educated migrants are structurally well integrated while disengaging from the host society. On the other hand, they attempt to uncover the ways in which ethnic similarity with the host society may represent an obstacle in the overall socio-cultural integration process. The first bullet point groups questions that seek answers beyond the identification of the migration triggers, insofar as migrants’ motives for ethnic “return” are accompanied with an ensemble of intentions, expectations, attitudes and other preset circumstances that not only impact on their integration experiences in China, but also their willingness to integrate as well.

- Why did Western-born second generation Chinese remigrants decide to relocate to China? How much was their remigration project motivated by ethnic roots and cultural rediscovery, or by economic opportunities? How much did these

two reasons interplay with one another? In what ways do their reasons to migrate impact on their integration experiences in the ancestral homeland?

- What were remigrants expecting when relocating to China? Did they have any expectations at all towards their local counterparts, and towards life in China? How did “reality” compare with their expectations? How did the gap, if there was any, affect their integration experiences and outcome?
- Who do their social networks consist of? Do these networks amplify socio-cultural differences or do they facilitate interactions between the remigrants and the host population? In either instance, what role do all these networks play in their socio-cultural integration processes?
- In what ways does shared ethnicity impact on their integration and everyday interactions?

(2) Questioning ethno-cultural identities and belonging

The questions below address ethno-cultural identity questioning and issues related to home and belonging, triggered by the migrants’ socio-cultural encounters and experiences in China. They seek to uncover how remigrants negotiate their ethno-cultural identity(ies) throughout their migration stories, and how their integration experience in the ancestral homeland affected their understandings of self, home and belonging.

- Do Chinese ethnic remigrants perceive their ethnic “return” as a homecoming? Did they expect their local coethnics to interact and consider them as “one of theirs”? How do these “homecoming” experiences influence remigrants’ identity reevaluations and construction? How does their ethno-cultural identity(ies) develop and evolve, and under what circumstances?
- How do they define and understand themselves (as people of Chinese ancestry), home, and the “place” they belong? How did this evolve after they experienced China?
- How do their socio-cultural integration experiences in China impact on their identity construction? What connects these two spheres?

1.4. Theoretical framework and data sources

This thesis is guided by the emerging concept of social anchoring, which combines theories of integration, social networks, and ethno-cultural identity construction into a single integrative conceptual framework. Insofar as identities are socially constructed, changes in social contexts (inevitable with migration), should result in identity changes. Moreover, even though ethnic remigrants seem to be structurally integrated in China, they might remain socially separated from the host society because of cultural differences with the host majority. Based on the above research questions and theoretical framework, the following hypotheses can be formulated:

- Western-born second generation overseas Chinese remigrants' experiences of "homecoming" are affected by the processes and outcomes of their socio-cultural integration, which in turn correlatively impacts on their ethno-cultural identity social construction.

The aim of this study is not to evaluate whether ethnic "returnees" are integrated or not into the host society, or whether they experience identity changes in the ancestral homeland. Rather, this research focuses on the relation between these two aspects, and seeks to understand in what ways the former impacts on the latter, which is the reason for the emphasis on social relations in these processes. As such, a second hypothesis stems from the first one:

- Social networks represent essential anchors that play a crucial role in ethnic remigrants' socio-cultural integration and identity construction processes in China.

To verify whether these hypotheses are true or not, I use a qualitatively-driven multimethod research design, which helps improve our understanding of migrants' multi-layered socio-cultural integration experiences. Data collection thus primarily consisted of semi-structured in-depth interviews (QUAL) with a sample of 58 ethnic remigrants in Beijing and Shanghai, which was the primary research medium. Fieldwork was conducted in Beijing and Shanghai because of the high density of foreigners in

these two cities. Interviews were complemented by additional forms of ethnographic-inspired data such as fieldwork notes, direct observation (qual₁), as well as by the analysis of a variety of formal and informal sources (qual₂) including reports from Chinese think tanks, targeted blogs and forum threads, all of which provides a qualitative approach that enables studying cultural patterns as well as the perspectives of participants in their natural settings.

Experiences and testimonies individually collected with eligible respondents focused on delivering a micro perspective that enabled the unlocking of meso-level mechanisms that impact on remigrants' experiences of integration in the ethnic homeland. Narrated migrant stories also provide sensible insight into the various meanings ascribed to specific migrant experiences. By exploring and interpreting these experiences, migrant stories become vivid illustrations revealing more than just feelings and opinions: they also provide alternative perspectives to better understand both collective and individual identities that extend beyond rigid ideas of restrictive affiliations and attachments to nation-states (Kleinman and Coop, 1993; Teerling, 2010). Christou (2003:2) also suggests that despite what may first look like skepticism vis-à-vis fixed allegiances and loyalties, adopting a fluid notion of belongingness actually proves to be more durable and robust than previous rigid frameworks. Alternatively, this perspective responds to gaps between structure and agency by shedding light on the active role of individuals who shape and are shaped by transnational social worlds (Ibid.).

1.5. Terminology clarification and scope of work

In order to lift any potential ambiguities, it is crucial to clarify the key terminologies used recurrently throughout this thesis. Moreover, since there are so many possible layers of study, it is essential to define the scope of work for the rest of this research. As such, my study focuses on Western-born second generation overseas Chinese ethnic "return" migrants in China.

Firstly, the specification "Western-born" is placed to distinguish the studied group with the already well-established Chinese diasporas in other parts of the world, most notably

in South East Asia for example. Here, Western countries thus generally refer to Western and Northern Europe, Northern America, Australia and New Zealand. These countries are what the United Nations refer to as countries pertaining to the Global North, and categorize them as developed countries, while China is still categorized as a developing nation (United Nations, 2014:146). Additionally, the dichotomy between the “West” and “China” is an omnipresent feature throughout the thesis. Although the West encompasses a multitude of countries with a diversity of languages, cultures, demographics and social structure, in this study, these Western countries will be referred to as a dominant cultural ensemble, as opposed to China. In parallel, there are significant socio-cultural variances within China. Substantial differences can be noted between provinces, and even though Beijing and Shanghai are geographically on the eastern coast of China, the former is considered to be part of the North while the latter a part of the South. Moreover, China may be considered as a developing country overall, but Beijing and Shanghai could be argued to be developed cities, despite the existing economic disparities among Chinese residents. Furthermore, although they are two international megacities that are comparable in many respects, there remain critical differences between the two cities, each having its own accent, ways of thinking and behaving. Nevertheless, in this study, China will be referred to as a whole socio-cultural ensemble, mostly to emphasize on the dichotomy with the “West”. In both cases, unless mentioned otherwise, Western countries and China will be considered as two vast entities that contrast each other, and nuances will be discussed in due terms.

The second main element to clarify regards the specification “second generation”. To be sure, “second (and subsequent) generation overseas Chinese” refer to the descendants of the first-generation migrants who left China and immigrated to the West. In many instances, the diasporic families are so well-established in the Western society that they have fully assimilated into the mainstream cultural majority. The studied group of second generation overseas Chinese also takes account of children that belong to the 1.5 and 1.75 generations, i.e. children who immigrated with their parents before the age of twelve² (Portes and Zhou, 1993; Rumbaut, 2004). Indeed, although they were born in

² According to Rumbaut (1997, 2004), there are four categories within second generation groups. The ‘true’ second generation (born in the host country), the 1.75 generation (foreign-born children arriving before 6 years old), the 1.5 generation (foreign-born children arriving between the age of 6 and 12 years old), and the 1.25 generation (foreign-born

China, they were raised and educated in a Western environment, and were young enough to appropriate the host culture. To simplify the writing process, I will refer to the whole group under the label “second generation”, and will include the necessary specification when relevant. Being born (or brought up before reaching adulthood) as an ethnic minority in a Western mainstream society was a key element in this study to take into account, as Chinese international students returning in China, known as *haigui*³, are excluded from the studied group since they grew up in China. Their struggles when returning to the homeland have also been covered in recent scholarship (Wang, 2013; Wang and Bao, 2015). Finally, this research focuses on second generation ethnic “return” migration to their ancestral or parental homeland, which is different from first generation return migration to their own homeland, their birth country. It should be further emphasized that since this thesis primarily focuses on highly-skilled migrants, which happens to be one of the characteristics of second generation Chinese ethnic remigrants (Tsuda, 2009b:2), forced migrants such as refugees are not taken into consideration when examining ethnic “return” migration to China.

Third, in speaking of “return”, for lack of an appropriate term, I call the process of relocating to the ancestral homeland *ethnic “return” migration*, as expressed by Tsuda (2009b; 2009d), although it is semantically incorrect to refer to return migration per se. Indeed, the studied group is not returning to China insofar as they never really left China in the first place. Conversely, as emphasized above, the second generation was born, raised and educated in an ethnic minority family, in a Western majority society. Their search for better economic opportunities has brought them to China, their parental homeland, and their integration experiences triggered an identity questioning, as they reevaluate their initial understandings of who they are, and where home is to them. Therefore, in this thesis, to point out the inaccuracy of the terminology, I use quotation marks to frame the ambiguity, such as in *ethnic “return” migration* or for variations such as “returnees”. In contrast, return migration (without quotation marks) tends to refer to a specific pan in the migration literature in its own, and usually refers to the return of first

children arriving after 12 and up to 17 years of age). For my research, I chose not to include the 1.25 generation, since past 12 years old (early teenage years), it becomes more difficult for children to integrate into the new host society (Rumbaut, 1994).

³ *Haigui* (海归) usually refer to Chinese nationals who graduated overseas and who have returned to China with a degree obtained in a foreign university.

generation immigrant to their birth country or ancestral villages (Cassarino, 2004; 2008; Chen, 2013; Xiang, 2013).

Fourth, the omnipresence and constant reference of the studied group as “migrants” (and other derivative appellations such as “remigrants” for instance) needs in fact to be revised. When designing this research project, I approached second generation ethnic “returnees” in China as a distinct social group of international migrants without challenging the accuracy of this appellation. However, as the research progressed and took shape, the data collected revealed that most participants were closer to the definition of a sojourner than of a migrant. Indeed, by solely going by the numbers, respondents would be classified as sojourners. Nevertheless, the qualitative analysis of their testimonies and personal stories revealed that many of them relocated to China as migrants, but their hands-on experiences of everyday China, along with the reality of their obligations (usually linked to their progression in the life-course, or simply, due to their inability to remain legally) often led to new plans to leave the ancestral homeland after a moderate length of time, which means that they were in fact sojourners⁴. Even though intentions are feeble and subject to change, they are the reasons why ethnic “returnees” initially relocate as migrants only to become sojourners as their initial plans evolve. Although using the right terms to designate the studied group is important, the focus of this research was not to determine whether Western-born second generation overseas Chinese ethnic “returnees” in China are migrants or sojourners in China, but to depict a picture of their experiences in the parental homeland and see how their socio-cultural integration impacts on their identity questioning. As such, even though the majority of the research participants for this study turned out to be sojourners, I chose to refer to them as migrants or remigrants, while occasionally calling them sojourners when relevant. As it will be discussed further in the findings chapters, whether ethnic “returnees” are migrants or sojourners –which is determined by their duration of stay since arrival and intention to stay in China– has a direct influence on their willingness to integrate into the host society and appropriate the Chinese dominant culture, as well as the way they develop new understandings of ethnic identity.

⁴ According to Lynch (2013), sojourners temporarily reside in a different, new, or unfamiliar environment for an unspecified duration (between 6 months to 5 years), and have the intention to return “home”. On the other hand, migrants tend to reside overseas for longer periods.

Fifth, when conducting this research project, I comprehended identity as a dynamic, fluid, circumstantial, and socially-conditioned response to who someone says they are and how they understand themselves as well. Although identity can be personally and subjectively determined, it is also highly socially-constructed, as it is shaped by the continuous interactions –or the lack thereof– with one’s surrounding social groups. An individual’s identity is thus composed of multiple partial identities. Given the multiplicity and complexity of one’s identity, I chose to focus on a few partial identities relevant to this research. This project investigates the ways in which Western-born second generation overseas Chinese’s ethnic “returnees” ethno-cultural identities and ethno-national attachments are affected by their experiences of socio-cultural integration when they remigrate to China. In remigrating to the ancestral homeland, this group’s ethnic and cultural identities are being challenged in view of the different society with which they now share ethnic traits but differ culturally. Nevertheless, as mentioned above, although identities are socially constructed, they still remain singular and subjective. Moreover, given the diversity and multiplicity of the backgrounds and individuals pertaining to the researched group, it would be presumptuous to even attempt to homogenize their identity, and bring it down to one single shared identity. In this research, I will thus use stories, testimonies, and examples shared by Western-born second-generation ethnic “returnees” to illustrate some points I drew out from the analysis of the data collected.

Finally, the title of this thesis mentions “Hyphenated-Chinese in China”, which is an allusion to another specific characteristic of the group of migrants studied in this thesis. It refers more particularly to the fact that some of them have taken on or reinforced hyphenated identities after remigrating to the ancestral homeland. This hints to the question of in-betweenness experienced by individuals colloquially referring themselves as “American-Chinese” (or ABC, American-born Chinese), “British-Chinese” (or BBC), “Canadian-Chinese” (or CBC) and so on, and their experiences in China.

1.6. Contributions and limitations

This thesis aims at improving our theoretical and empirical understandings of integration and identity construction in the context of ethnic “return” migration. Hoping to bring the case of Western-born Chinese ethnic “return” migration to academic attention, this research also endeavors to contribute to debates on social networks and their role in facilitating or hindering integration in the new society, not from an economic stand point, but mostly from a socio-cultural perspective. This research further adds to knowledge in the following aspects.

First, as Tsuda (1999, 2003, 2009a, 2009b) contends, exploring second and subsequent generations’ ethnic migration provides a new third key perspective within migration studies. Indeed, the first perspective is unipolar for it emphasizes on the host society and how new immigrants are received. The schema is simpler: people leave their country of origin, immigrate, settle in the new society and assimilate. With regards to the Chinese diasporic communities, ample studies have been published in the previous scholarship, including the study of the first and second generations’ assimilation struggles into the host (Western) society. The second perspective, deemed to be bipolar, focuses on the transnational flows between sending and receiving countries, as well as the circular nature of migration, and its constant movement of capital through remittances was also widely documented. Finally, the “return” movement of second and later generations brings out a third perspective in migration studies as it raises questions related to the role of ethnicity in routing the migration flow to the ancestral land, and in reshaping the migrants’ identity(ies). However, very scarce due to its relative novelty, the literature on second generation ethnic “return” migration rarely mentions Chinese ethnic groups. Moreover, the rare few studies documenting Chinese ethnic “returnees” in China tend to focus on American-Chinese’s experiences exclusively (Louie, 2000; 2001; 2004), while in my study, I chose to look at a cultural ensemble of countries, hence the West-China dichotomy mentioned above. Furthermore, my research aims to challenge the general assumption in ethnic migration studies that ethnic “return” migration is mainly motivated by nostalgia or reasons related to ethnicity (Wessendorf, 2007; 2008; Kim, 2009). I demonstrate in this research how in the case of Chinese ethnic remigrants, common ancestry with Chinese people is primarily perceived as a potential economic

advantage which the “returnee” believes can instrumentalize to smoothen the China experience. Nevertheless, I also show how in turn, common ancestry actually represents an obstacle for ethnic remigrants in their socio-cultural integration process, and how it can trigger identity questionings as well as new ethno-national attachments. From this perspective, the journey to roots seeking and reevaluation is not what motivates ethnic “return” migration to China, but instead, tends to be an unexpected by-product, or a side effect that occurs after remigrants experience China firsthand.

Second, this study adds to knowledge by tailoring the concept of social anchoring which is argued to act as the glue bridging social networks, integration and identity, three conceptual frameworks usually studied separately. By applying the idea of social anchoring onto the case of Chinese ethnic “return” migration, this thesis thus brings in new data on understudied migration flows to an undocumented case.

Third is the directionality of the migration flow, as diasporic Chinese ethnic “return” from Western countries can be categorized as a North-South migration movement, which, depending on the definition used to scale countries pertaining to the North or South, only represents 3 to 6% of all international migration⁵ (Laczko and Brian, 2013). Besides, existing studies on Chinese migration tends to focus more on the dynamics and outcomes of Chinese internal migration, or Chinese international –outward– emigration. This thesis thus contributes to knowledge by introducing new empirical data on an understudied form of Chinese migration.

Fourth, by investigating Chinese ethnic remigrants’ integration experiences and overall journey, I find that as they re-evaluate their own definitions of home, self and belonging, this migrant group experiences various forms of emotional in-betweenness and double disconnection challenging the boundaries of their identities. In order to address such multi-layered issues, it was most relevant if not necessary, to break out of the boundaries of traditional disciplines and design the research within an interdisciplinary theoretical framework. This study therefore benefits from being at the crossroads of a diverse range of research areas including area studies, migration studies, sociology,

⁵ 3% of all migrants based on the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and World Bank’s definitions, and 6% based on the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA).

social psychology, and socio-anthropological studies. Borrowing theories and methods overlapping different disciplines thus enables shedding light on the role of ethnicity in channeling “return” migration and in restructuring the “returnees” identities within their ancestral countries.

However, this thesis also has limitations. For instance, even though Beijing and Shanghai are the two main Chinese cities with the highest concentration of foreigners in China, other economic regions are attracting growing communities of foreigners as well (such as Shenzhen, which is geographically close to Hong Kong for instance). Their experiences may not be generalized to all ethnic remigrants in China. Additionally, as this thesis focuses on a group of emigrants from an ensemble of countries (“the West”), the sample size (58) does not allow producing statements generalizable to all Western countries, nor to all migrants. Even though some similarities, and even patterns may be traced between the interviews conducted with the participants, it is difficult to apply the same experiences to all since the principal data source relies on individuals’ personal journeys and experiences. Finally, as mentioned above, this thesis overlooks the regional differences within China as well as the differences between Western countries, and views those as two opposing cultural ensembles by dichotomizing China and the West. However, to avoid the dangers of compartmentalization, and as sustained by Frank Pieke (2016), understanding Chinese –contemporary– society requires seeing beyond outdated dichotomies of East versus West.⁶

1.7. Thesis structure

Chapter One is an introduction to the thesis.

Chapter Two reviews the existing literature on ethnic “return” migration, and discusses the previous studies on second generation ethnic remigration. Since the research questions emerge from the literature review, this chapter informs on existing studies on similar topics, and areas overlapping with this thesis. It looks into studies addressing the

⁶ I insist however, that my thesis foci that are not on Chinese contemporary society and its mechanisms or reception of foreign migrants, but on second generation Chinese ethnic remigrants’ experiences within this society.

causes and processes of ethnic “return” migration, as well as ethnic “return” and identity changes.

Chapter Three presents the theoretical framework for this research, and discusses how major theories of international migration, socio-cultural integration, social networks, identity construction, and social identity interplay around the concept of social anchoring as part of second generation ethnic remigration.

Chapter Four presents the methodology used to design this research, collect data, and the methods of data analysis. This thesis was conducted using a qualitatively-driven multimethod design, and this chapter explains how, and why such methodology was the most relevant and adapted for this research. In this chapter, I also discuss questions of positionality and my status as both an insider and an outsider, and issues related to reliability and validity.

Chapter Five is the first of three findings chapters. In this chapter, I focus primarily on demonstrating the role of social networks in the integration process, and discuss the role of strong ties in the remigrants’ socio-cultural integration experience as well and the various communities or “crucial meso-level” networks (Faist, 1997) identified to have been surrounding Western-born ethnic “returnees” in Beijing and Shanghai.

Chapter Six then retells different facets of the groups’ integration experiences in the ancestral homeland, and focuses on aspects related to language, work, and willingness to integrate after relocating to the parental homeland. It was observed that the majority of ethnic returnees’ experiences in China were highly influenced by the ability to communicate *properly* with the host natives. This chapter mostly looks at what impacts on the “returnees’” everyday interactions in China, and discusses migration motives and intentions to stay, willingness to integrate and work experiences.

Chapter Seven then moves on to questions related to ethnic identity changes resulting from the remigrants’ integration experiences in the ancestral homeland. It first demonstrates how different socio-cultural experiences may trigger identity reevaluation and changes. Second, it examines the different post-migration identities observed

among migrants. Finally, it discusses the fluidity of ethnic identity, and how changing circumstances may affect *all types* of identities observed in the previous section.

Chapter Eight finally concludes the thesis, summarizing the main findings of this research, and how it relates more broadly to the literature. It also includes a reflection on the limitations of this research and how it could have been improved. The conclusion also suggests how further research can be conducted based on this thesis, and how to develop the current topic into its own research ecosystem.

Lastly, this thesis is supplemented by five appendices that will be referred to in relevant places in Chapter Four.

Chapter Two – Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

Many studies have already been published on the descendants of migrants born and raised in a host country, focusing on their assimilation and integration struggles and performance in their birth country (Levitt and Waters, 2002; Kasinitz et al., 2004; Dhingra, 2008; Heath et al., 2008). However, very little has been written on this very same group's "return" migration to their parental homeland, nor on their experiences and identity transformations occurring *after* performing such migratory movement. The literature on second generation "return" migration is scarce, scattered across disciplines, and appears to have been understudied as it is traceable only to the recent decades for most. Fortunately, as globalization generated development, it was accompanied with progress that facilitated transnational transportation and communication, eventually increasing movements of individuals across nations. In parallel, shifting dynamics in birth and ancestral societies prompted new migration patterns, which contributed to the increase of second generation "return" migration to the ethnic homeland, a timely topic, to gain academic interest.

Despite studying the same migratory movement –to different destinations–, scholars have labeled second-generation "return" migration to the ancestral homeland differently in attempt to fill in the conceptual void that usually clumsily refers to a "marginal form of return" (King, 1986:6-7) or a "return that is not a return" (Bovenkerk, 1974:19). Over the years, studies have thus referred to this migration pattern as ethnic unmixing or migration of ethnic affinity (Brubaker, 1998:1047), diasporic unmaking, in-gathering, or regrouping (Van Hear, 1998:6,47-48), counter-diasporic migration (King and Christou, 2010), and ethnic "return" migration (Tsuda, 2009b). In some specific cases however, this movement was more precisely referred to as roots migration (Wessendorf, 2007), which emphasizes on the nostalgic aspects linked to such "return", or as an imaginary return (Hansen, 2013), when connoting underlying disillusionment upon remigration.

Regardless of the latter specificities and of terminology, all authors describe the phenomenon whereby an ethnic group that initially scattered to different countries to become ethnic minorities is being regrouped and reconsolidated in the ethnic homeland.

In this chapter, I review the existing literature on second generation ethnic “return” migration from a variety of sending and receiving countries. This chapter is structured following the recurrent themes identified in previous studies as I discuss the ways in which they overlap with my research. In the first section, I examine what the literature says about the migration triggers when it comes to second generation ethnic “return” migration, from both macro- and micro-level perspectives through the push and pull lenses. In the second section, I review the facilitators of migration, focusing mostly on macro- and meso-level standpoints. Although these two sections are supported by empirical studies, they also refer back to the body of theories most important to the sociology of migration: why and how do people migrate (Hammar and Tamas, 1997; Schmitter-Heisler 2000:77; Haug, 2008:585). In the final section, I assess previous studies’ discussions on how identity changes stem from experiences in the ancestral homeland. According to previous scholarship, negative homecoming experiences tend to engender marginalization, and those various forms of exclusion bring the migrant returnee to re-evaluate their identity.

2.2. Causes of second generation ethnic “return” migration

Often regarded as axiomatic, the literature on descendants of migrants’ ethnic “return” movement to their ancestral homeland regularly overlooks the causes behind ethnic “return” migration. Unlike their parents –the first generation migrants who left their own birth country–, the second generation’s attachment to their parental land does not appear to be justified on the surface, or even be any different from other trending labor migratory movements, apart from the emotional aspects involved. Indeed, it has been widely theorized and demonstrated that similarly to other types of labor migration, second generation remigration is mainly triggered by economic pressures, as opposed to the general assumption that ethnic migration should be motivated by ethnic reasons.

In this section, I assess the literature and theories that have attempted to explain the causes of international migration, and more specifically, how the second generation's motivations to perform diasporic "return" migration to their putative homelands has been documented so far. The review examines the relating importance of socio-economic motivations framed within the broader context of push-pull and rational choice theories first, and then, will be going through the literature and concepts focusing on ethno-racial factors of migration and nostalgic transnational affinity for the parental homeland. Finally, I dedicate a part to probe the literature that questions why the majority of peoples have sedentary lifestyles, or in other words, why they do *not* migrate.

2.2.1. Economic motives

Being a pluri-disciplinary phenomenon, international migration has long been subject to scrutiny and a plethora of theories providing an explanatory framework to better understand the causes of transnational migratory movements. The majority of such theories suggest that *voluntary* international migration is primarily motivated by economic factors, which mainly stems from push-pull models and neoclassical migration theories; and socio-cultural aspects in second. However, theoretical models do not necessarily help to grasp the drivers and complexity of real-life migration (de Haas, 2014).

From a macro-economic point of view, neoclassical theory focuses on the costs of migration and the differences in wages, real income, and employment conditions between the country of origin (or of residence before migration), and the country of destination (Borjas, 1989; Massey et al., 1993). However, on a micro-economic level, the migrant is portrayed as an income-maximizing individual whose rational decision to migrate is motivated by the accession of better economic opportunities and higher wages, after he or she has calculated the costs and benefits of moving (King and Christou, 2008). Migration can thus be said to result from decisions made by 'rational actors' who evaluate the pros and cons of migrating relative to remaining in their country (King, 2012). In this scheme, international migration is conceptualized as a form of investment in human capital where individuals decide to migrate in places they can

maximize their economic productivity given their abilities and skills¹. Before so, they must invest in the costs related to traveling, maintaining themselves while moving and looking for a new job, or the efforts required to learn new languages and/or cultures, and most importantly, the psychological costs of having to cut old ties and create new ones (Borjas, 1989).

Critical observations on neoclassical approaches have been abundant. Although neoclassic theories are frequently acknowledged to have their 'own internal logic and elegant simplicity' (Malmberg, 1997:29), it is also common to read about its shortages. Indeed, deemed to be too deterministic and functionalist, the model neglects the incorporation of historical perspectives, rendering it less viable and secluded from the evolving realities of migration since the 1970s, in the post-oil crisis era (King, 2012). Arango (2004) formulated another issue related to the neoclassical theories' failure to clarify, first, the reasons for the number of migrants to be so low in comparison to non-migrants, despite the reasons explained above (economic incentives, mostly); and second, the reasons why some countries with the same economic structures have different rates of out-migration when they should be similar (Arango, 2004:19-20; Massey et al., 2010). Some other noticeable shortcomings encouraged academics to seek further theoretical frameworks; such as (1) the lack of consideration for family, personal or social-cultural factors²; (2) the failure to recognize the political realities that induce the apparition of barriers to international migration; (3) and taking into account the diverse colonialism histories that connected core countries with their peripheries. Finally, evidence around the world does not support the idea that wage differentials are the main reason behind international migration, because it would imply that the poorest would want to move first, however, it discards people's conditions and plenty of other factors.

Numerous contemporary studies have been applying these theories, illustrating them with empirical evidence focusing on the second generation ethnic "return" migration to their parental homeland. For instance, Tsuda (2009c; 2009d) contends that migration commences with macro-economic pressures as he seizes the myth claiming that

¹ Theoretically, migrants go where their expected net returns are greatest.

² See Lee's (1966) revision of Ravenstein's Laws of Migration.

diasporic “return” migration is mainly caused by sentimental factors. Indeed, Tsuda affirms that the root cause of ethnic “return” migration remains largely economic in nature (either due to push or pull factors, or a combination of both); this being especially evident when the country of emigration is less economically developed than the country of immigration. This view is supported by many other empirical studies, such as the case of second (and subsequent) generation Korean-Chinese born in China (also called *Chosŏnjok*) returning to South Korea (Song, 2009; Hong et al., 2012), and the case of *nikkeijin*'s³ ethnic “return” migration from Brazil or Peru to Japan (Tsuda, 1999, 2003, 2009c, 2010; Phillips, 2007; Takenaka, 2009). Their study of returning *nikkeijin* to Japan revealed that the persistently crumbling and hyper-inflating Brazilian economy beginning in the early 1980s pushed the *nikkeijin* to seek better economic opportunities by returning to their ancestral land. Tsuda (2003) and Phillips (2007) showed that during the same period, Japan’s bubble economy was growing expansively, offering favorable work (and salaries) opportunities. Economically-motivated transnational migration within Europe also occurs across regions and time periods, as demonstrated by Klekowski von Koppenfels’ (2009) research on second generation *Aussiedler*⁴ who are moving from less economically developed East European regions to the more prosperous Germany. Senegalese circular migration between Senegal and Italy depicted by Sinatti (2011, 2014) exemplifies the economic drivers of migration, concluding that in most cases, economic factors result in the impossibility for Senegalese migrants to resettle permanently in their homeland.

However, it is important to note that economic reasons remain key factors of migration, even when migrants move from a developed nation to another, as in the case of second generation Finnish-Swedes returning to Sweden (Hedberg, 2009). In some other instances, while still being driven by macro-economic motives, ethnic “return” migration occurs from “traditionally” economically developed countries to seemingly developing ones. The best illustration of this situation so far is that of second generation Americans of Indian descent returning to India, as portrayed by Jain (2011, 2012) and Chacko (2007) in their studies on highly-skilled and university-educated remigrants to India. The push and pull combination of the American economy slowing down and India’s high-

³ Descendants of overseas Japanese.

⁴ Descendants of German migrants returning migration from Eastern Europe to Germany.

speed development has incited American-Indian descendants to perform ethnic “return” migration to Bangalore, Mumbai, New Delhi or Hyderabad, Indian’s high-tech global cities with knowledge-based activities. Moreover, highly-skilled workers tend to be attracted to and thrive in cities that provide a cosmopolitan environment (Yeoh and Chang, 2001), which global cities are, and second generation American-Indian returnees make no exception of this statement as they are pulled by the new growth and employment opportunities while in parallel, the United States’ IT industry is deteriorating (Chacko, 2007:131; Jain, 2012).

When it comes to Western-born second generation Chinese ethnic remigration to China, taking into consideration the global economic context is key to understanding the implications of the neoclassical economics’ theory to this specific population. China’s rising competitiveness in the world’s economy and its attractive professional opportunities (compared to the saturated job markets in the West that were suffering from the economic crisis) have been accompanied with increasing migrant flows to China. Moreover, to a similar extent to Jain and Chacko’s studies, China’s main international megacities also entice highly-skilled overseas compatriots who view the ancestral homeland as an attractive pool of professional opportunities.

2.2.2. Socio-ethnic push and pulls

Although it is primarily rooted in macro-economic factors, multiple studies have demonstrated that ethnic “return” migration could be triggered by sociological factors. In his study on ethnic unmixing (or ethnic affinity), Brubaker (1998:1047) distinguished the two connotations ethnicity carries with regards to migration. At the point of origin, ethnicity is associated to conflict, a sociological push factor which ethnic migrants get away from. At the point of destination (i.e. the ancestral country), ethnicity is regarded as an affinity, or a pull factor. Ethnic conflict as a migration trigger has already been well-documented in the literature on forced migration flows for example, and does not fail to show that ethnic conflicts may be highly politicized, often exceeding mere socio-cultural disagreements (Child, 1943; Marrus, 1985; Govers and Vermeulen, 1997; Wihtol de Wenden, 2013a). As mentioned, this thesis does not focus on forced but on voluntary ethnic migration.

Racism and discrimination as sociological push factors

In the case of second generation ethnic remigrants, as they were born and raised in a host society which racial majority differed from their own, issues related to racism and discrimination may act as strong social push factors, and nurture potential remigrants' wish to relocate to their ancestral homeland⁵. Characterized by both macro and micro-levels of social relations (Omi and Winant, 1986:66-8), racism may affect the second generation, often labeled as (sometimes visible) minorities in their birth country. Potter and Phillips (2006) also comment on issues related to race in England influencing Bajan-Brits' (second generation Barbadians born and raised in the United Kingdom) decision to "return" migrate to Barbados, in the Lesser Antilles, pointing out that Bajan-Brits were racialized as a visible minority in England. Similarly, Korean-Americans descendants continue to be stigmatized as non-white foreigners in America, despite their high concentration around the coastal areas⁶. As a result, they have developed a romanticized understanding of their parental land, identifying South Korea as the place they truly belong as ethnic and racial insiders, triggering a desire to return to their ancestral homeland (Kim, 2009:309). Similarly, Judy Cooper (2014) retells the narratives of Nabeweya White, a social worker of African descent in Scotland experiencing straightforward racism from her colleagues on a regular basis⁷. Despite her having a Masters' degree in Equality and Discrimination, her being simply of African descent dismissed her twenty years of experience as a social worker (abroad), with her suggestions at work being ignored. Therefore, unwelcoming societies discriminating minorities accompanied with daily micro-level experiences of racism may therefore explain ethnic remigration.

⁵ Considerations to relocate to the ethnic homeland may be especially strong if its economic performance and professional opportunities are attracting.

⁶ Being racialized as a foreigner despite being born and entirely raised in the United States was even more difficult to deal with in states like Kansas or Texas, where there is a prominent majority of Caucasian residents.

⁷ Judy Cooper (2014) retold the narrative shared by White: "I worked in a voluntary fostering service and one of the foster carers said very flippantly 'I can't remember your name, so I just decided to call you Simba'. The agency's way of dealing with this was to simply laugh it off. There was no discussion with the carer acknowledging this was a racist act."

In line with the above argument but to a different level, are the examples of Indonesians and Malaysians of Chinese origin: victims of institutional racism and discrimination⁸, these Chinese minorities returned to China overwhelmingly to outflow their marginalization instituted by Malaysian and Indonesian discriminating policies (Richardson, 1998). For instance, the Malay-controlled government established policies of positive discrimination in favor of the ethnic Malay majority, in crucial areas such as finance, housing and education (Brant, 2009). On the other hand, the Indonesian government implemented a number of laws discriminating against Indonesians of Chinese descents, and the riots of May 1998 targeting Chinese minorities resulted in nearly half a million of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia to 'return' to China over the years since the first discriminatory law was implemented to escape violence and marginalization (Wang, 2009).

Shared ethnicity as a pull factor

If second generation "return" migration is rooted in macro-level socio-economic factors, ethnic affinities tend to influence the directionality of the migrants' flow to the parental land (Tsuda, 2009d). According to general pre-established assumptions that ethnic "return" migration occurs because of sentimental reasons (i.e. individuals longing nostalgically to return and rediscover their roots buried or lost during the assimilation into the dominant culture of their birth country), Wessendorf (2007, 2008) introduced the concept of roots migration, stressing on the second generation remigrants' necessity to return to the place where they truly feel they belong to, their ancestral land. In contrast to the above arguments, roots migration puts the emphasis on ethno-racial motivations to explain ethnic "return" migration rather than on economic factors. Indeed, contradicting classic migration theories, according to Wessendorf, roots migration as performed by second generation Italian-Swiss to Southern Italy is not motivated by financial reasons. Quite the opposite, despite less favorable economic and structural conditions in the destination country, "return" migration is a product of

⁸ I decided to incorporate the circumstances of Malaysian and Indonesian Chinese as *voluntary* migratory movements back to China insofar as their 'persecutions' and discriminations are indirect in most cases unlike extreme cases such as the Jewish communities in Europe being exterminated in the middle of the 20th century.

nostalgic feelings towards their parental land, nurtured by strong transnational links during childhood and adolescence (Wessendorf, 2008:15). Precisely, second generation Italians born in Switzerland strongly associate their identity to their co-ethnics', as growing up, they cultivated transnational ties to their parents' country. As they are celebrating, embracing and fostering *Italianità* (Italianness), some choose to relocate to their ancestral land as if they had been affected by their own parents' nostalgia for their homeland. Despite unfavorable conditions in Southern Italian villages, these ethnic "return" migrants still view their ancestral villages to be appealing alternatives to their Swiss lives. In view of this finding, Wessendorf conceptualized this form of remigration as "roots migration", precisely because of its distinctive nostalgic characteristic (Wessendorf, 2007). The distinguishing nostalgic feature of roots migration among second generation remigrants somehow mirrors Basu's (2004; 2007) notion of "roots tourism", which designates North American tourists visiting their ancestral land in Scotland. Researching their roots in a quest for homecoming, belonging and identity, these individuals thus perform heritage tourism (Basu, 2004:151). Andrea Louie (2001; 2004) also visits the concept of –group-organized– roots tourism in her study of Chinese-Americans in China retracing their roots in their ancestral villages. Roots tourists and migrants are thus shown to seek places that could provide them with a sense of belonging (Wessendorf, 2008:15). Nevertheless, unlike roots tourists, roots migrants' links to their parental land rest upon active and concrete transnational participation in their daily lives.

It is worth noting that in Wessendorf' study, ethnic remigrants relocate to Southern Italy in the same region –if not villages– wherefrom their parents originated, which emphasizes the underlying nostalgic aspect of their remigration. Comparatively, Jain's (2012) study on second generation Indian Americans "return" migration to India introduces remigrants whose relocation is directed to a *country* in general, and not necessarily to their ancestors' exact *hometown* or *village*. Unlike their Italian-Swiss counterparts, second generation Indian Americans "return" migrate to *India*, but prefer larger cities with denser economic activities thus better employment prospects. This observation shows that in the case of second generation Italian Swiss, economic motives for migration are overshadowed by ethnic motives imbued with nostalgia; which contradicts Tsuda's earlier argument stating that ethnic "return" migration is principally

caused by economic factors (Tsuda, 2009b; 2009d). Nonetheless, it is important to note that roots migration is not only prompted by nostalgic feelings. Wessendorf does specify that roots migrants also take socio-economic conditions and choice of partners into consideration.

This sentimental theme revolving around the second generations' apparent necessity to reconnect with their roots is further represented in recent studies involving other ethnic groups. For example, Hedberg (2009) observed that the ethnic Swedish Finns minority in Finland performed ethnic "return" migration primarily because of the linguistic and cultural affinities they harbored for their neighboring homeland, and not purely for economic purposes. Similarly, Jain (2012) demonstrated that second generation Americans of Indian descent wished to reconnect and develop a personal and independent relationship with India, as opposed to the 'forced' family visits during summer when they were younger. Reynolds' (2008; 2009) study on second generation British-Caribbean "returning" to their parental land also shows that their internally formed ethnic identity and understanding of home and belonging influenced their decision to remigrate in addition to practical and pragmatic personal reasons. Finally, as mentioned above, second generation Korean-Americans' idealized and romanticized view of their ancestral land prompts them to relocate to South Korea, where they share the same racial features as the ethnic majority (Kim, 2009).

2.2.3. Why do people stay?

It is interesting to note that Wessendorf's study on second generation Italian Swiss makes use of a seemingly common yet remarkable methodology worth pointing out: building on qualitative and ethnographic research methods, Wessendorf combined participant observation and 23 life stories interviews with second generation Italian Swiss returnees in Southern Italy, and conducted another 28 interviews with second generation Italian Swiss who remained in Switzerland (Wessendorf, 2008:4-5). Her findings thus shed light not only on the issue of second generation "returnees" but also on the ones who stayed. If remigrants are motivated by nostalgic reasons, her findings show that the large majority of second generation's everyday lives are not affected by their migrant origins. This is partly explained by their geographical location and school

environments where their social networks are dominated by non-Italian descents. Consequently, this proportion of second generation Italian Swiss considers that although they maintain more or less strong transnational ties with Italy, “they feel clearly rooted in Switzerland, and feel at home where they grew up. Hence, they have no intention to relocate to Southern Italy” (Ibid., 3.).

This may seem contradictory to the very essence of migration studies insofar as movement is supposedly a core characteristic of migration. Here however, Wessendorf also addresses issues related to the lack of such movement, to sedentary lifestyles in migration studies. This not only enables a better understanding of the reasons why remigrants perform roots migration, but it also provides explanations on the reasons why people choose not to migrate, which is often neglected in migration studies. Although the focus of her study clearly points towards the “returnees”, Wessendorf’s methodology therefore indirectly refers to the ‘Immobility Paradox’ (Malmberg, 1997:21-22) which focuses on individuals who do not migrate, thus joining the small group of scholars discussing the question of immobility in migration studies⁹. In brief, the immobility paradox calls attention to the vast majority of people who do not migrate despite the economic models, based on push and pull, which predicts that they *should* go (King, 2012:5). We should note however, that Lee (1966) pointed out in early studies that there could be ‘pull’ factors in the natal land that retains people from migrating, which could be personal factors related to comfort and familiarity, fear of the unknown or external macro-level obstacles.

2.2.4. Summary

This section reviewed the theoretical and empirical literature on second generation ethnic “return” migration by focusing primarily on the causes triggering relocation to the ethnic homeland. Neoclassical theories of migration –more particularly with regards to the push and pull theory– suggest that economic motives are the main reasons for migration, which applies to ethnic “return” migration, and is supported by empirical studies demonstrating that job opportunities in the ethnic homeland matter in the

⁹ For more, see Hammar and Tamas (1997), Fischer et al. (1997) and Malmberg (1997).

decision-making process. In contrast, socio-ethnic factors are also to be taken into consideration, and consist of relevant migration triggers insofar as ethnicity can both act as a push and pull relocation factor. A final point was raised vis-à-vis the immigration paradox, which scholars tend to overlook.

2.3. Processes and facilitators encouraging ethnic “return” migration

Because migration studies generally involve interdisciplinary approaches and perspectives linking at least institutional, economic and sociological aspects among others (De Jong and Gardner, 1981; Brettell and Hollifield, 2000; Anderson and Keith, 2014), this part aims to understand how second generation ethnic “return” migration functions. After considering the causes behind this return movement in the previous section, I first delve into the literature to assess what it says on macro-level ethnic “return” migration policies acting as facilitators of migration. Second, I examine the underlying processes of second generation remigration, focusing on the role and impact of meso-level social networks (Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993; Portes, 1995, 1998; Faist, 1997).

2.3.1. Policies directed at overseas coethnics

The goal here is not to list all the existing laws and policies encouraging ethnic “return” migration to the homeland, nor to analyze the policies implemented by each country to attract potential returnees. This part aims to understand the rationale behind the measures that homeland governments established, and assess how in some cases, they resulted in the returns of foreign coethnics. On macro-institutional levels, immigration policies with ethnic preferences have already been discussed widely in the literature, more particularly regarding homeland governments opting for preferential treatment and policies specifically targeting their overseas coethnics when setting up immigration policies for example by facilitating access to citizenship for foreign coethnics¹⁰ or other

¹⁰ Or “ethnic kin”, as termed by Brubaker (1998:1047).

forms of privileged immigration programs (Klekowski and Ohliger, 1997; Brubaker, 1998).

Joppke (2005) demonstrated that European countries generally justify ethnic preference policies by accentuating that (1) they should express their duty in view of their common historical culture, and (2) they should fulfill their duty to protect their ethnic brethren from foreign persecution, even though it implies that the local nationals have to carry the economic burden of such costly measures. In line with Joppke's conclusions, Skrentny et al. (2007) further developed the topic, arguing that if European countries are driven by humanitarian and protectionist incentives by facilitating their coethnics' immigration in the country, East Asian countries, on the other hand, have more instrumental purposes when establishing preferential migration policies geared towards coethnics. However, the authors posit that both European and Asian countries' rationales for developing such policies rest on the belief that coethnics would assimilate into the host society more simply and smoothly compared to other foreigners of different origins, which would therefore be less likely to disrupt their societies.

Humanitarian rationale

Studies of preferential immigration policies towards coethnics revealed that countries such as Germany, Italy, Spain, Greece, and Ireland¹¹, which diasporas are known to have largely scattered abroad, also have high levels of diasporic "return" migrants (Cerase, 1974; King, 1988; Christou, 2006; King and Thomson, 2008; Cook-Martín and Viladrich, 2009). Skrentny et al. (2009) observed that along with other Eastern European countries, the considerations of coethnics in immigration policies and access to citizenship of these nations are particularly prominent and straightforward (p.44).

¹¹ Although France and Britain are key migrant-receiving countries (with estimated net migration of 650 000 and 900 000 respectively for each, between 2010 and 2014, while Germany, Spain and Italy's net migration was of 550 000; 600 000 and 900 000 for the same period (World Bank, 2012)), they were deliberately omitted in this literature review insofar as these are two former colonial countries which relationship between the states and their colonies was not based on racial ethnic affinities (Skrentny et al., 2009:57).

In the case of Germany, because such preferential policies were already firmly rooted in the nation's development due to historical events, they resulted in several millions of coethnics to take advantage of such opportunities to relocate to their ancestral land, mostly from Eastern Europe, where they had settled for generations. Klekowski von Koppenfels (2009) further remarks that the majority of these returning communities called *Aussiedler* mostly emigrated from nearby countries such as Romania and Poland, a geographical extension of Eastern Germany subsequent to the Iron Curtain. Germany's ethnic preferential policies granted citizenship automatically to ethnic Germans foreign nationals, even to those who had never even visited Germany, in ways loosely similar to Spain granting citizenship to its Argentinians ethnic returnees (Cook-Martín and Viladrich, 2009). As a result, German natives and government committed to the economic burden involved to *help* the "returnees": education programs, housing allowances, business assistance, pensions, and other advantages. The German government's rationale behind those policies can thus be qualified as altruistic, as it aimed to protect its coethnics from foreign persecution. The combination of the negative environment in their natal land with such attractive options provided by their ethnic homeland led to massive ethnic German returns. The protectionist characteristic of ethnic preferential policies is especially salient in the case of Jews "returning" to Israel. Remennick's (2009) analysis on second and later generations Russian Jews' ethnic "return" to Israel offers an interesting perspective on a nation's ethnic migrant policies, as the underlying aspiration of nation-building is omnipresent in Israeli migration policies. Therefore, ethnic affinity, sense of national duty to repopulate a land, ease of entry and settlement in the ancestral homeland resulted in overwhelming return movements from Jewish people around the world, with a significant proportion from Russia.

Instrumental rationale

In contrast with the above immigration policies' rationale, Asian ethnic "return" migration policies tend to be more economically driven, and serve an instrumental purpose. Moreover, these countries' policies seldom give such a straightforward access to citizenship. However, over the years, to attract their foreign coethnics to return and invest capital in their ancestral homeland, governments have simplified visas

applications and renewal for returning coethnics. These statements are supported by the studies below.

In their study on ethnic Korean “return” migrants from China to South Korea, Hong et al. (2012) demonstrated that in the 1990s, to remedy the issue of bride shortage in rural areas, the South Korean government released a number of policies to entice *Chosŏnjok* (ethnic Koreans from China) women to become brides in South Korea. To facilitate the process, the government introduced the Residence Visa scheme in the early 2000s, allowing marriage migrants to work legally. The policy later on evolved, permitting marriage migrants to invite their family to Korea, and eventually, to obtain citizenship (p. 30). Subsequently, a large wave of *Chosŏnjok* seeking better economic opportunities migrated to South Korea¹², where they could earn up to twenty times more than in China, despite having low-skilled jobs. In consonance with Hong’ research, Song (2009:284) debates on *Chosŏnjok*’s ethnic “return” migration, motivated by nostalgic images of Korea, as an ethnic minority in China that has preserved Korean cultural traditions very closely. Similarly, when Japan attempted to solve low-skilled labor shortages in the 1980s and 1990s, it implemented a set of preferential migration policies targeting its Japanese diaspora to minimize the disruption of national ethnic homogeneity. As a result, many *nikkeijin* in Brazil and Peru responded to the policy, choosing to relocate to Japan. *Nisei* and *sansei*¹³ quit their white-collar jobs in Brazil, opting for harsh and low-skilled in Japan, where the salaries were much more attractive (Phillips, 2007; Tsuda, 2003, 2009c, 2010; Takenaka, 2009).

If in the cases of South Korea or Japan, policymakers rely on their overseas coethnics to perform the so-called 3D jobs¹⁴; China’s immigration policy however, seems to differ radically. Although China’s purposes are also indisputably economic, Chinese

¹² In 1993, there were 1500 *Chosŏnjok* migrant brides returnees in South Korea. By 2006, their number increased to 31 000. Since then, there has been a slowdown, but *Chosŏnjok* still represent a large proportion of marriage migrants in South Korea (Hong, 2012:30).

¹³ *Nisei* and *sansei*, respectively the second and third generations of *nikkeijin*, in contrast to *issei*, the first generation.

¹⁴ *3D jobs* refer to the dirty, difficult and dangerous job positions shunned by the local population whose educational level increased, therefore aiming for better positions (Skrentny et al. 2009). Japanese and Korean societies then consisted of segmented labor markets.

policymakers target the wealthy and highly-skilled overseas coethnics, similarly to India. Indeed, Chacko (2007) explicates in her study how the Indian government resorted to special measures to attract its overseas coethnics, especially the highly-skilled ones from the United States and England. Even though the targeted migrant flow is relatively small, this specific group is highly regarded by both the Indian authorities and nationals as “high profile resources that are welcomed back” (p.134). To entice these “returns”, the Indian government thus implemented a series of laws and new tax rules to encourage Indian citizens living abroad (non-resident Indians) to remit home. Moreover, restrictions related to visa applications and renewals, investments and home purchasing by foreign nationals of Indian descent were largely improved in addition to many other favorable social policies and economic programs, all to attract the highly-skilled Indians abroad. These policies were set in the wider frame of promoted ideologies supporting an Asian Indian identity in its co-nationals abroad as well as economic and sociocultural with the home country (Ibid.). In line with Chacko, Jain (2012) found that India’s simplification of visa application for returnees and the beneficial policies instituted in the homeland in their favor influenced their decision to relocate, as the practical obstacles were removed, making it simpler for them to “return”.

Finally, in view of the increasing curiosity and need of descendants of migrants to visit their ancestral land, travel agencies and even governments have been offering new travel plans to popularize the idea of roots tourism (see Basu, 2004). For instance, the local government of Uttar Pradesh, a region located in the Northern part of India, launched a website promoting roots tourism, offering the possibility to “rediscover roots and heritage” to migrants’ descendants¹⁵ (Uttar Pradesh Tourism, n.d.). This strategy to promote a beautified homeland to entice wealthier Indian Americans (among others) to visit, and ultimately relocate permanently to India is also discussed by Chacko (2007) and Jain (2011, 2012).

¹⁵ A variant of roots tourism is called “slave tourism”, which again, has been popularized over the past decade, targeting descendants of slaves deported to the Americas in the sixteenth century from West African countries. Targeting mostly African-Americans, the government of Ghana, Sierra Leone and other countries where slavery originated, are investing efforts into promoting roots tourism, hoping to attract more tourists and also to perpetuate the memory of slavery by reconnecting descents to their ancestral lands (Newton, 2014). In this case, the governments’ strategy is to reconnect its people by stressing historical ties and empathy.

Enticing overseas Chinese coethnics to China

If China tends to be scrutinized by migration scholars who focus on it as a country of international emigration (Wang, 2013; Wang and Bao, 2015; Xiang, 2016), and even though China is not known for being a country of immigration, it does record a significant number of foreigners, growing each year (Pieke, 2012). As of today, no official data enables determining the number of Western-born Chinese ethnic remigrants in China (even approximately) because they are registered as foreigners, and are only categorized by nationality in censuses, without their ethnicity being recorded. According to the 2010 Population Census, the foreign population in China was 593,832¹⁶ (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2011), and despite doubling in numbers since 2000¹⁷, the number only represents 0.1% of the overall population size of 1.4 billion. Among those foreign citizens, only about a tenth originate from developed countries (United Nations, 2013; 2014). Skrentny et al. (2009) note that China's official figure of 30 million returnees is much larger. However, this number includes Chinese people ranging from Chinese nationals who have lived for a time overseas (including students), to those of interest for this study (ethnic Chinese of foreign nationality).

In the meantime, China has implemented policies to attract highly-skilled foreigners to invest and work in China, by facilitating their visa and residence permit application processes since 2012. Aiming to be a global talent hub by 2022, China also developed a recruitment program of global talents called the Thousand Talents Plan, which attracted more than 6,000 experts from around the world since its introduction in late 2008 (Shi, 2017). China also has paid closer attention to its overseas Chinese communities, working ways to attract its foreign coethnics back to the ethnic homeland. Targeting more particularly the wealthy and/or skilled overseas brethren, Skrentny et al. (2007) nonetheless observed that while technically, the majority of the policies directed at overseas Chinese call for the investments and return of overseas Chinese co-nationals, in parallel, Chinese official statements also tend to include foreign coethnics to contribute

¹⁶ Recent studies estimate the number of foreigners in China to have increased to 848,500 in 2013, with South Koreans generally representing a quarter of the foreign population, followed by Americans and Japanese nationals, with no specification regarding their ethnicity (CCG, 2015).

¹⁷ 508,034 foreign citizens in China in 2000 (United Nations, 2014).

to the reinforcement of the patria. This can be attributed to the Chinese belief that considers overseas Chinese to be temporary migrants (or sojourners) who should therefore remain loyal to China, justified on the basis that “once a Chinese always a Chinese” (Cheng and Katz, 1998; Cheng, 2003; Skrentny et al., 2007).

Hence, in October 1949, the Chinese state created the Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission (OCAC, *qiaoban*) to encourage remittances from its overseas coethnics to China (Thuno, 2001). However, during the Cultural Revolution, the authorities became antagonistic against and persecuted overseas Chinese and their family in China, until the authorities decided to reinstate the OCAC in 1974 as policymakers began realizing the potential resources overseas Chinese could bring to the nation (Cheng and Katz, 1998; Bolt, 2000). Indeed, when the government declared that economic development was to become China’s central priority, the authorities turned their attention to their Chinese compatriots abroad, believing they would provide the necessary funds to “start the economic engine” (Zhuang, 2013:36-7). In 1977, the state thus abolished the persecution policies as Deng Xiaoping incorporated Overseas Chinese Affairs (*qiaowu*) into the official agenda. This later resulted in the reestablishment of the All China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese¹⁸ (ACFROC, *qiaolian*), an analogous non-governmental organization parallel to the OCAC which purpose is to “build a bridge out of overseas Chinese connections” (*yi qiao da qiao*) (Barabantseva, 2005:10-11).

Nevertheless, it was not until 1990 that the Chinese government passed a law guaranteeing the protection of overseas Chinese returnees. The “Law of the People’s Republic of China on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Returned Overseas Chinese and the Family of Overseas Chinese (Nation People’s Congress Standing Committee (Presidential Order No. 33), 1990) represents the very first major legal step taken by China to encourage its overseas coethnics to return to their motherland. This law’s main objective was that of reconciliation with the overseas Chinese citizens formerly harassed under the Qing rule and during the Cultural Revolution. The law also promised overseas Chinese returnees “the recognition of their full Chinese citizenship, protection from injustices experienced in the past, and even some preferential

¹⁸ The ACFROC was originally created in 1956 but its activities were suspended during the Cultural Revolution.

educational and investment opportunities” (Skrentny et al., 2007:803-804). The advantageous treatment in terms of investment and education displayed China’s efforts to attract the wealthy and highly-skilled migrants. Although this law seemed to be applicable to Chinese citizens only, internal documents issued by the State Council on meetings occurring in 1989, evidenced the Chinese government’s determination to focus on wealthy, professional and highly skilled overseas Chinese. Since then, the Chinese state has been so proactive in its efforts to draw in overseas Chinese investments and to entice returns that almost all local governments now have an OCAO (Ibid., 805.). Under the ACFROC, over 2,000 structures were founded in 29 localities across China, complemented by 8,000 affiliated organizations at lower administrative levels (Thuno, 2001:916). All these offices were designed to entice Chinese abroad to contribute to China’s development with more than 360 laws and regulation established by the Chinese People’s Congress, and close to 800 by the State Council (Bolt, 2000). As Barabantseva (2005) argues, China soliciting its overseas Chinese brethren to play a part in its socialist modernization has done so on the basis “that they are part of China’s family and that China’s interests are also their interests” (p. 12).

Similarly to South Korea and Japan, China avoids granting citizenship as a reward, even to its foreign coethnics, but uses instead “an in-between status of privileged foreigners” to incent investment or “return” to the homeland (Skrentny et al., 2007:805). China thus created a “Chinese Green Card” in 2004 to attract wealthy investors and highly skilled foreigners. At the end of 2015, a variant especially targeting foreign coethnics called the “*Huayi* Card” surfaced in the press, speculating that foreigners of Chinese descent could apply to the card scheme, and enjoy similar rights to Chinese citizens, such as free circulation in and out of China, and have more options in areas such as housing, education, investment, or even to use in hospitals or to book train tickets online for instance (Li, 2016; SCMP, 2017). However, very few Green Cards are granted each year, and the requirements to apply for it successfully are still very high. Moreover, to date, the *Huayi* Card scheme has still not been officialized, and remains an uncertainty among the potential beneficiaries. The main reason behind the *Huayi* Card initiative is to entice talents to “return” to the motherland. In doing so, the authorities hope to facilitate the administrative procedures related to visa application but also improving their daily life (since the *Huayi* card supposedly acts in ways similar to the Chinese identity card).

Shared ancestry being an essential criterion when applying for the *Huayi* card, the underlying ideas of ethnic similarity and belonging are geared to, and instrumental to “encouraging an attitude of loyalty and devotion to China’s development, though with a longer timeframe” (Choe, 2003, cited in Skrentny et al., 2009:56).

On the other hand, Louie (2000; 2001) notes that to appeal to overseas Chinese descendants, China has been organizing summer youth festivals and camps, designed to instill an emotional attachment to the country and culture, focusing mostly on ethno-racial grounds and ancestral heritage more than on political ones. However, other scholars argue that such programs are instrumentalized to nurture nationalism within Chinese diasporic youth, for them to develop loyalty to the ethnic homeland, and eventually engage in a further initiative to support China’s development –again, even if it means on a longer run (Choe, 2003; Xiang, 2016).

2.3.2. Meso-level migration networks

Moving on from macro-level institutional facilitators, the literature on second generation ethnic “return” migration also gravitates towards meso-level agents’ roles in the relocation process. The study of the relationship between social networks and migration was first carried out by Massey et al. (1993; 1999) and Boyd (1989). Building on migration networks, Faist (1997) further introduced the idea of a “crucial meso-level”, which is an intermediary level between the micro-level individualistic framework of migration studies, and macro-level structural set of constraints and opportunities in migration (Faist, 1997:247-8). The crucial meso-level thus involves mid-scale units, such as households, extended families, kinship and social networks to link individual decision-making to larger social structures.

Social networks are widely discussed in the literature, described as a good foundation and starting point for information sharing and dissemination among migrants from both origin and destination countries (Faist, 1997; Haug, 2008; King, 2012). Networks thus provide a frame wherein mutual assistance and patronage can take place during the process of migration, reducing risks and costs related to the relocation. Reynolds’ (2008, 2009) study on British Caribbean returnees shows for example how transnational family

ties along with other migrant social networks simplify such processes. The case of *Chosŏnjok* migrants from China to South Korea also demonstrates the importance of social capital in the migration process when for example, *Chosŏnjok* migrants are required to provide an invitation letter from their South Korean relatives when applying for visas to enter the territory. Those unable to fulfill this requirement need to resort to brokers if they do not wish to migrate illegally (Song, 2009; Hong et al., 2012).

Migrant networks are revealed to be especially important to facilitate arrival, provide practical information for day to day activities, but also to prevent social isolation once in the ethnic homeland. As it will be discussed in the next section, socio-ethnic marginalization affects ethnic "returnees'" migration experience, and their alienation may eventually trigger their decision to leave the ethnic homeland to re-return where their social capital is more substantial. Haug (2008; 2012) supports these arguments in her study on Italian remigration to Germany, wherein she demonstrates how social capital in the countries of origin and destination impact on the returnees' decision to migrate and to stay. Her findings show that the existence or lack of social capital in the sending and receiving countries are directly correlated to the migrants' decision to migrate (Haug, 2008:588-9). The author also notes that circular migrants pertaining to social networks and repeatedly moving between countries may have a multiplier effect, and eventually generate a migration chain insofar as former, "current", and potential migrants are connected through interpersonal relations, further strengthening existing social networks. Prospective migrants can thus benefit from such networks and transnational communities, especially the ones already well set in the destination country (Boyd, 1989; Haug, 2008). To be sure, the literature has profusely discussed the importance of social networks in migrants' plans and their role in directing the migration flow concluding that social networks influence migration decision-making and processes significantly (Banerjee, 1983; Fawcett, 1989; Wilpert, 1992; Böcker, 1994). For example, Tsuda (2003; 2009) has shown how Brazilian *nikkeijin* back to Brazil who had worked in Japan tended to exaggerate the benefits of remigrating to Japan, downplaying the hardship experienced in the ethnic homeland. This contributed to incent younger *nikkeijins* to try their luck to succeed, and ethnic "return" migrated to Japan, causing a chain migration building with each remigrant extending this network.

2.3.3. Summary

This section discussed the processes behind ethnic “return” migration by looking at macro and meso facilitators of ethnic “return”. First, I looked at homeland governments’ motives behind the implementation of ethnic remigration policies. While some countries call for their diasporic peoples have a humanitarian rationale, some other governments resort to their diasporas to boost or remedy internal socioeconomic situations, usually preferring them to other foreigners, whether it be to preserve ethnic homogeneity, or based on the belief that diasporic “returnees” would assimilate more easily. It can be noted also that if some governments are more concerned with their coethnics’ cultural authenticity, others may give more importance to racial authenticity¹⁹. Skrentny et al. (2007) observed the contrast in policies, and stated that if in Europe for example, governments exist to help their coethnics abroad, in Asia, the obligation direction is reversed: instead of the state providing help to its diasporic peoples, the diasporic brethren should help strengthen the ethnic homeland (p. 795). Clearly, in China ethnic preference policies were implemented to so that foreign coethnics could contribute to the nation’s economic development. Finally, macro-level networks play an important role in facilitating ethnic migration.

2.4. Ethnic “return” and identity changes

After returning to their putative homeland, diasporic remigrants are often disillusioned with the reality of their new every day. Numerous qualitative studies have abundantly recounted the negative experiences resulting from ethnic “return” migration, retelling narratives wherein “returnees” experienced belittling, status degradation, as well as rejection from the host society (Potter and Phillips, 2006; Fox, 2009; Kim, 2009; Klekowski von Koppenfeld, 2009; Remennick, 2009; Reynolds, 2009; Song, 2009; Takenaka, 2009; Tsuda, 1999; 2003; 2009; Sinatti, 2011; Hong et al., 2012). This section thus aims to review the common traits of the portraits depicted in the literature wherein negative experiences and alienation in the ethnic homeland led ethnic remigrants to reevaluate

¹⁹ This corresponds to Hong’s (2012) dichotomic analysis of identity perception between primordialist and circumstantialist understanding of identity formation, which will be discussed in the later chapters.

their ethnic identity and belonging. The purpose of this section is not to list or retell all the negative experiences encountered by ethnic “returnees” but first to examine the ways in which these experiences resulted in economic, socio-cultural, and ethnic marginalization, and second, to understand how the literature sees ethnic identity re-evaluations following alienation. In the final part, I review what the literature says about the differences experienced by ethnic remigrants based on their country of emigration.

2.4.1. Marginalization

Despite governments holding warm discourses welcoming ethnic “returnees”, the reality for them is different since they experience multiple forms of marginalization when encountering the new host society. Indeed, most studies argue that their local coethnics consider them as foreigners regardless of their shared ancestry and bloodline. As such, counter-diasporic migration, as termed by King and Christou (2008), often results in socio-economic and ethno-cultural ostracism in the ethnic homeland, which is why the problems related to their integration into the host society are often comparable to the ones other immigrants face (Song, 2009; Takenaka, 2009; Tsuda, 2009c; Hong et al., 2012).

Socio-economic exclusion and downward mobility

Tsuda argues that much of the disappointment and negative experiences shared by ethnic remigrants result directly from their economic and social exclusion in the host society after “return” (Tsuda, 1999; 2003; 2009a; 2009c). His study shows that ethnic “return” migrants have to endure unskilled and degrading 3D jobs, which generates an overall unpleasant experience of homecoming. More common among those from less developed countries (in comparison to their ethnic homeland), remigrants therefore experience downward mobility insofar as the majority of them were “from relatively well educated middle-class backgrounds” (Tsuda, 2009a:331). Counter diasporic migration hence involves substantial declassing and deterioration of their previous statuses. The consequences of ethnic “return” are manifold, illustrated in many cases, such as in the relocation of Brazilian *nikkeijin* to Japan who used to be part of the “model minority” in Brazil. Despite occupying white-collar jobs before moving, most remigrants ended up

taking on low-salary factory jobs (though, in view of the economic situation in the mid-80s in Brazil, with comparatively higher salaries), with little to no benefits, accomplishing the lowest-skilled jobs shunned by local workers.

Similar instances were mentioned in the works of Song (2009) and Hong et al. (2012) on *Chosŏnjok* migrants from northern China to South Korea. Compared to many other ethnic minorities in China, the Chinese Korean minority concentrated in the Yanbian Autonomous Prefecture has enjoyed a relatively high socioeconomic status for a long time (Song, 2009:282-7). Hong et al. also shared testimonies of *Chosŏnjok* migrant brides expressing disappointment after “returning” because of their rapid status degradation. Indeed, many of the study’s respondents were holding comfortable middle-class positions as teachers, accountants, journalists, nurses or even government officials, but once they relocated to their putative homeland, most of them ended up occupying low-skilled jobs such as restaurant helpers or waitresses and housemaids (Hong et al., 2012: 49-51). In both studies, *Chosŏnjok* “returnees” struggled with their employment situations: discriminations in most cases, and constant fears due to illegal status in some cases, almost all having to work harsh immigrant jobs regarded as degrading.

Studies wherein ethnic “return” migrants experienced downward mobility were further documented in Remennick’s work on Russian Jews’ marginalization and a socio-economic downgrade in Israel. The author argues that despite their relocation being supported by important networks and significant human capital, their loss of proficiency and authenticity in Jewish culture and Hebrew language caused by decades (at least) of assimilation to Russia has resulted in a noticeable decline in professional status in Israel (Remennick, 2009). Despite being granted a legal status and privileges by virtue of racial commonality, Russian Jews ethnic remigrants’ access to the labor market was obstructed by their cultural and linguistic deficiencies.

Socio-cultural ostracism and ethnic alienation

In addition to socio-economic exclusion, ethnic "return" migrants are often subject to socio-cultural marginalization in the ancestral land. If migrants' descendants' social and cultural alienation in the birth country is an already well-documented topic, very little has been written on this form of ostracism after relocating to their parental land. Social alienation occurs as a result of ethnic remigrants' lack of cultural and linguistic competence, which itself is caused firstly by their being born and raised abroad, with greater chances of assimilation into the adopted (as opposed to inherited) culture if their family has lived overseas for multiple generations. Secondly, studies show that some ethnic "return" migrants have been subjected to (past or current) nationalist assimilation projects in their natal land, or been victim of ethnic and racial discrimination, which tends to "suppress minority culture and diasporic allegiances to the ancestral homeland" (Tsuda, 2009a:327).

For example, *Chosŏnjok* migrants' level of assimilation into Chinese culture may have prevented a smoother acculturation and integration into South Korean society because of China's own internal national assimilation policy. More precisely, the Three View Education²⁰ project carried out by the Chinese government since 2002 aimed at reinforcing Chineseness in the minds of the Chinese-Korean minority. Takenaka further illustrates this point with the example of Japanese-Peruvian ethnic "return" migrants in Japan who shared similar difficulties after moving to the ethnic homeland. Peruvian *nikkeijin*'s lack of cultural or linguistic competence was partly caused by the authorities implementing discriminatory measures in Peru, banning the use of Japanese language and activities during the Second World War (Takenaka, 2009:268). In these studies, ethnic "return" migrants' incapacity to communicate linguistically and culturally in a proficient manner in the ethnic homeland causes lapses and disruptions in ethnically homogenous countries such as Japan and South Korea. However, in such countries, racial commonality does not suffice to be accepted as coethnic brethren, but cultural

²⁰ The Three View Education assimilation policy involved (1) the view of nation, (2) the view of motherland, and (3) the view of history, teaching that "*Chosŏnjok* are Chinese, that China is their motherland, and that *Chosŏnjok* history is a part of Chinese history" (Hong et al., 2013:45).

and linguistic skills are also required for acceptance. This response is due to host natives' primordialist understanding of ethno-national identity, which sustains that (ethnic) identities are based on ascribed elements, such as shared ancestry (blood), language, and cultural affinities (religious ties in some cultural contexts). Primordialist ideologies are opposed to circumstantialist interpretations of ethnic identity, which suggest that social and political circumstances shape ethnic attachments instead of fixed elements (Hong et al., 2012:30-1). Socio-cultural and ethnic alienation thus ensue from these salient deficiencies, and many ethnic "return" migrants are not socially accepted because of strict ethno-national identities demanding that remigrants be linguistically and culturally proficient in addition to sharing racial ancestry with the host population (Tsuda, 2009a:328). Since in Japan and South Korea (and to some extent, China), primordialism is dominant and well-grounded among local coethnics, "returnees" with shared ancestry are expected to share cultural similarities as well, regardless of their place of birth (Ibid.). As such, ethnic remigrants who look ethnically similar, but who cannot speak properly and are cultural strangers, risk being measured against local standards and being stigmatized as inadequate (Tsuda, 2003; Kwon, 2006; Kim, 2009; Song, 2009). Fox (2009) further illustrates this case with the example of ethnic "returnees" from Romania to Hungary whose migration experience is affected negatively because of their economic and social marginalization in the ethnic homeland. Additionally, in spite of shared Hungarian ancestry with the local populace, they are being disrespected and disparaged as unskilled and uneducated *Romanians*, as they are denied shared ethnic identity and belonging with the host majority. In contrast, Potter and Phillips' (2006) study on Bajan-Brits shows that ethnic "return" migrants benefit from privileged statuses based on their symbolic "whiteness" (as migrants from Britain), despite their salient ethnic markers. This nevertheless stigmatizes them and leaves them on a liminal situation which induces discrimination and social alienation from their local ethnic peers.

The literature thus shows that despite sharing ancestry with the host natives, ethnic "return" migrants can end up being confined in laborious, degrading low-status jobs and be the subject of social segregation by their own coethnics in view of their cultural ineptitudes in the ethnic homeland. Additionally, "homecoming" experiences seemingly worsen when their ethnic heritage is denied, and remigrants are branded as foreigners,

ethnically alienated on cultural grounds. For example, in South Korea, *Chosŏnjok* are called Chinese (Song, 2009; Hong et al., 2012), Russian-Jews in Israel are referred to as Russians (Remennick, 2009), Hungarians “returnees” from Romania are called Romanians (Fox, 2009), Japanese-Brazilians, at best, are called *nikkeijin*, but are otherwise called Brazilians (Tsuda, 1999, 2003, 2009c). Japanese-Peruvians, on the other hand, are either called Peruvians or downright *gaijin* (lit. foreigner/outsider) (Takenaka, 2009), and the list goes on.

Ethnic remigrants are subjected to different levels of ethnic alienation. How much they are being excluded depends on (1) the linguistic and cultural gap between the host population and the returnee’s, and (2) whether the ethnic homeland and its diasporic peoples are located in different regions of the world insofar as the author argues that greater geographical distance general implies greater cultural divide (Tsuda, 2009a:330). For instance, *Chosŏnjok*’s relocation involves less cultural loss compared to Brazilian and Peruvian *nikkeijin*. Moreover, since ethnic similarity with the host natives does not automatically enable acceptance and assimilation upon returning to the ethnic homeland, counter-diasporic remigration increases both migrants and host society’s consciousness of cultural dissimilarities, which results in the formation of cultural minorities within the homeland, among individuals pertaining to the same ethnic root. In a way, ethnic “return” migration can no longer be regarded as a form of *ethnic* regrouping or ethnic consolidation. As Brubaker (1998) and Takenaka (2009) contend, when ethnic affinity is the main reason driving migration to a country, it may in fact engender new types of ethnic heterogeneity in the destination country. Following her comparative study of Brazilian and Peruvian *nikkeijin* in Japan, Takenaka thus concludes that these *nikkeijin* have turned into Japan’s new ethnic minority, claiming that ethnicity “intensifies ethnic division more often than forging ethnic solidarity” (2009:341), which prevents the remigrants from assimilating to the host society. Ironically, these observations disrupt the national ethnic homogeneity which policymakers in such countries originally wanted to preserve, deploying policies targeting their foreign coethnics. In the end, the integration struggles faced by ethnic “returnees” are comparable to other migrants, apart from the additional expectations remigrants are measured against.

2.4.2. Ethnic identity changes after remigrating

Because they are typically marginalized and treated as outsiders in their ancestral homeland, negative experiences are likely to produce a reaction from ethnic remigrants. In response to the negative reception and rejection in the homeland, “returnees” are subsequently confronted with the urge to reassess their ethnic identities (Takenaka, 2009). In this regard, ethnic “return” migration has a significant role in shaping both migrants’ and the host society’s ethnic identities and perceptions of self and others (Christou, 2006). The study of second generation “return” migration to their ethnic homeland thus involves a strong anthropological perspective, which the literature – however meager it is– relates to sensibly. This part therefore aims to understand what the literature says about ethnic remigrants’ (1) reevaluation of their ethno-national loyalties and identities, as well as (2) their own conceptions and notions of home and homeland, which all result from their socio-economic and ethno-cultural marginalization discussed above. Finally, this part will examine how the remigrant’s experiences and identity formation is affected by their birth country’s position in the global hierarchy of nations (Tsuda, 2003, 2009c).

Although the majority of ethnic “returnees” do *not* migrate for ethnic reasons but primarily for economic purposes, their ethno-national identities are still (unintendedly) impacted upon return. Like in most studies, Takenaka’s (2009) work on *nikkeijin returnees* suggest that few of them expected to have any subsequent identity questioning. However, when facing social hostility as migrant minorities, many respond with a sensible deterioration of their previous diasporic affections to the ethnic homeland. At the same time, they adopt a position of differentiation, reinforcing their foreign national identifications in view of their sociocultural dissimilarities with the host society (Tsuda, 2009a: 334). Despite the higher propensity to develop a defensive discourse of difference vis-à-vis the host population, ethnic “return” migrants may adopt other forms of reactions in the process of their identity (trans)formations. Out of the possible responses recorded in the literature, are the following ones. The first type of reaction is a state-based reinforcement of national identity, which means that ethnic remigrants respond to social hostility in the homeland by either strengthening their foreign national identity (natal homeland), or their ethnic identity (ethnic homeland). The

second type of reaction is transnational, which equates to diasporic discourse (dissociation from any ethno-national identity) or cosmopolitan discourse (comprising both ethnic identities).

State-based national identities

Expressing a form of deterritorialized nationalism (Tsuda, 2009a), ethnic “return” migrants respond to negative experiences by strengthening nationalist closeness to their birth country. Not only do remigrants come to the realization that they are in fact cultural foreigners who do *not* belong to the ethnic homeland, but they also develop updated understandings of the new host society and distance themselves from it by asserting their status as foreign nationals. This counter-identity can also become a defensive response in opposition to the host society. However, as Capo Zmegac (2005) noted, this is less because of increased cultural attachment to their birth country or loyalty to their natal land, but more of a defensive response. For instance, *Chosŏnjok* migrants emphasized their Chinese identity in view of their disappointment in South Korea. Trying to distinguish themselves from the local Koreans who ostensibly looked down on them, *Chosŏnjok* migrants thus develop *reactionary* Chinese identities (Hong et al., 2012:12).

The idea of deterritorialized nationalism is further exemplified with *Aussiedler* “returnees” singing Russian songs in Germany to assert their differences (Klekowski von Koppenfels, 2009). This is also the case for Brazilian *nikkeijin* consciously adopting excessively warm gestures and different dressing, strengthening their sense of pride and awareness as Brazilians, expressing “patriotic sentiments”, hanging Brazilian flags and dancing the samba in Japan, even though they had never done so back in Brazil (Tsuda, 2003). Likewise, *Chosŏnjok* migrants end up siding with their birth country insofar as before migration, they would identify themselves as both Korean and Chinese in China harboring strong emotional attachments to their motherland. However, after relocating to South Korea, many eventually identify themselves only as Chinese in Korea, often as a defensive strategy to build up confidence in what they now perceive as an adverse environment. Their negative experiences in the homeland (from financial hardship to

social exclusion to the constant pressure of being undocumented for some) transform their ethno-national identification, redefining China as their homeland, instead of South Korea (Song, 2009; Hong et al., 2012). Kim's (2009) work on Korean-American ethnic "returnees" to South Korea depicts the same observation. Because they are ethnically rejected, considered to be overly Americanized cultural foreigners (and sometimes called descendants of traitors who left Korea during hard times (Park, 2006)), second generation Korean-American "returnees" are disillusioned and develop negative attitudes about South Korea, losing their previous emotional connection with their ethnic homeland. This therefore causes them to strengthen their identities as Americans and to redefine themselves as feeling more at home in the United States. Likewise, though to a lesser extent, Finnish Swedes "returnees" in Sweden experience social exclusion due to their distinct Swedish dialect, causing them to reassess their ethno-national identification to Finland rather than Sweden. According to Hedberg, their experiences of exclusion generates an increase of their emotional attachment to Sweden, at the expense of their emotional attachments to Sweden. However, eventually managing to assimilate into Swedish society, these remigrants juggle between public and private identities, and keep their Finnish affinities (through language, for example) in private (Hedberg, 2009).

Embracing ethnic identity

A close examination to the literature reveals few cases of ethnic remigrants responding to ethnic "return" migration by strengthening their ethnic identity. Hong et al. (2012:50) records that only a handful of her interviewees reinforced their Koreanness, no longer identifying themselves as either Korean-Chinese or Chinese, but simply as Korean. In these cases, Korean identity was often developed by interviewees who had satisfactory or successful experiences in Korea. Another interesting form of ethnic reassertion would be the case of Hungarians in Romania "returning" to Hungary (Fox, 2009). Indeed, some ethnic remigrants assert nationalist 'difference' in response to negative experiences, not because of cultural attachment to their birth country, but because they choose to reaffirm their ancestral nationalities and belonging to the nation, by claiming that unlike their local counterparts who have lost the traditional customs, they maintained ethnic cultural traditions abroad, and are therefore culturally more authentic. As such, in

response to ethnic exclusion, Hungarian “returnees” from Romania identify themselves as *authentic* Hungarians in Hungary, differentiating themselves from the local ones, considered to have been contaminated by modernization.

Transnational responses

As Potter and Phillips’ (2006) study on Bajan-Brits “returnees” points out, ethnic “return” migration may produce a form of in-betweenness and hybridity resulting from the difficulties encountered following their migration, and from the associated feelings of social alienation and discrimination. The ambivalence of Bajan-Brits’ transnational status challenges well-established understandings of Barbadian ethnicity and racial identity. As a result, transnational identifications may take the form of diasporic or cosmopolitan identities.

Unlike most, some ethnic “return” migrants adopt an ethnic identity that goes beyond national affinity. Their sense of belonging cannot be defined in terms of nationalist terms and they tend to distance themselves from the host society in response to the negative experiences, but they are also reluctant to embrace a nationalist identity with their birth country because of the following. Firstly, affirming their birth country’s nationality in the ancestral homeland is not well regarded and provokes disdain and further rejection from the host society. The case of Peruvian *nikkeijin* resonates with this argument insofar as Peruvian migrants are denigrated in Japan because of ethnic Peruvians’ overall depreciable behaviors in the eyes of the Japanese. However, in this context, asserting Peruvianness would invite criticism and be prejudicial, so instead, Japanese-Peruvians consolidate their hybridity by identifying themselves as *nikkeijin*, mostly to draw the line with *other* Peruvians of non-Japanese descent. Echoing the sentiments of many Japanese-Peruvians in Japan, one of Takenaka’s interviewee shared his sentiment: “We are not completely Peruvian, and here in Japan, we are *gaijin* (foreigner)” (Takenaka, 2009:322). Secondly, ethnic remigrants may be victims of discriminations in both countries, preventing them from identifying to either. Not fully feeling at home in the United States because of racial differences with the host majority, nor in South Korea because of cultural differences, some Korean-Americans thus

develop an increasing sense of in-betweenness without being able to clearly identify their homeland (Kim, 2009). Thirdly, non-nationalistic identities may result from the loss of sentimental connections with the birth country that the migrant realized upon visiting the natal land after spending a long time in the ancestral land. Hong et al. (2012) illustrate this case with *Chosŏnjok* migrant brides who could no longer identify themselves to China or as Chinese, where they were treated as Koreans. One of the study's interviewee encapsulate the idea of diasporic identity with the following statement: "I don't know who I am. *Chosŏnjok* are homeless, we belong to neither countries." (Hong et al., 2012:37).

In contrast to diasporic identities, cosmopolitan identities reflect a more positive identity transformation occurring after ethnic "return". Indeed, some migrants embrace their multicultural selves and the duality of their background, believing they can select the best of both worlds (Takenaka, 2009). Nevertheless, Tsuda specifies that "only a few from developed countries who enjoy a certain degree of social acceptance in their homeland seem to develop a transnational identification in which their allegiances to their birth country is accompanied by a strengthened attachment to their ethnic homeland" (Tsuda, 2009a:337). For example, some Americans of Korean and Japanese descent who have "returned" to their ancestral homeland do experience a certain degree of ethnic alienation (which strengthens their Americanness). However, because they are more positively received, and due to their higher socio-economic status in the homeland, their homecoming experience leaves them with a greater appreciation and pride in their Japanese ethnic heritage, and end up identifying as "bicultural" individuals (Tsuda, 2009c:251). Similar conclusions were recorded by Hong et al. (2012). In the study, *Chosŏnjok* migrant brides whose homecoming experience was overall more positive are found to be more inclusive ethnically, showing sign of a stronger transnational awareness as diasporic peoples.

2.4.3. Global hierarchy of nations

Tsuda suggests that the host society's reception and attitude towards ethnic remigrants is correlated to the migrant's country of emigration, and that there exist differences in the treatment of migrants according to whether they come from developed countries

with a good international reputation, or whether they originate from poorer, less advanced nations with a negative image abroad (Tsuda, 2009a:329). To the author, the host society's differing attitudes are based on the emigration country's existing stereotypes and ranking, or position in what he calls the global hierarchy of nations. Oftentimes, the foreign cultural attributes of ethnic remigrants are perceived pejoratively by local coethnics, particularly if the "returnee" migrated from a country that is less developed or lower in the global hierarchy of nations. For example, Israeli perceptions and treatments towards Russian Jew "returnees" are strongly influenced by the unfavorable label and stereotype of Russians in the mass media as "welfare mothers, prostitutes, and mafia men" (Remmenick, 2007:154). Likewise, Japanese Brazilians are often seen by the mainstream Japanese as lazy, poor, noisy, easy-going, over-individualistic and culturally inferior (Tsuda, 2003). This results in Brazilian *nikkeijin* being unwelcomed by local Japanese in Japan.

In contrast, the reception of diasporic "returnees" from developed countries is far more positive. Firstly, it is important to point out that despite ethnic remigrants originating from more developed countries, these "returnees" are still exposed to ethnic prejudice. However, as they come from the developed world, they are generally more respected by the host society since they benefit from the higher stature of their birth countries and are not subject to the negative stereotypes attached to developing countries. On the contrary, some may even be the subject of admiration, envy, or curiosity. Secondly, ethnic remigrants from more developed countries usually enjoy a higher status as investors, professionals, expatriates, or university students, which keeps them from socio-economic alienation and stigmatization in unskilled working-class types of occupations. Thus, this leads to a more welcoming response from the host population and a better social experience in the ancestral homeland.

These observations can be illustrated with Takenaka's (2009) comparative study of Brazilian and Peruvian *nikkeijin* returning to Japan. Because Brazil benefits from a higher status relatively to Peru in the global hierarchy of nations, their reception is less negative in relation to one another. Likewise, Korean-Americans are usually better received compared to their Chinese counterparts. Song points out that "in a sense, South Koreans distinguish *Chosŏnjok* from other 'overseas brothers', particularly ones from wealthy

areas such as the United States, Japan, and Western Europe" (Song, 2009:293). Song further adds that even though in South Korea, *Chosŏnjok* are still thought of as civilized people, they are nonetheless looked down upon, considered mostly like deprived brethren willing to accept any 3D jobs. The local population's differentiation between *Chosŏnjok* and wealthier brethren from developed countries is also apparent at the institutional level. Indeed, the South Korean government has discriminated its own coethnics according to their country of emigration. As a result, in 1999, the authorities enacted a law regulating the Entry/Exit and Status of Overseas Koreans, and explicitly excluded *Chosŏnjok* (and Koreans from the ex-USSR) from the status of 'overseas brothers' (Song, 2009:296). While Korean remigrants from developed countries such as the United States benefit from hassle-free visa applications to enter the Korean territory. In contrast, *Chosŏnjok* desiring to visit their ancestral homeland are required to present formal invitations from in-landers to complete their visa applications.

2.4.4. Summary

This final section unfolded progressively, and started by identifying economic, socio-cultural, and ethnic marginalization as experienced by ethnic "return" migrants upon relocation to the ancestral homeland. Marginalization largely affects "returnees'" "homecoming" experiences, and often translates into disappointment towards their local coethnics and the ethnic homeland. Ostracized, ethnic remigrants then become cultural minorities in the ethnic homeland. Ethnic identity was affected by these –mostly negative, reportedly– experiences in the homeland. The differences in receptivity and welcoming by local coethnics, depended on the "returnee's" country of emigration according to Tsuda's concept of hierarchy of nations: coethnics from better-perceived countries (i.e. seen as more "developed") are also better treated than the counterparts from less developed countries.

2.5. Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the literature on second generation ethnic "return" migration. Although few in number, there exist an interesting diversity of studies documenting this

migratory movement, all of which discuss similar threads and themes. The first section focused on the causes of ethnic "return" migration, arguing that ethnic "return" to the ancestral homeland is primarily triggered by economic motives, which is in line with neoclassical theories of international migration. Ethnic affinity for the destination country is secondary in the decision-making process. The second section looked at macro-institutional processes facilitating ethnic "return" and meso-level networks facilitating relocation. In the case of Chinese ethnic "return" migration, policymakers in this century have proven to develop policies and programs to attract its overseas coethnics, mostly targeting the highly-skilled and the wealthy, who could contribute to Chinese economic development. Western-born second generation overseas Chinese thus fall in the targeted category that the Chinese government has been looking out for, which translates into measures adapted to their needs, to entice ethnic "return". The third section then discussed ethnic remigrants' experiences in the homeland, noting how negative experiences of economic, socio-cultural, and ethnic marginalization trigger an identity repositioning. While some remigrants develop a state-based emotional affinity to the ethnic homeland or to the country of emigration, other remigrants develop transnational identities, juggling between their dualities, or reversely, by staying in an in-between diasporic space where they no longer have an emotional attachment to either country.

In essence, the case of Chinese ethnic return migration is very similar to other cases of ethnic return migration since in most instances, migrants shift from being an ethnic other in the birth country, to a cultural other in the ancestral homeland. Being socialized in different cultural settings leads to the inability to integrate the native social circles in the host society, and develop "meaningful ties" with its members. While disillusion and disappointment seems to be a common and prevalent feature among most studies on ethnic "return" migration, the case of Western-born Chinese remigrants introduces a dynamic multi-layered picture wherein "returnees" express an overall positive experience of "return" despite an overall unsuccessful socio-cultural integration, which sheds new light on Verkuyten's (2016) concept of Integration Paradox.

This thesis investigates Western-born second generation overseas Chinese remigrants' experiences of socio-cultural integration in the ancestral homeland, and how such

experiences impact of the construction of their ethno-cultural identity. It aims to fill the gap in the literature on ethnic "return" migration, or counter-diasporic migration. Chinese ethnic "return" migration to China has not yet been thoroughly addressed in the literature: the subjects of the study, the geographical zones (Western countries and China) and the current period are not properly addressed in the literature. Louie (2000; 2001), Ang (2001; 2013) have covered issues of temporary "return" to China, mostly as part of projects related to roots searching. These studies refer to an epoch in China that was only at the very start of its current repositioning in the world's economy. Pieke (2012) also addressed questions of foreign migration to China when writing on *Immigrant China*, focusing on China being a receiving country instead of a sending country. All such studies make mentions of Western-born second generation Chinese ethnic "returnees", but none have been dedicated to this group, voicing their experiences in the ethnic homeland, and looking into the identity changes occurring after migration.

Chapter Three – Theoretical Framework

3.1. Introduction

This chapter paints a picture of the multilayered theoretical frameworks used for this research, and is important because it guides the analytical processes of this thesis. It differs from the literature review insofar as it introduces raw concepts and theoretical debates, as opposed to presenting previous studies with topics and themes similar to this thesis. Rather than focusing on economic or occupational integration which is more prevalent in other ethnic “return” migration studies, this thesis examines socio-cultural integration because ethnic remigrants are by definition, second (and subsequent) generation migrants who were socialized in different socio-cultural environments and settings to their counterparts who grew up in the ancestral homeland, resulting in inter-group encounters that are worth studying. In contrast, looking into economic and professional integration would be less relevant insofar as in the case of Western-born remigrants to China, subjects are highly-skilled migrants who seldom experience economic nor occupational declassing upon migration, but live comfortable lives in the ancestral homeland, which is not of interest for the purpose of this research.

There are four main sections in this chapter, each covering a theoretical aspect of second generation overseas Chinese’s ethnic “return” migration to China. The first section focuses mainly on social-cultural integration theories, and reviews the main debates and most relevant indicators of integration. The second section concentrates on social networks, and their role as a meso-level intermediary in the migrants’ relocation and integration processes. The third section moves on to identity theories, and examines the social construction of ethno-cultural identity in the context of international migration. It presents the primordial/circumstantial dichotomy, central in debates on identity and emphasizes on the fluidity of identity being highly context-dependent, and socially constructed. The fourth section then introduces the emerging concept of social

anchoring as an integrative framework linking all previous three frameworks under the same umbrella, also used as a lens for this thesis.

3.2. Socio-cultural integration theories

The first axis of reflection focuses on socio-cultural integration theories. As reviewed in Chapter Two, studying Western-born Chinese ethnic “return” migrants in China not only requires examining the causes and processes of their international relocation, which mostly occurs before migration, but it also requires studying the integration issues occurring *after* migration. The complexity of integration involves multiple disciplines and dimensions, such as economic, social, political, spatial¹, ethnic and cultural integrations among others, all of which can be studied separately or combined with each other (Diaz, 1993; Magnusson, 2014:13-4). This section thus examines a selection of theories explaining migrants’ socio-cultural integration in a new host society, with the first part introducing the main theoretical debates on integration, from both classical and modern perspectives. The second part draws out key indicators of socio-cultural integration from these debates, while in the third part, I explain the applicability and limitations of such concepts in the Chinese context.

3.2.1. Theoretical debates on socio-cultural integration

Integration theories are largely influenced by integration policies which receiving countries develop to regulate immigrant flow, facilitate the inclusion of immigrants, and encourage their adjustment in the new host environment while preserving the socio-cultural order. Starting with a brief overview of three classical theorists whose contributions to the understanding of integration are inescapable, the second part introduces more modern conceptualizations of integration and presents the nuances between integration and assimilation, as well as the notions involved around the latter notion.

¹ i.e. residential, referring to geography.

Classical debates

Brettel and Hollifield's (2000) cross-disciplinary anthology discusses migration theories, and suggests that the study of social relations is rooted in classic sociological theories which are fundamental to a better understanding of the processes of migration, as well as migrants' integration in a new host society. The discussion around socio-cultural integration in a cohesive society is thus grounded in a handful of classical perspectives which major debut can be traced back to the nineteenth and early twentieth century, along with a few contemporary ancillary theories (Ghani, 2008).

The literature abounds with integration theories and social theorists such as Karl Marx, Max Weber, Emile Durkheim and the thinkers of the school of Chicago, pioneers in this discipline. If most of them tend to focus on economic or social integration, the socio-cultural aspects are often neglected or substantially relegated to the background. Starting in the nineteenth century, the notion of integration was mostly attached to socio-economic disparity. Claiming that such disparities generate and amplify inequalities between social classes, Marx, in the *Manuscripts of 1844*, argued that they ultimately lead to disadvantage and inequality, which prevents exploited groups from equal participation in the society (Bottomore and Goode, 1983). One of the major pitfalls of this approach is that it undermines the emergence of the welfare state. In the case of China, the difference and disparity in socio-economic spheres between minority and majority groups clearly exist and widens. Although the Chinese government works towards reducing the gap, the reality remains that of a disparate society. With regards to second generation overseas Chinese "returnees", Marx's conceptualization is not applicable in practice because most "returnees" are usually foreign citizens harboring little to no possibility to be (politically) represented, despite existing dedicated associations and organization such as the Overseas Chinese Affairs Council (OCAC) and the All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese (ACFROC). Moreover, these "returnees" tend to benefit from privileges as foreigners, which places them 'on the brighter side of the fence', as they are usually warmly welcomed by the Chinese authorities (Skrentny et al., 2009).

Weber (1968) is another classical theorist whose work is frequently featured in studies on integration or social solidarity. Weber's idea of integration and cohesion within modern societies was influenced by social interactions between individuals and groups. Suggesting that disparity ensues from the unescapable struggle for survival or dominance in a society, Weber considered that tolerance, fairness and equitability are crucial to sustain a rightful society, and that such virtues are indispensable when transitioning from one society to another as it is the case when people migrate from a country to another. Accordingly, the government's role in encouraging and supporting justice and equality for all groups in society becomes crucial. Although Weber contributed significantly to building social theories on integration, the implications to this study are again limited if not irrelevant insofar as being foreign nationals, second generation overseas "returnees" benefit from certain privileges de facto despite the omnipresence of the Chinese government.

Like his two predecessors, Durkheim (1967) drafted the foundations of social theory on the basis of "wanting to cohabitate harmoniously", and conceptualized the notion of social integration by examining the links between different societies, social groups and individuals. Considering integration to be a clear feature of modern society itself, Durkheim argued that internal relations and social bonds within a society are positively correlated with its level of integration. Integration is thus contrasted to the concept of anomie, which refers to a disorganized society wherein the absence of social constraints and rules generate individual behavioral disorientation. Durkheim's concept of social integration has two distinct forms: organic and mechanical solidarity. Organic solidarity argues that for a society to be productive and remain stable, people have to rely on one another, based on their differences. In contrast, mechanical solidarity implies that integration unites the different social groups within a society "into a single moral and social unit with a sense of common duty and responsibility" (Dennis, 2008:193). In these terms, social integration suggests that the individual (e.g. migrant minority) should have a sense of moral obligation towards the society. Therefore, according to Durkheim's conceptual framework, societal integration emphasizes on the importance of values and moral aspects because of the place of the society's constituents' convictions, inclinations and motives in the theory's model.

However, this precise emphasis on morality and principles is the primary cause of criticism from contemporary scholars. As pointed out by Ghani (2008), one of the drawbacks of this theory is that it omits the fact that social and economic inequalities cannot be answered nor solved with discipline and moral convictions only. On the contrary, integration and social cohesion involve other external and/or institutional aspects to regulate at least part of the society. For instance, state power is indispensable to hold together and support a society and its economic system (Dennis, 2008; Ghani, 2008). Another downside to Durkheim's approach is that that integration is to be understood from a micro perspective wherein individuals are integrated when they are incorporated or when they belong to different social groups and communities. Durkheim's integration theory is relevant to this research project insofar as it involves interactions between individuals and groups within a society for it to be harmoniously integrated. Therefore, if interactions or 'internal relations' increase within the society between the majority (host population) and minorities (here, "returnees"), the society is more likely to be integrated and share values, which increases the likeliness of socio-cultural integration. As mentioned previously, though the applicability of these classic social theories may appear to be subtle, they remain essential in the understanding of socio-cultural integration, and have laid pioneering foundations for contemporary authors to develop and build concepts embedded in theirs, more relevant and adapted to modern societies.

Modern conceptual debates

Integration theories have often been used in traditional migration contexts to interpret the adaptation processes and outcomes of immigrants who relocate to new countries, wherein they settle permanently. However, when it comes to new forms of migration – wherein immigrants maintain close transnational connections (Levitt, 2004; Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004), are more mobile and less likely to settle anywhere permanently (Vertovec, 1999; 2007; Faist, 2000), the concept of integration fails to properly understand how migrants adapt to new societies (Grzymala-Kazłowska, 2016). The need to integrate migrants into the society originates from a combination of political and moral obligations, as well as some form of self-interest (Heckmann and Lüken-Klaßen, 2013). If social cohesion is often argued to be the result of a well-integrated society, it

can also be said that cohesion cannot be ensured if a substantial proportion of the population is socially excluded or marginalized. Because the idea of integration and its definition are often questioned, this part here attempts to provide an overview and clarification of the key fundamental theories regarding overlapping and cross-related concepts at the heart of the debate between integration and assimilation.

Integration

Based on sociological traditions, integration issues can take on two main approaches. The first one looks at societal integration as a whole, while the second approach puts the emphasis on individuals or groups, and investigates their integration *within* society. These two respective approaches can be paralleled with the traditional debate between structuralism and individualism insofar as integration processes can be examined from both micro and macro-level perspectives² (Collet, 2006:97). Integration thus refers to “stable and cooperative relations within a social system” (Heckmann and Lüken-Klaßen, 2013:3) that is determined, on the one hand, by the efforts and actions of the immigrants themselves, and on the other hand, by structural conditions met in the new host society, ranging from legal, social and economic conditions (Ibid.). Though the definitions of integration often change according to national contexts and schools of thoughts, it is generally agreed that integration is a process rather than an end state, a process which occurs in various spheres: political, economic, social and cultural, among others (Vermeulen and Penninx, 2000; Penninx, 2005).

Integration is therefore not unidirectional, but a two-way process that stresses the importance of strengthening the relations within a social system as well as the inclusion of new members into economic activities and social structures of the receiving country; a process involving social networks and contacts between immigrants and the host natives (Diaz, 1993:16-7). The notion of mutuality is strongly emphasized in the Council of the European Union’s Common Basic Principles (CBPs) policy for immigrants’ integration, adopted in 2004 for countries members of the European Union. For

² [Section 3](#) further down focuses on meso-level understandings of integration, referring to the intermediary level between micro and macro analyses, which highlights the criticality of social networks.

instance, the very first principle states that: "Integration is a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of Member States" (Council of the European Union, 2004:19). In addition, Heckmann and Lüken-Klaßen (2013) suggested that a social system's level of integration is positively correlated to how intensely its constituents are connected to one another. To some extent, integration can be understood as "a social phenomenon related to the quality of immigrants' participation in different types of social relations in the receiving society" (Diaz, 1996:74). Socio-cultural integration does not require cultural similarity with the host population or the eradication of all cultural differences and group identities. As a dynamic exchange, it suggests that minority groups adopt the culture and values of the majority while maintaining their own initial cultural features.

Heckmann et al. (2003, 2013) further identified four main dimensions of integration: (1) structural integration, referring to the acquisition of rights and the accession to core institutions and labor market; (2) social integration, which is standing for relationships, inter-group interactions and participation to voluntary association; (3) cultural integration, which encompasses changes for attitude and behavior; and (4) identificational integration, which refers to identity and sense of belonging. Vermeulen and Penninx (2000:2) also suggested that if the concept of socio-cultural integration was often used as an umbrella concept, it could also become a more specific notion varying in its degrees of pluralism³. Integration through a pluralistic perspective allows groups to keep their group identity and simultaneously receive equal access to the receiving society (Ibid., 3.).

Assimilation

Nevertheless, depending on *desired* outcomes, alternatives to the term 'integration' have been employed, such as 'assimilation', to accentuate on the migrants' adaptation to the new society (Spencer, 2006). Because the concepts of integration and assimilation are closely interlinked, they are regularly used wrongly or interchangeably. If the former notion has a positive undertone of unity and mutuality, the latter one sometimes bears a

³ Pluralism can be defined as the coexistence of two (or more) groups, principles, cultures, etc., in a system (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006).

negative connotation which authorities and political figures usually avoid using when addressing immigrant communities (Magnusson, 2014:12). Indeed, assimilation refers more specifically to the changes in the cultural sphere, again implying that migrants are assimilating into a homogenous majority culture. More precisely, assimilation differs from integration in the way that assimilation is a process in which migrants become similar to the native population, a transformation process that turns cultural differences into similarities and that homogenizes a population's culture by subjecting minority social groups into a majority group as they come in contact. Focused on the learning of the norms, values, language and ways of the native population, assimilation is often regarded as a one-sided adaptation process undergone by absorbed minorities or foreigners who progressively adopt the cultural characteristics of the majority until the progressive disappearance of all their initial cultural characteristics (Diaz, 1993:17; Algan et al., 2012: 2-30).

Developed in American sociology, the concept of assimilation has had multiple definitions over the years, and for a long time, was equated to Americanization. Although for a few scholars such as Berry (1951:217) and Bierstedt (1957), assimilation is a synonym of acculturation, it is more frequent to interpret acculturation as being *included* in the assimilation process. Acculturation corresponds to the dynamic process from which permanent results are produced as two or more cultures come in contact – i.e. second-culture learning (Floyd, 2003:3). In contemporary literature, acculturation thus refers to “the process of becoming communicatively competent in a culture we have not been raised in” (Hall, 1992; 1996). Although its meaning slightly varies according to the disciplines, the core definition remains the same. In sociology, acculturation is the process by which an individual learns the behavioral patterns and norms of a larger majority group in order to be accepted into this group and participate without conflict due to the cultural differences. In social psychology, it refers to the process through which a person learns and interiorizes the values and norms of their environment, which influences their way to think and act. From this point of view, the meaning of acculturation is closer to that of socialization, and is seen as a process allowing an individual to manage the cultural disparities encountered in contexts of contact with different cultures, situations in which immigrants and expatriate communities need to deal with on a daily basis. In other words, deculturation occurs when one undergoes the

process of 'un-learning' their original culture (Hall, 1996). According to Gudykunst and Kim (1995), the dynamic process occurring between acculturation and deculturation is indispensable to the process of adaptation, which itself is essential for a successful socio-cultural integration in a new host society.

Likewise, as Park and Burgess asserted (1921:735), "assimilation is a process of interpretation and fusion in which persons or groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons or groups, and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life". Therefore, classic assimilation theory suggests that ultimately, both the majority group and immigrants (or ethnic minorities) are bound to converge towards a "straight line" as differences gradually diminish, and both groups become more similar over time with regards to values, norms, behaviors, and attitudes. According to this model presented by the Chicago School of thought which Park and Burgess emerged from, more established immigrants (and their descendants) are expected to show more similarities with the host majority. This model appeared in a particular context in the United States along with the concept of the Melting Pot which was popularized in Israel Zangwill's dramatic play in 1908. The Melting Pot is a metaphoric term used to refer to immigrants' assimilation, where the heterogeneous society becomes more standardized after "melting together", resulting in a homogenous whole with a new common culture. However, other scholars contend that in some cases, the assimilation of many migrant minorities remains blocked, especially among visible migrants. This train of thought, named the racial or ethnic disadvantage model, is reflected in multiple writings challenging the concept of assimilation, seeking explanations beyond the idea of Melting Pot (Glazer and Moynihan, 1970). This model argues that persistent institutional barriers and discrimination tend to obstruct access to education and employment, therefore blocking complete assimilation. Often referred to in the literature discussing on second generation migrants, assimilation is seldom mentioned when studying return migration nor ethnic "return". In the case of second generation overseas Chinese born in Western countries, most tend to have assimilated to the culture of the country they were born in (Louie, 2004), or by definition, grew up to be –adult– third culture kids (Pollock and Van Reken, 2009). However, when "returning" to their ancestral homeland, referring to integration is more appropriate given the context.

Therefore, integration and assimilation can be considered as strategies which immigrants possibly adopt in the new society (Berry, 2005). However, to refer to migrants' adjustment to new socio-cultural ways of living, the notion of adaptation has also been used instead, even though it often overlooks other aspects involving social ties and identity changes as a result of this adjustment. However, despite receiving little scholarly attention, migrants' socio-cultural adaptation processes tend to be accompanied by identity transformations. In this thesis, the term "integration" was chosen to refer to migrants' involvement in various aspects of life in the host society. It refers more particularly to second generation Chinese ethnic remigrants' socio-cultural inclusion processes in the ethnic homeland's society, and among the local coethnics. Therefore, this thesis considers that in addition to establishing relationships with members of the host society, socio-cultural integration also requires migrants to have or acquire linguistic and cultural proficiencies without necessarily having to give up their own identities. To these, Grzymala-Kazłowska (2016:1126) further includes the acceptance of the host country's fundamental institutions, which generally refers to legal and political aspects. However, as it will be discussed in the findings chapters, this last requirement is often an obstacle for ethnic "returnees" to connect more profoundly with their local coethnics, in view of their differences of embeddedness and opinions of those.

All in all, as mentioned in the beginning, much of this debate applies mostly to cases when there are a significant economic disparity and racial disunity with the host society. It also applies to instances wherein migrants perform a unilateral and permanent migratory movement. Although this section did not aim to offer new insight on a century-long debate, it helped frame the research by providing background theories to build on, and better understand the socio-cultural integration experiences of Chinese ethnic remigrants in China. In this thesis, I therefore support my own simple definition of socio-cultural integration, given above. If socio-cultural integration is self-evidently a combination of social and cultural integration, Van Tubergen (2006:6) defines the former as an ensemble of social interactions between host natives and immigrants, and characterizes the latter as being the extent to which natives and migrants share cultural customs, values, and patterns (Ibid., 7.).

3.2.2. Indicators of socio-cultural integration

Based on the above theories and from previous studies, numerous factors influencing integration processes can be extracted, with varying degrees of importance. This part highlights what socio-cultural integration theories claim affects migrants' integration processes and outcomes in the host society. While some indicators are scholarly regarded as axiomatic and consensually approved of, some other indicators are seldom mentioned despite providing significant insight into migrants' socio-cultural integration experiences.

The first of the above-mentioned consensus refers indisputably to regular inter-group interactions between migrants and members of the host society, essential in any socio-cultural integration process (Diaz, 1993:86; Spencer, 2006). Most studies, such as Ersanilli and Koopmans' (2010) tend to refer to inter-ethnic interactions with the host natives as a requirement for social integration, insofar as their work involves immigrants whose ethnicity differs from the host majority. However, in the case of ethnic "return" migrants, inter-group social interactions are necessary for cultures to encounter, and for one to receive the other (Hosseini-Kaladjahi, 1997:155). Moreover, according to Van Tubergen, "an immigrant group is considered to be socially and culturally integrated when friendships and marriages are common between the groups" (Van Tubergen, 2006:7). In line with this statement, Magnusson (2014) suggested that membership in organizations also enables measuring the extent to which a group is integrated to the host community, as membership shows active participation and commitment to a new society by interacting with its members. To be sure, functional participation in the society's socio-economic system is required to achieve integration in a society (Dennis, 2008:193). Therefore, in line with Durkheim's arguments, it can be said that increased interactions between individuals and groups pertaining to different cultures are likely to develop into mutually positive opinions and attitudes, which in turn facilitates the integration of minority groups in the society (Ghani, 2008:194). Nevertheless, it is important to further problematize the notion of integration by specifying how the varying levels and quality of contacts between immigrants and the host society impact on their integration experiences. This refers more particularly to the discussions around

how “meaningful” ties and contact are in the host country (Valentine, 2008)⁴. From this point of view, integration is only regarded as “contact with members of the host society”, which needs to be further analyzed, given the complexity of the issue. Indeed, depending on the types and on how developed these contacts are, different outcomes may occur insofar as not all contact necessarily results in social ties. These aspects will be further developed in the findings chapters.

The second core indicator facilitating positive integration outcomes, also scholarly supported by most, is proficiency *and* use of the host country language (Hosseini-Kaladjahi, 1997; Van Tubergen, 2006; Takenaka, 2009; Magnusson, 2014). Indeed, the ability to communicate with the wider native population enables navigating more easily between the various local social spheres, giving more chances for migrants to anchor themselves locally, with local communities. However, as it will be demonstrated in [Section 6.2](#), although linguistic proficiency largely facilitates integration, it does not suffice to develop “meaningful” connections with the host natives. On the other hand, additional cultural proficiency enables unlocking opportunities to develop further qualitative relations with members of the host majority, which again, favors social anchoring. In the case of ethnic “return” migration, linguistic and cultural proficiency are especially important for “returnees” insofar as they are often expected by their local coethnics to be capable of communicating. This will be addressed in more details in the findings chapters.

Host country identification is a third sign indicative of an immigrant’ socio-cultural integration outcome. On the one hand, it could be argued that migrants identifying to a foreign state might be perceived as their unwillingness to pertain to the society, or signs of reluctance to associate with local peers and trying to differentiate themselves. On the other hand, host country identification is increased by access to citizenship and naturalization, although linguistic and social integration are not, as naturalization is positively correlated to linguistic integration only in nations requiring a certain level of cultural assimilation from their new citizens (Ersanilli and Koopmans, 2010:775). Migrants’ experiences in the host country have a direct impact on their identification to

⁴ See also Granovetter (1973) and [Section 3.3.1](#).

either the sending or destination country, as demonstrated by Kim (2009) in her study of second generation Korean Americans returning to South Korea. Prior to migration, their romanticized perceptions of the ancestral land led them to identify to their parental land, until their "return" migration. After negative experiences of homecoming, their realizations made them identify to their birth country. Although they share the same ethnicity with the host population, their cultural differences and expectations prevented them from fully integrating socially and culturally.

Magnusson's study on highly-educated migrants in Sweden further points out to employment and length of stay, largely influencing migrants' socio-cultural integration experiences in the host country. After relocating, occupational status was identified as the main economic determinant of socio-cultural integration although being employed as such had no substantial consequence on socio-cultural integration (Magnusson, 2014). Hein de Haas (2011) also demonstrated in his study how African migrants in Spain and Italy who were well-educated and well-informed prior to migration, and who moved at a younger age were more likely to have more successful socio-cultural integration experiences in the destination country. Likewise, in her study on cross-cultural adaptation, Kim stated that educated migrants prepared for change are more likely to experience successful integration outcomes (Kim, 2001).

Rex (1970) contends that successful integration is determined by the history and social structure of sending countries from which migrants originate, and based on this model, socio-economic achievement depends on social and cultural resemblance between the host majority and migrant minority. Rex's model draws on Park and Burges' assimilation theory (1921), which claims that the more similar migrants are to the host population; higher are the chances for them to integrate into the society successfully. However, for this research, the problem resides in the definition of "resemblance" insofar as foreign coethnics returnees share the same ethnicity with the local majority while at the same time, their cultural dissimilarity contributes to slowing down their socio-cultural integration. Finally, Ghani (2008) argues that migrants who are considered to be coming from developed nations have greater chances to integrate successfully into the new society, as opposed to migrants originating from different countries which are thought

to be less developed, which resonates with Tsuda's (2003) global hierarchy of nation states mentioned in [Section 2.4.3](#).

Although the theories reviewed above were indispensable cornerstones that contributed to building contemporary integration theories, their disconnection with the current realities of socio-cultural integration in transnational migration contexts is all the more important to highlight. Classical debates mostly revolve around a larger macro-debate that discusses social classes disparities that need to be overcome in order for society as a whole to be integrated, and become a coherent ensemble, mostly referring to social cohesion as a more uniform entity. And while modern debates reflect on socio-cultural integration in the context of migration, it mostly does so primarily on a meso-level with considerations of the wider society with rare instances wherein personal identification and belonging to a social group may enhance socio-cultural integration.

It is interesting to point out that much of the existing theories on socio-cultural integration built on empirical research tend to include a "list" of determining factors facilitating integration processes and positive outcomes⁵, most of which, depending on the circumstances, this thesis supports, as reflected in this section above. Such "lists" can be compared to checklists with boxes which migrants need to tick off to maximize their integration chances in the destination country. This suggests that there is a floating assumption that ultimately, migrants aim to be integrated socially and culturally to the new host society, which is why they "should" thrive towards accomplishing this goal: learn the host country language and values, cultural practices, be part of a social group with members of the host majority, and eventually, marry them. However, these concepts overlook the possibility that some migrants may indeed tick all the boxes without necessarily being integrated into the host society. Verkuyten (2016) addresses this concern in his study on highly educated migrants in the Netherlands. Calling it "The Integration Paradox", Verkuyten describes the phenomenon whereby highly educated and highly skilled immigrants that are structurally integrated in the host society are more likely to separate themselves psychologically from members of the host society rather than becoming more oriented to it (Verkuyten, 2016:583), despite ticking all the

⁵ For example, Ager and Strang's (2008) model of integration which identifies 10 domains facilitating the integration process.

boxes in the list that classical theorists have developed over the years. The theoretical implications are important insofar as highly educated migrants' withdrawal from the mainstream society is contradictory (hence paradoxical in nature) with traditional theories of migration and integration (Ibid., 584.). Indeed, classical theories suggest that structural integration is propitious to other spheres of integration, enabling migrants to develop more favorable attitudes toward the host majority, as well as a sense of belonging (Gordon, 1964; Alba and Nee, 2003). However, to some extent, highly educated migrants who are structurally integrated are in a privileged position where they can "choose to integrate" (Diaz, 1993) socio-culturally or remain marginalized in this respect. Educational achievement seems to represent an obstacle to all these. Although applicable to many other Western countries, Verkuyten's theory is contextual to the Dutch socio-economic structure, wherein the main cause for immigrants' disengagement from Dutch society is linked to their feelings of relative deprivation and perceived discrimination (Verkuyten, 2016:584-6). In the case of Chinese ethnic "returnees" in China, it is possible that cultural distance with the local coethnics, and temporariness in the ethnic homeland might cause their withdrawal and social distance from the host society. In turn, this might prevent them from socially anchoring themselves into the local communities and develop a sense of belonging. In this thesis, I will discuss the reasons why some "returnees" go the extra mile to mingle with their local coethnics, while some others refrain from putting efforts into developing social ties with members of the host population in [Section 6.5](#).

It should be emphasized that this thesis does not aim to develop a new list of integration indicators (i.e. new boxes), but aims to examine how the overall experience of ethnic "return" migration to China is affected by remigrants' experiences of integration, and how these very experiences also induce questioning regarding their ethno-national identities and attachments. Instead of verifying whether a certain checklist applies to the studied group, this research examines key and recurring aspects that affected Chinese remigrants' integration experiences, which is compiled and analyzed in [Chapters Five](#) and [Six](#).

Finally, there is a discrepancy between the theories that need to be reviewed in order to understand the phenomenon, and the facts on the ground. Reviewing theories of

integration and assimilation is essential to better understand how in reality, after conducting fieldwork, highly skilled ethnic remigrants in China outgrow these very determinist frameworks of integration that determine that a society is integrated if its members tick a number of boxes, with the assumption that migrants ultimately aim to be integrated both socially and culturally to the new host society, which is accomplished by ticking boxes. Nonetheless, it remains important to look into integration issues since they impact on the overall experience in China upon “return”, and using the language of integration allows us to identify the inaccuracies and inapplicability to ethnic remigrants living in a contemporary Chinese society.

3.2.3. Applications to, and limitations to the Chinese context

The concepts discussed above laid the essential foundations to improve our understanding of immigrants’ socio-cultural integration processes. However, because these debates emerged from Western-centric policies and literature, the relevance to Chinese social structure is limited in many respects as these theories provide few elements applicable to a society with such different normative and socio-demographic structures. The key difference between the Western and Chinese conceptualizations of those terms is that Western societies generally refer to immigrants’ incorporation to the new society, and makes a clear distinction between the host natives as opposed to immigrants. In contrast, the distinction in China is of a completely different nature insofar as its policies for integration and assimilation are largely targeted to its own citizens. The nuance can be explained by pointing out Chinese peoples’ composition of 56 ethnicities⁶. In other words, socio-cultural integration in China implies that the 55 ethnic minorities comply with the Han ethnic majority’s mainstream cultural norms. More recently, Chinese researchers and policymakers have been developing studies and policies to facilitate the socio-cultural re-integration of its overseas co-nationals (called *haigui*, or “sea turtles”), to avoid reverse cultural shocks and smoothen their integration (Zweig, 2006; Wang and Bao, 2015; Presbitero, 2016). Foreign nationals, on the other hand, have limited attention in this respect, though official efforts were made in order to attract more skilled foreigners.

⁶ China officially recognizes 56 peoples with a large majority of Han ethnics (90% on average) and 55 ethnic minorities (Benewick and Donald, 2009).

In the recent years and in Western societies, the understandings of the concepts of integration and assimilation have evolved around each country's own national debate over various communities from different cultural or religious backgrounds. If in Germany, the debate involves Eastern European migrants; in France, the debate has revolved around Muslim and/or Mediterranean-African communities (Algan et al., 2012) while in the U.S., Hispanic communities are the ones at the heart of the debate. As discussed in the part above, the definitions can overlap, and some terms misused. The American definition and use of assimilation and its processes (Melting Pot) in which cultural differences are melted altogether to become one new common culture show the contrast with Chinese understanding and debate. Indeed, as mentioned, in China, assimilationist policies are primarily geared towards Chinese nationals, members of the 55 ethnic minorities. Although the ethnic minorities have the freedom to use, develop and enjoy their own ethnic languages and to preserve their own social and cultural customs, they are nonetheless encouraged to assimilate to the Han majority's cultural norms as they come under the strong influence of (the Han Chinese) society and state. Assimilation in China is therefore called the process of sinicization, and areas affected include economics, language, lifestyle, religion, cultural values, among others. For example, studies on *Chosŏnjok* (Korean ethnic minorities in China) explain that as part of China's *Zhonghua* nationalism, Koreans in China were the targets of an assimilation policy "carried out by the Chinese government since 2002 to instill a strong sense of Chinese identity in the minds of *Chosŏnjok*" (Hong et al., 2013:41-2). A second example would be the more controversial and debated situation of the Uyghur ethnic minority in the Xinjiang province of China, for whom the official discourse clearly evokes promoting assimilation between China's Han majority and Uyghur minorities (Barabantseva, 2011; 2012). China's integration policy thus mirrors a form of nationalism aimed at strengthening the Chinese identity among its peoples, incorporating the minorities into the majority, as it would be for assimilation. Proponents argue that it will contribute to the development of unity, develop shared pride and values as a nation, and respect towards the cultural differences among the peoples of China. Reversely, critics contend that such policy smothers diversity within the nation.

3.2.4. Summary

All in all, models of contemporary integration stemming from classical perspectives suggest that immigrants' socio-cultural integration is achieved through interaction and social consensus. Debated over the years and across disciplines, migrants' socio-cultural integration experiences are shown to be influenced by a number of factors that depend on the migrants and on the host society. Successful outcomes, however, do require efforts from members of the majority, so that social groups can be developed into networks wherein migrants can anchor themselves into. All such processes occurring upon migration produce identity changes and transformations among immigrants (Magnusson, 2014), especially when they are confronted to their ethnic brethren with different cultural backgrounds.

3.3. Social networks and social capital

Social networks can be defined as links between individuals (Grzymala-Kazłowska, 2016:1132), which in the context of migration, are part and parcel of what Faist (1997) identified as the crucial meso-level, highlighting the role of communities and intermediary relational systems, as resources for migrants. These resources, also called social capital, as per Bourdieu's terminology, are characterized by their potential productive benefits (Bourdieu, 1986). In China, social capital translates into a very specific *guanxi* culture, omnipresent in every layer of the society, and well rooted in individuals' mentalities (Bian, 1997; Lai, 2001; Wilson and Brennan, 2010). As mentioned in the previous chapter, numerous studies have demonstrated how social networks and social capital can help facilitate the migration process through mutual assistance, stressing on the importance of social capital in migrants' every stage of migration, from access to the territory, help with finding an accommodation or a job (Song, 2009; Hong et al., 2012). This section thus focuses on theories addressing the role of social networks in enabling or hindering migrants in the integration process.

3.3.1. Bonding and bridging with strong and weak ties

Considered as one of the founders of social network sociology, Granovetter developed the theory on the 'strength of weak ties' (1973), and the dissemination of information within a community. Based on the analysis of social networks, Granovetter connected macro and micro-level sociological theories, arguing that social networks are composed of strong and weak ties which strength are defined by the combination of (1) the amount of time spent on another agent, (2) emotional intensity, (3) intimacy (mutual confiding), and (4) reciprocal services between the two agents (1973:1361); each of these being interdependent. As such, strong ties are those within a smaller circle, including friends and family, referring more generally to frequent and sustained relationships. Weak ties, however, are composed of acquaintances. According to Granovetter, weak ties can be strong if diversified, since they enable penetrating larger or extended social networks formed by other's own strong ties⁷. Granovetter also mentions the importance of "absent ties", characterized by the lack of interaction, which refers for instance, to ties with little to no considerable implications, such as a 'nodding' relationship between neighbors, or the 'tie' to the newsagent met daily⁸ (Ibid.). His theory stands out from most concepts on social networks because of the emphasis on weak ties' forte rather than on strong ones; hence expanding its applicability to larger, and less-restrained groups.

Granovetter's idea of strong and weak ties later resurfaced with Putnam's own conceptualization of social capital, heavily relying on social networks, i.e. connections between and among individuals (Putnam, 2000). Suggesting that among the many aspects of social capital –including norms and moral obligations, social values (trust) and social networks (voluntary associations particular)–, the most critical two are 'bonding' and 'bridging' social capital (Ibid., 22-24.). Bonding refers to the exclusive social capital limited to certain people only, and tends to exist between close friends and family members. Bonding in social capital is therefore generated by strong ties, and refers to homogenous social networks, valuable for marginalized or oppressed members in a

⁷ In other words, although A and B are linked by a weak tie, B's own strong ties can be beneficial to A.

⁸ In some circumstances (e.g. disasters), such ties usually considered negligible, are distinguished from the complete absence of one.

society to support collective needs. Bridging, on the other hand, consists mainly of weak ties and refers to social networks involving social heterogeneous individuals and groups. Bridging enables inter-groups interactions and the circulation of ideas, information and innovation thus extending social capital with the increase of the “radius of trust” as mentioned by Fukuyama (1996). If bonding affects a smaller number of people and therefore occupies a narrower ‘radius of trust’; bridging implies a larger radius, and can include individuals from more varied backgrounds. Bridging occurs more frequently with acquaintances than with close friends. If both social circles are beneficial, they are in different ways, responding to different situations. As illustrated by Putnam, “strong ties with intimate friends may ensure chicken soup when you’re sick, but weak ties with distant acquaintances are more likely to produce leads for a new job” (Putnam, 2000:22). Consequently, social capital theory highlights the value of social networks, stressing on the idea that social capital often produces positive effects on the society and improves mutual support, cooperation, trust, and institutional effectiveness (Ibid.).

In migration studies, social capital theory has mainly been used to rationalize the differences of economic integration between immigrant groups (Van Tubergen, 2006:33). Nevertheless, social capital is closely intertwined with social integration inasmuch as they both converge on access to social networks (Magnusson, 2014). While social integration focalizes more on the networks which migrants build as they come in contact with the host population, social capital theory pays attention to all kinds of networks.

3.3.2. Social networks and integration

To better understand integration amid complex migration processes, it has become crucial to further analyze social networks and the connections migrants establish and maintain with other migrants at similar or different stages of migration, as well as the ties they have with other non-migrants both locally and transnationally (Boyd, 1989; Gurak and Caces, 1992; Haug, 2008). While the analysis of social anchoring emphasizes on the ways in which migrants construct and sustain ‘life footholds’, studies on social networks focus on the analysis of the structure, volume, and characteristics of social linkages (Grzymala-Kazłowska, 2016). Coleman (1988) suggests that this is done for

instance, by examining more closely the composition of migrants' ties: who they consist of, how they are differentiated from one another, and how developed these ties are (referring more particularly to the quality and density of the network, how frequently they interact, and their proximity). As such, current research has mostly been focusing on the ways in which social networks facilitate the circulation of information within those networks to smooth the migration process and settlement in the new country.

On the other hand, it should be pointed out that the above concepts of social networks and social capital were developed based on the assumption that individuals committed to stable interactions and long-term relationships with members of their new local communities. However, these concepts may have limited applicability with regards to highly mobile migrants insofar as their motivations to get involved with the local communities may be halted by their lack of long-term projection within it (Ryan et al., 2008:675). Indeed, because of its perceived ambiguity and complexity, the role that social networks play in migrants' integration and adaptation processes tends to be overlooked, especially with regards to networks based on ethnic or cultural similarities. As Grzymala-Kazłowska (2016:1132) states it, although such networks may provide social support for prospective to more established migrants, they may also act as barriers between migrants and new local communities by nurturing disconnection and estrangement from local social groups, preventing socio-cultural learning and exchanges. Moreover, even though contacts with members of the host population is generally argued to contribute to social integration, it should be noted that not all such contacts always result in social ties being formed and maintained. Conversely, instead of bringing people together, they may have the opposing effect (Ibid., 1128.). Finally, although recent work has included more relational and dynamic approaches (Ryan, 2011), social network theories and related concepts still fail to adequately address identity problematics. To better understand the role of social networks in migrants' integration and their subsequent development of belonging and embeddedness through anchoring, it is necessary to look beyond the traditional boundaries of integration and social network theories. It thus becomes necessary to shift the focus away from the functional aspect of social networks being resources. By doing so, it becomes possible to adopt a perspective wherein people and individuals represent social anchors within whom migrants can identify and anchor themselves. According to

Brough et al. (2006:396), this is also facilitated by delving into the “textures of social capital” instead of simply “measuring its volume”.

3.3.3. Summary

This section mostly focused on reviewing social networks theories and the related concept of social capital as applied to this thesis. Considering their role in migrants’ socio-cultural integration process and identity repositioning, it shows how the concept of social anchoring (developed further in [Section 3.5.](#)) might address these issues more accurately. To be sure, socio-cultural integration into Chinese society can be spoken of only if remigrants’ social network(s) include members of the host population or if they enable further interactions across socio-cultural groups wherein they can anchor themselves. While it is important to look into the components of Chinese remigrants’ social circles’, it is also necessary to examine their role in remigrants’ “return” journey, and how they either facilitated or hindered their integration processes in the ethnic homeland.

3.4. Social construction of ethno-cultural identity

In spite of their multidimensional and complex features, most integration and social network theories often fail to address identity issues sufficiently. However, according to Mead (1934) and Blumer’s (1969) concept of symbolic interactionism, identity is central in mediating all human actions, and connecting social relations. However, although identity is now largely recognized as an essential analytical concept, it is also being criticized for its lack of clarity and for being overused (Hall, 1996; Brubaker and Cooper, 2000; Verkuyten, 2005). As Grzymala-Kazłowska (2016:1125) pointed out, the notion of identity has been disregarded because of its subjective characteristics, even though she acknowledges that the boundaries of identities are likely to blur because of technological advances, as individual subjectivity weakens, and group identities gain influence (Ibid.). This section thus consists of three parts to help understand how ethno-cultural identity is constructed upon ethnic “return” migration. The first part briefly acknowledges ethno-cultural identity as a partial identity, component of a whole, and

discusses the theoretical debate surrounding ethnic identity. The second part looks more closely into the primordialist-circumstantialist dichotomy that frames concepts of ethno-cultural identity. In continuity with circumstantialist understandings of identity, the last part points out to the fluid nature of identity, and highlights how it is socially constructed.

3.4.1. A partial identity

Identity is often taken for granted and becomes problematic, subject to questions or straightaway challenged internally or externally when *difference* is noticed, compared to the “similar others” (Jenkins, 2014). To begin with, it is important to acknowledge that every person’s identity is composed of multiple partial identities that evolve and gain in texture and complexity as they grow and pass through the different stages of life. For example, at some point in their life, one person’s identity can thus be that of a woman, a daughter, a mother, a wife, a lawyer, a Canadian national, a Toronto resident, a person of Chinese descent, an advocate for animal rights, along with multiple other partial identities. Depending on the context, one or several of these partial identities may become more relevant and overtake the moment, while the other partial identities recede temporarily into the background (Verkuyten, 2005:53). Therefore, in the presence of her children, her identity as a mother may take over her identity as a lawyer. On the other hand, if she experiences gender and racial discriminations at her workplace, she might have to be balancing her identities as a female lawyer of Chinese ancestry while all the other identities become less relevant during those times, at this place, and in the presence of certain peoples. Given the multiplicity and complexity of one’s identity, this thesis focuses principally on ethno-cultural identity changes occurring throughout the migration process, most relevant to this research. This includes questioning that occurred prior to relocating to the ethnic homeland, during settlement processes, and after migration –with an emphasis on the latter. In remigrating to the ancestral homeland, Western-born second generation Chinese remigrants’ ethnic and cultural identities are being challenged in view of the different society with which they now share ethnic traits but differ culturally.

After Anderson's work (1983), it has become more common to view ethnic and national groups, as well as other large-scale social groups (Tajfel and Turner, 1986) as imagined communities, discernible by the way they are represented and imagined. Scholars have then argued that an ethnic group is characterized by its members sharing a common origin, history and descent, which sets ethnic identity apart from other types of social identities (Hutnik, 1991; Cornell, 1996; Govers and Vermeulen, 1997). The importance of origin and common descent was raised earlier by Weber, stating that ethnicity was a social identity based on putative common ancestry (1968:389, original 1922). According to Verkuyten (2005:75), ethnic identity comprises of varying criteria that contribute to defining and justifying shared roots, which includes similar physical attributes, cultural characteristics, from religion, language, and historical milestones.

Verkuyten (2005:77) also argues that ethnic identity is functionally independent of cultural content insofar as even when undergoing acculturation, migrants' sense of ethnic identity –i.e. identification to their ethnicity– can remain strong regardless of the many cultural changes that occur during the process. According to him, even though migrants' cultural standards mingle with the host population's, they may even develop stronger attachments to their ethnic identity because of the continuity and perceived familiarity with the past. And if mutual adjustments may occur as a result of interactions and cultural exchanges, at the same time, it strengthens group differentiation as ethnic awareness increases. To illustrate this point, Verkuyten takes the example of young Dutch people of immigrant descent who acculturated to Dutch culture, but who have retained a strong ethnic identity at the same time, defining themselves as Turk, Moluccan or Antillean (Verkuyten, 1997; 2005). Applied to this thesis, and in most cases of ethnic "return" migration, the words *ethnic* and *culture* can be swapped out. As it will be further discussed in [Chapter Seven](#), in spite of sharing ethnic traits with the host society, ethnic remigrants often hold onto their cultural identity due to being socialized in a different cultural context during their formative years, and because of perceived past familiarity as opposed to present differences. Indeed, even though cultural differences are real, they may be difficult to outline because they are often construed from unspoken, and therefore subtle signals communicated during interactions. As Verkuyten (2005:79) highlights, culture refers to the unreflexive aspects of everyday practices, and although people are usually aware of the existence of cultural differences,

it is still difficult to pinpoint them accurately insofar as “culture is very tacit in nature rather than voiced out.”

3.4.2. Primordialist and circumstantialist dichotomy

Ethno-cultural identity is further problematized insofar as scholars have been debating about whether it holds primordial or circumstantial characteristics. Seemingly contradictory, both approaches arose in response to assimilation theories which considered that ethno-cultural differences between majority and minority groups are temporary, and will eventually disappear over time. The dichotomy of primordialist and circumstantialist understandings of Chinese ethnic identity enables clarifying how Chinese ethnic remigrants experienced identity changes after relocating to China.

On the one hand, primordialist, or perennialist concepts of ethno-national identity emphasize on the imperative, yet emotional nature of ethnicity, suggesting that ethnic identity is shaped based on a combination of ascribed characteristics such as ancestry (blood), language and culture, essential for one to identify with a particular ethnic group (Fenton, 1999; 2003; Verkuyten, 2005; Hong et al., 2012). Scholars supporting a primordialist approach to ethno-cultural identity also argue that in addition to actual social interactions, the *belief* in shared origin and descent have an important place in psychological development and perception of self. Geertz (1973) is often cited when referring to ethnicity and primordialism. However, Geertz does not exactly argue that ethnicity holds fixed and unchanging primordial characteristics inherited by birth, but rather stresses on the fact that it is often perceived as such by individuals, and that primordialism is in the importance given to ethnicity. Therefore, based on a primordialist understanding of ethnic identity predominant in China (Tong, 2011; Tan, 2012; Li and Li, 2013), ethnic remigrants not only need to share common ancestry, but also be linguistically and culturally proficient. Some scholars even argue that Chinese identity may include some extent of allegiance to “the motherland” China (Reid, 2009; Tong, 2011).

On the other hand, circumstantialist understandings of ethnic identity stress that ethnic attachments are not limited to fixed elements, but instead, are shaped by social and

political circumstances (Hong et al., 2012). In the literature, anthropologists have been using different terminologies to refer to circumstantialism. Closely related, they all have slight nuances and foci. For example, situationalism and circumstantialism focus primarily on the definition and meaning of ethnicity based on the conditions (situations and circumstances) that contribute to the importance of ethnicity under such conditions. Instrumentalism and constructivism, used in identity politics, is related to rational choice theories and utilitarianism as they mostly refer to the strategic deployment of ethnicity as a political rationale (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000; Fenton, 1999; 2003). All such approaches focus primarily on the external conditions and circumstances that impact on the formation and shaping of ethnic identity rather than on the groups involved. Circumstantialism nonetheless contends that people and ethnic groups emphasize –or downplay– their ethnicity when advantageous, that is, depending on the circumstances. For example, this perspective is successfully made use of in the analysis of identity politics processes. Consequently, from a circumstantialist point of view, ethnic identity “is a fluid and dynamic understanding of self and ethnic background” and can be “constructed and modified as individuals become more aware of their ethnicity” (Phinney, 2003:63).

Although the primordialist-circumstantialist dichotomy is key in understanding ethno-cultural identity, the limits of these approaches are not difficult to outline. On the one hand, primordialism is likely to omit the dynamic, conscious, and therefore changeable character of ethnic and cultural identities. Indeed, identity changes do come about as individuals encounter different situations, and their attachments to these vary – especially in the context of international migration. Primordialism thus struggles with keeping up and explaining the variations and flexibilities occurring during interactions. Finally, it does not account for the ways in which people define, negotiate, and manage their ethnic and cultural identities in practice, and how these may evolve after migrating for instance. On the other hand, circumstantialism tends to assume that people only react to external circumstances, almost like passive *beings* free from the *doing*. Circumstantialist approaches therefore do not focus much on how people –individuals and groups– *actively* shape the circumstances, to some extent. For example, by choosing their social circles, by opting for a residential area instead of another, or by actively learning about a language and culture. Finally, as Verkuyten observed, circumstantialism

neglects the fact that ethnic and cultural identities both have emotional power, and a distinctive meaning that impacts to varying degrees on people's lives and experiences (2005:85).

As it will be discussed in the findings chapters, and in more details in [Chapter Seven](#), both theoretical perspectives could be detected in the respondents' narratives in which they explained what they thought being Chinese entailed. On the one hand, the fluidity of second generation ethnic remigrants' Chinese identity reflects the ideas of circumstantialism, but contrasts with that of their local coethnics in China who tend to conflate Chineseness with fixed, ascribed characteristics –much closer to a primordial approach to Chinese ethno-cultural identity.

3.4.3. Fluidity and social construction of identity

G. H. Mead, pioneer in the discipline of social psychology, became one of the first cultural sociologist, and claimed in *The Social Self* (1913, published posthumously in 1934), wherein he introduces the notion of social identity, that a sense of identity can only be developed in a social context, by interacting with other social groups. H. G. Blumer (1969), his student, carried on Mead's legacy and further developed the concept of symbolic interactionism, importing the idea to microsociology. Symbolic interactionism refers to a micro-level theoretical study of individuals' social behavior and the dynamic processes of personal, recurrent, and meaningful interactions (see also Valentine, 2008). Contemporary scholars such as Verkuyten (2005) contributed to the concept of social identity by focusing more specifically on ethno-cultural identity. The author contends for example that ethno-cultural identity, being a social identity more than an individual identity, is thus socially constructed, evolving along with circumstances. Social identities hence place emphasis on the relationship between the individual and society –the environment (p. 39), and focus on similarities and differences to others (p. 42) rather than on personal individualities.

In line with circumstantialist approaches, this thesis considers that one's ethnicity and ethno-cultural identity are dynamic and evolve along with the individual's personal experiences throughout their migration journey (Brown, 2004). As such, changes in the

cultural contexts of migrants challenge the stability of their identity(ies) as they are being questioned and repositioned, which stresses the idea that identity construction is a dynamic social process (Fenton, 1999). Ethno-cultural attributes can thus be characterized as a "dynamic and constantly evolving property of both individual identity and group organization" (Nagel, 1994:152). More precisely, because individual ethnic identity is closely interrelated to its environment, its construction becomes "a social process, as the moving boundaries and identities which people, collectively and individually, draw around themselves in their social lives" (Fenton, 1999:10). Likewise, ethnicity can also be understood as "the product of actions undertaken by ethnic groups as they shape and reshape their self-definition and culture" (Nagel, 1994:152). Brown (2004) further argues that ethnic identity is shaped not only by ancestry, language or culture associated with a specific racial group, but also to their personal experiences. The above definitions highlight the fluid characteristic of social identity: not inherent to the individual, social identities are thus built, constructed and deconstructed based on the circumstances, the surrounding peoples and the interactions (or lack thereof) with them. In the case of (ethnic "return") migration, the change of circumstances is inevitable because of the nature of migration. Very similarly, Louie (2004) asserted that "like all axes of identity, [Chineseness] is not a fixed or bounded category, and its meaning only becomes relevant as people use it as a tool to define themselves *in relation to others* (p. 21, emphasis added). In the case of Western-born overseas Chinese's ethnic remigration to China, the combination of a new environment wherein they become cultural minorities but are part of the racial ethnic majority and the cultural changes that take place along with their settlement in China bring forward the necessity for them to reevaluate their identities.

It is worth noting that concepts related to belonging have emerged in response to the critique of identity as a conceptual framework, though belonging intrinsically refers more particularly to group identification, especially with regards to its socio-cultural aspect (Lovell, 1998; Geddes and Favell, 1999; Fortier, 2000; Calhoun, 2003). Finally, as Verkuyten wrote, insofar as social identities have to do with similarities and differences, by drawing boundaries, differences between groups are established. These differences relate to striving recognition, esteem and respect, which can develop into "us and them" thinking, feelings of superiority, and intergroup antagonism (2005:82).

3.4.4. Summary

This section examined how the theoretical literature refers to the social-construction of ethno-cultural identity in the context of (international) migration. Ethno-cultural identity is thus a partial identity, component of whole. Primordialist understandings of ethnicity suggest that ethnic identity (in this case, Chinese identity) focuses primarily on closed features such as ancestry, language, and culture. Based on this understanding, being of Chinese ethnicity supposes that one should share common ancestry, but also speak Chinese, know and practice Chinese culture. Circumstantialism, however, suggests that ethno-cultural identity is more fluid, and evolve along with the conditions surrounding the migrant. Finally, it is argued that identities are fluid and highly context-dependent, and are therefore socially constructed.

Identity can be considered as both a part of the process of socialization as well as an endpoint. In the former case, the extent to which one identifies to a host country's socio-cultural mores and values surely impacts on their socialization and integration experiences. In the latter case, it can be said that these very experiences will also impact on migrants' ethno-national identification and attachments. However, as this thesis demonstrates in [Chapter Seven](#), ethno-cultural identity in the context of international migration is dynamic, fluid, and particularly subject to the changing circumstances, inevitable in ethnic "return" migration.

3.5. Social anchoring, an integrative theoretical framework

So far, this chapter has elaborated on three normally-separated conceptual frameworks that, although seem to be different, are closely linked to one another. For instance, as discussed in the previous sections, the social and cultural integration of migrants is determined by a multitude of actors, factors, and circumstances, one of which consists of the migrants' social networks. Their role in the integration process is not to be neglected, and represents one of the main foci of this thesis (see [Chapter Five](#)). Moreover, based on who consists of these social groups, and how "meaningful"⁹ –or

⁹ See Granovetter (1973) and Valentine (2008).

developed— the relationships are within these groups, migrants' integration experiences differ, which in turn, impacts on their ethno-cultural identity development. In this section, I discuss the necessity to develop an integrative theoretical framework that takes into account the importance of social networks in the integration process upon migration, and the effects these have on the migrants' ethno-cultural identity construction. This section thus explains what the concept of social anchoring refers to, what it involves, and how it organically emerges to weave the above theoretical frameworks altogether as a response to a number of theoretical lacunae. Finally, I acknowledge the limitations of this concept in this thesis.

3.5.1. What is social anchoring

Connecting the existing concepts of social integration, social networks, and identity construction, social anchoring introduces an integrative conceptual framework for this thesis. Despite being connected, these notions have usually been studied separately as they each constitute studies on their own, but their interrelations were hardly ever examined close enough. It is worth noting that Clopton and Finch (2011) previously connected social anchor theory with social capital, and Grzymala-Kazłowska (2016) recently proposed a very similar concept of social anchoring which also focuses on the socio-cultural adjustment processes of migrants in a new host country. In the latter study, the author considers migrants as individuals seeking stability and security¹⁰ in increasingly super-diverse societies¹¹. I argue that through the concept of social anchoring, this study benefits from combining this theoretical trio altogether, rather than analyzing them in isolation from one another, as it enriches the study with a holistic approach to better understand Chinese ethnic remigration to China. Social anchoring thus examines social integration issues by looking at the meso-level intermediaries between individuals and society, namely social groups.

Social anchoring aims to understand how migrants anchor themselves, or in Grzymala-Kazłowska's words, how they "establish life footholds" in the new host society, insofar as such footholds have a direct impact on migrants' integration experiences (p. 1133).

¹⁰ See Maslow (1954).

¹¹ See Vertovec (2007).

According to her, this approach would enable identifying the main root(s) of “psychosocial stability” which she argues is fundamental for individuals (including migrants) to integrate in the society, especially when they are encountering “new life settings” (p. 1134). Built from her study, a working definition of social anchoring that is more tailored to this research would refer to the process of migrants grounding themselves in a new environment, developing new social ties and familiarities within one or multiple social groups to foster a sense of stability. Central to helping migrants adjust and integrate in the new host society, social anchoring also plays a pivotal role in triggering and shaping identity questioning based on their perceived socio-cultural integration experiences and performances.

Grzymala-Kazłowska (2016:1131) distinguishes two main types of anchoring: (1) internal and subjective anchoring (e.g. national identification), along with (2) external and objective anchoring (e.g. legal citizenship). Migrants’ sense of rootedness is thus analyzed through a multitude of dimensions –the former type is related to personal beliefs and values, personality, and memory while the latter type comprises of more objectively determinable anchors, such as legal status, place of birth and of formative years, symbolic anchors that carry an important emotional load (e.g. the graves of loved ones), material possessions (e.g. pictures), and habitual practices (Ibid.). It should be noted, however, that while some anchors can be replaced, transferred, or reproduced in the new setting, others are not, and might require to be created from scratch. Depending on the migrant, social networks could be either. Although the author categorizes anchors by types, this thesis primarily focuses on social networks as main anchors, or footholds in the new society. Other anchors are regarded as satellites feeding and illustrating the primary core. Since looking into migrants’ social anchoring gives better insight into the facets of their inclusion (or exclusion) in the society, it is therefore important to examine the anchors that ground migrants to the host country in relation to other footholds that may embed them to their emigration country, or even to other transnational social spaces (Faist, 2015). This thesis thus looks mostly into who consists of these anchors, what role they play in the migrant’ socio-cultural integration process and how this results in identity questioning.

3.5.2. A response to current gaps

Social anchoring thus emerges as a response to the limitations of integration, social network, and ethno-cultural identity construction theories. Although all three frameworks are directly related to the key problematics of this thesis, they do not completely address the issue when used separately. However, when tied altogether through the concept of social anchoring, they gain in relevance, and although very subtly, fill in the following gaps.

First, as discussed above in [Section 3.2.](#), socio-cultural integration theories are limited insofar as they do not pinpoint exactly how migrants adapt personally and socially in new host societies. Moreover, integration theories tend to overlook identity issues, especially relevant when it comes to ethnic “return” migrants. As Jenkins (2014) emphasized, (ethnic) identity is now unavoidable in sociological theories when attempting to understand individuals and their place in the society. Another issue with current integration concepts is related to the debates about quality relationships with the host population and how developed, or meaningful these ties are to the migrant. This is important insofar as socio-cultural integration does not equate to having mere contacts with the host population as it does not necessarily produce social ties, but can actually have the opposite effect (Grzymala-Kazłowska, 2016:1128). Second, as Castells (1996; 1997) pointed out, individuals, and migrants in particular, are affected by their social relations, and being grounded in these ties (i.e. socially anchored) provides them with a minimum of stability, especially in times of change. Furthermore, while social network theories generally focus on how social relations are structured and what results from these relations, social anchoring concentrates instead on the ways in which people develop and sustain different life anchors and the roles these footholds have in their integration and identity construction processes. Social anchoring hence builds on social network theories but focuses more particularly on migrants’ interactions and their individual connections rather than on structural relations between groups. Third, social anchoring takes into account objectively-defined aspects that help overcoming the boundaries of subjectivity, usually criticized when studying identity construction. Grzymala-Kazłowska’s version of social anchoring also includes multiple other social and psychological resources which migrants lean on during their adaptation process in the

new host society, as well as during their identity deconstruction and reconstruction journey.

3.5.3. Limitations

Being an emerging concept, the limits of social anchoring should be acknowledged. Grzymala-Kazłowska's own conceptualization of social anchoring is much more extensive, and takes into account types of anchors with clearly defined categories (2016:1131). However, this thesis focuses primarily on migrants' social networks as social anchors that facilitate or hinder socio-cultural integration in the ancestral homeland. Even though other types of anchors are identified throughout the finding chapters, they do not necessarily refer to causal footholds, but represent a material expression or affirmation of their identity. A new concept of social anchoring stemming from the findings of this thesis therefore needs to be further developed in future research, and clearly define the types of anchors and instances in which they make their appearance, as well as the differential roles they may play. Finally, as it was discussed in this chapter and further illustrated in [Chapters Five](#) and [Six](#), strong anchoring within a social group does not necessarily result in intergroup interactions, and may instead accentuate separation from the host communities. Willingness to integrate with members of the host population is therefore important to take into consideration, which refers back to Verkuyten's (2005) Integration Paradox.

3.5.4. Summary

This section introduced social anchoring as an emerging integrative conceptual framework combining three normally disparate theoretical frameworks: integration, social networks, and identity. Acting as a glue connecting all three themes, it also becomes a more relevant response to this thesis foci. Finally, social anchoring responds –subtly– to issues which the above theoretical trio fails to answer when taken on individually.

3.6. Conclusion and hypotheses

This chapter presented the theories used to frame this thesis. Juggling between multiple theoretical frameworks, it consisted of four main sections, three of which introduced key analytical frameworks and debates. The first section on social-cultural integration theories provided an overview of the most relevant debates in this area, indicators of integration, and pointed out to the limitations and applicability of all such concepts in the context of China. The second section on social network theories insisted on the importance of meso-level intermediaries, i.e. networks in the integration process, and introduced to key concepts revolving around social ties and capital. The third section focused on the social construction of ethno-cultural identity in the context of international migration. It stresses the fact that ethno-cultural identity is only a partial identity, and presented the primordial/circumstantial dichotomy, central in debates on identity. It also emphasized on the fluidity of identity as highly context-dependent, and socially constructed. The final section introduced the concept of social anchoring as an integrative framework linking all previous three frameworks under the same umbrella, also used as a lens for this thesis. This theoretical framework produces the overall hypothesis that Western-born second generation overseas Chinese remigrants' experiences of "homecoming" are affected by the processes and outcomes of their socio-cultural integration, which in turn correlatively impacts on their ethno-cultural identity social construction. In the midst of all such processes, social networks are suggested as essential anchors that play a crucial role in Chinese ethnic remigrants' experiences in the ancestral homeland.

Chapter Four – Methodology

4.1. Introduction

The previous chapter depicted a triptych theoretical framework from which stemmed the emerging concept of social anchoring, which combines elements from the existing theories of integration, social networks, and ethno-cultural identity construction. To test my hypotheses, I use deductive reasoning as I work from more general theories to a more specific case as an illustration. This thesis thus focuses on the study of a specific diasporic group and their experiences, perceptions and emotional reactions upon “return” to the ancestral homeland, which is why an overall interpretivist philosophy underpins my research. This approach suggests that social reality is subjective, and consists of meanings or narratives (co)constructed by individuals and their social surroundings within specific social contexts (Hesse-Biber et al., 2015:4).

This methodology chapter describes the steps undertaken in the course of the research to address my hypotheses and research questions as expressed in the previous chapters. The aim here is to provide, as Rudestam and Newton (2007:87) formulated, “a clear and complete description of the specific steps to be followed”, including both methodological *and* ethical perspectives from which my research was conducted, analyzed and conveyed in the writing process. The first section delivers a comprehensive description and explanation of the research strategy and design followed to collect data, presenting the mechanisms behind the study as a qualitatively-driven multi-methodological research. This section includes details about the fieldwork research conducted in China and the interview processes that consisted of my main method, as well as evidence and explanations for the use of my secondary supportive methods. The second section then focuses on the methods used to analyze the data collected and the perspectives from which I stand to discuss the studied group’s socio-cultural integration and identity changes upon migration. I then dedicate a small section where I discuss

issues of positionality as an insider and outsider throughout the data collection process before looking into questions of reliability, validity and generalizability.

4.2. Research strategy and design

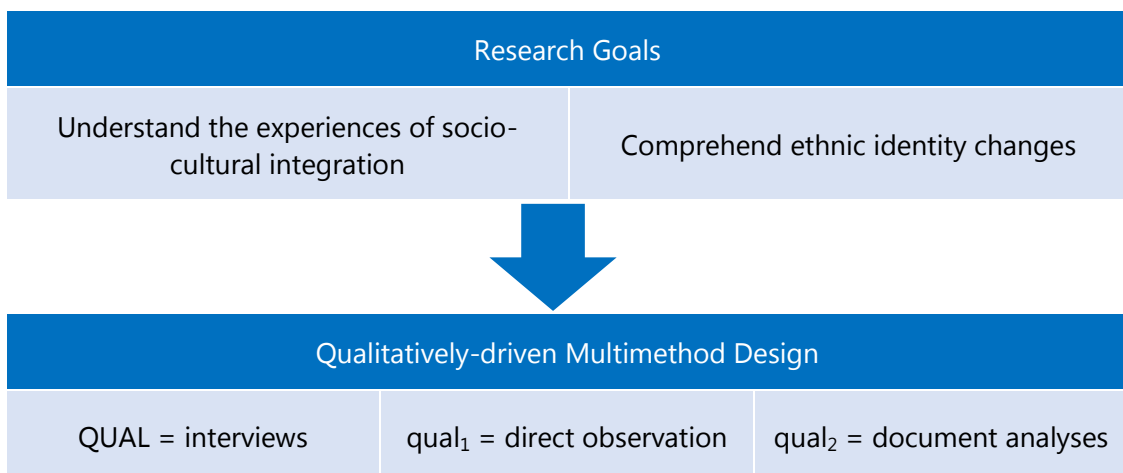
4.2.1. Qualitatively-driven multimethod design

Because of the intrinsic nature of my research, I adopted several methods to collect various forms of qualitative data inasmuch as qualitative methodologies support a deep listening, as well as communication between the researcher and the studied group so as to obtain “deeper and more genuine expressions of beliefs and values that emerge through dialogue [and] foster a more accurate description of views held” (Howe, 2004:54). Qualitatively-driven, my research thus calls for the combination of multiple qualitative methods, also known as multimethod design, which differs from a mixed methods design in that the former combines two or more qualitative methods while the latter combines qualitative and quantitative methods (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007:273). As Hesse-Biber et al. (2015:6) elaborated, a multimethod research design comprises of a primary qualitative method (QUAL), which is supported by (at least) one secondary qualitative component (qual) as its auxiliary component, all of which address the same research goal.

The rationale for choosing a qualitatively-driven multimethod was primarily to gain insight into the overall phenomenon of Western-born second generation overseas Chinese in China, which data was collected from multiple sources providing differing perspectives. Secondly, a multimethod design allows developing a more comprehensive understanding of the studied issue, which is achieved by means of comparison and congregation of at least two separate datasets as the secondary component (qual) comes as a supplementary dataset that either further explores the issues from different angles, affirming or confirming the primary dataset (QUAL). Thirdly, a multimethod design enables acquiring a more complete understanding of the multilayered experiences and stories of the studied group (Hesse-Biber et al., 2015:6-9), which in turn generates a better explanation and understanding of the social phenomena that can be

obtained by using only one method or type of data (Ibid., 587-8.). Finally, multimethod designs facilitate the processes of confirmation (generally called triangulation) and complementarity; the former involving the verification of findings that resulted from the one dataset with the findings that result from another dataset. On the other hand, complementarity involves the combination of at least two datasets so that the limitations of one dataset can be compensated by the other dataset (Small, 2011:63-7). However, it is important to note that the applicability of multimethod designs is based on the working assumption that “different methods aim to do different things” (Hesse-Biber et al., 2015:589) because “they envision different kinds of explanation” (Abbott, 2004:27).

Hence, in order to uncover Western-born second-generation overseas Chinese in China’s “return” migration stories and multifaceted identities, combining the use of a variety of primary and secondary sources and triangulating this qualitative data provides a more consistent argument and a stronger understanding of this ethnic group’s journey in China.



For my research, I used a core qualitative component (QUAL) which was supplemented by the gathering and analyses of secondary qualitative datasets (qual₁ and qual₂). More specifically, although semi-directed in-depth interviews conducted during fieldwork in China are the principal research medium for this project (QUAL), they were

complemented by additional forms of ethnographic-inspired data such as fieldwork notes, direct observation (qual₁), as well as by the analysis of a variety of written documents (qual₂), all of which provides a qualitative approach that enables studying cultural patterns and perspectives of participants in their natural settings. This makes possible the analysis and interpretation of the culture(s) of a specific group to understand their shared beliefs, behavior and languages –if there are any. In line with the aims of my research, my fieldwork aimed to collect detailed information and data about primarily the following:

- (1) Establish a demographic picture of the studied “returning” diasporic group,
- (2) The reasons for their ethnic “return” migration,
- (3) The processes of their migration journey until they settled,
- (4) The narrated experiences of cultural adaptation and social integration in China (How/why some or others integrate/adapt better or worse than others among their peers?),
- (5) The role of networks and social capital throughout the integration and identity construction processes as part of the migration journey,
- (6) What motivates them to stay or oppositely, what makes them want to re-return,
- (7) How their identity has evolved since migration, and what triggered such changes?

4.2.2. Fieldwork research and semi-directed in-depth interviews (QUAL)

Fieldwork was carried out in Beijing and Shanghai, China. As mentioned previously, the main purpose of this fieldwork was to collect data to test my research hypotheses with regards to the interrelations between Western-born second generation ethnic remigrants’ socio-cultural integration and ethno-cultural identity changes by looking more closely at their social relations in China. Beijing and Shanghai were chosen as fieldwork destinations due to the distinctive socio-economic features of these two international metropolises, which greatly influence the demographic characteristics of the studied migrant group, as well as their own motivations for relocating to China (Goldstein and Guo, 1992). Indeed, Beijing and Shanghai are incontestably among the

largest and most populated cities in China –Beijing being the political and cultural hearth of the nation, while Shanghai is the financial and economic center of China. Both cities thus harbor more activities, creating attractive opportunities for potential economic migrants, especially highly-skilled individuals –including expatriates– seeking jobs in larger branch offices, which tend to be more concentrated in these two cities (Wang and Bao, 2015). Also, most research centers, including the CEFC (French Centre for Research on Contemporary China) and the EFEO (École Française d'Extrême-Orient) Chinese branches from which I was granted fieldwork bursaries, are located in Beijing. Finally, relevant governmental institution main branches such as the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (OCAO, *qiaoban*) of the State Council of China were located and accessible from these two cities.

It is within this context that over the course of four and a half months, a total of 58 in-depth interviews were conducted, the majority of which were done in English and French, with the exception of two interviews conducted in Chinese and Spanish. The sample includes one-to-one interviews as well as focus groups. Face-to-face interviews were selected as the main research instrument because they allow putting a human touch to a series of data which is recontextualized in full narratives. Moreover, unspoken social cues (including body language, voice intonation, etc.) provide additional information to supplement the interviewees' verbal answers to questions (Opdenakker, 2006; Wyse, 2014). Individual interviews thus allowed me to collect rich qualitative data in a more private setting where I could obtain direct feedback from the participants, giving me the opportunity to probe their answers and ask for clarifications when necessary, as well as to make use of direct observation (*qual₁*) as an additional evaluation method (Kvale, 1996; 2007; Mahoney, 1997).

Focus groups are defined as “a group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment on, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of the research” (Powell and Singer, 1996:499). They differ from group interviewing insofar as group interviews emphasize on the questions and responses between the interviewer and the respondents while focus groups stress on the importance of interactions between participants (Gibbs, 1997). Although peer pressure may hinder the truthfulness and sincerity of the answers given by the participants

(Mahoney, 1997), I found that in my case, none of the focus group participants seemed to feel pressured by their peers in any way. Indeed, in each case, the respondents were very well acquainted with one another, had strong independent personalities, and did not fear to vehemently oppose others' views when necessary. I chose to conduct focus groups in addition to one-to-one in-depth interviews because they enable interactions within the group, as respondents can react to each other's answers, not only to disagree on certain responses, but also to acquiesce and approve of other participants' stories, experiences and anecdotes, enriching them with their own, and therefore adding value to the insights produced by the data collected via other methods. The fact that they could react to one another's anecdotes, realizing they had shared experiences as insiders of the researched group provided me with a better understanding of their situation in China, as I could not have understood the anecdote, as an outsider (more details in [Section 4.4](#)).

The interviews lasted between one and six hours, with the typical interview taking about 90 minutes. Focus groups lasted between two to three hours, as the interviewees were familiar with one another, responding and reacting to each comment made by others. Each interview was long and rich enough in data for me to qualify them as in-depth qualitative interviews. First, I had to collect some basic demographic data, and then I pursued the interview following an outline and themes to talk about, with only a few specific questions (see [Appendix 1](#)) so that the interview participant would have enough room to talk and reflect about it. Semi-structured interviews thus enabled articulating the interviews without being too suffocating or imposing, allowing me to collect data to "understand the multiple subjectivities of individuals considered as 'experts'" (Hesse-Biber et al., 2015:5).

Interviewee eligibility criteria

In order to be eligible for an interview, participants had to fulfill a specific set of basic yet essential criteria. To be sure, each of the 58 participants had to:

- (1) Be a second or subsequent generation overseas Chinese, which means that participants must have been born and raised overseas. If participants were born in China, they must have immigrated overseas at a young age (before their teenage years), and therefore have been raised or spent a significant part of their formative years in a Western country).
- (2) Must have had spent at least three consecutive months in China at the time of the interview. This criterion was as important as the other one because it meant that the interviewee would have had the opportunity to integrate (or not) into the society, "struggled" through the local paperwork and administration system (for instance: opening a bank account, dealing with property agents, or paying rent and bills). This ensured that the interviewee had enough perspective to reflect on and answer my questions.

As mentioned in the Introduction Chapter, in this thesis, "overseas" refers to "Western countries" or countries pertaining to the "Global North", which are mostly developed nations and economies¹, and which culture is often opposed to East Asian cultures, including Chinese culture. Second generation overseas Chinese born in Western countries are therefore differentiated from overseas Chinese located in South East Asia, where the communities of Chinese people are much more subsequent as well as geographically closer. I would like to emphasize on the requirement for the participants to have "returned" to China for at least three months, so that they have had the chance to possibly interact with the host population, and for them to encounter situations beyond tourism-related circumstances, which is why I excluded potential participants who were on vacation, as their perspectives and experiences may differ and impact on their feedback. Moreover, as Pietilä (2010) states, homecoming experiences and level of commitments differ with the intended duration of stay, so perspectives of immediate return to the West implies that the individual has no real need nor motivation to integrate.

¹ Western countries are mainly the United States, Canada, Western and Northern European countries, and Australasia (principally Australia and New Zealand).

Pilot interviews

In social sciences, pilot studies can be used to “try out” a specific research method (Baker, 1994:182-3), and are part of the preparation stage to test the feasibility of a project on a smaller scale done prior to the major study. Implementing pilot studies are also helpful in identifying possible issues related to situational (im)practicalities (Teijlingen and Hundley, 2001; Teijlingen et al., 2001), assist in determining potential flaws, weaknesses and other limitations of the interview design, allowing the researcher to make the necessary revisions before carrying out the study (Turner III, 2010:757). As such, before conducting the actual interviews from which I collected data to be used for the research, I started off with pilot interviews to help me test my interview questions and to familiarize myself with the interview content. In order to “avoid resource wastage” (Sampson, 2004:400), or in other words, to preserve “real” interviewees with profiles fully corresponding to the criteria list for actual data collection and usage, I chose to conduct five pilot interviews with *haiguis* because of the similarity of their profiles with my target group. *Haigui* (海归) is a term used to refer to Chinese nationals who graduated overseas and who have returned to China with a degree obtained in a foreign university. The similarity of their profiles mostly resides in the fact that upon return, many of them experience difficulties to reintegrate in their home societies (Wang and Bao, 2015) in aspects similar to Western-born overseas Chinese’s own difficulties upon immigration to China. On the whole, pilot interviews not only allowed me to test and refine my interview questions (in terms of order of appearance, wording, and accuracy), they also helped me readjust my timing and taught me to “read between the lines” and react to silences for instance, as explained in the examples below.

Interviews were divided into sections with distinct objectives as I needed to obtain: (1) basic demographic details, (2) details on the migration process from decision-making to settlement, (3) issues linked to socio-cultural integration and (4) issues related to ethnic identity throughout the journey (see [Appendix 1](#)). Although the first section was supposed to be straightforward, quick and short, I learned that it was crucial to spend some time in the beginning on what initially seemed to me more trivial and less central to the research. Indeed, demographic details could be obtained as the interviewees were introducing themselves and after obtaining this group of data, I had the possibility to

move onto the next section to gather data. However, I figured that spending more time to talk about the interviewee's background, introducing myself and speaking about my own trajectory during the first section helped establishing a good rapport with the interviewees and build trust, which in turn, enhanced the quality of the interview as the respondents were more willing to share personal stories and anecdotes, as well as tap into their own network to introduce me to potential participants. In parallel, I also learned to balance the interviews and adjust my timing so that by the time I reached the last section related to ethnic identity (which required a certain level of thought and intellectual effort on the part of the participants), the respondent would not be too worn out to rush to conclude the interview. Lastly, I learned through the round of pilot interviews that some questions could be understood differently from my expectations, no matter how simply worded they were. For example, in the final part of the interviews, I would ask the interviewee a seemingly simple question: "What does it mean to be Chinese to you?". Little did I know that this question would bring so much confusion and evolve into a major issue. When I designed the outline of the interview and prepared key questions to be asked, I believed I wanted to understand the interviewee's own definition of Chineseness, and of "being Chinese". However, one of my pilot interviewee, who was born and raised in China and who spoke perfect English as he had spent seven years in the Boston, U.S., told me that even though he was fluent in English, he would still translate some conversation bits from English to Chinese before answering. The moment I asked the question about "being Chinese", he told me he felt confused as he was not sure about how to translate the word "Chinese". At this moment, I realized the significance of that question, the importance of keeping that question worded in English, and the necessity for me to be even more aware of the reactions and answers to that question while collecting data during the actual round of interviews.

Procedures of data collection and interview process

Recruitment of interviewees

Participants were recruited via diverse methods. As a starting point, I made use of my personal and extended networks to reach out to potential interviewees. I also joined a

number of groups where foreigners and overseas Chinese were likely to be found, such as in international churches or expatriate groups. Additionally, I printed posters and flyers that I displayed and distributed around universities, English schools, and cafés around districts with a higher concentration of foreigners (e.g. Sanlitun in Beijing and Nanjing Road in Shanghai). Finally, I contacted the Shanghai branch of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (OCAO), which introduced me to a few interested interviewees. However, these recruitment methods resulted in too few interviews, which is the reason why word of mouth and snowballing were key to recruit more interviewees and obtain a more consistent sample size. Snowball sampling methods are commonly used in social sciences when the research sample is either rare or restricted to a very small subgroup, as in the case of Western-born second generation overseas Chinese in China. Nevertheless, snowballing is also debated in the literature as it can be considered as a risky recruitment method that affects sample diversity since chain-referral sampling might induce sample biases (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981). Nonetheless, because I recruited participants from several initial starting points, I was able to avoid issues related to sample homogeneity, and interview respondents with a good variety of profiles in terms of gender, age, occupation, length of stay since migration, and country of emigration. The full profiles of the interviewees are listed in a table in [Appendix 5](#).

Most of the interviews took place in public spaces such as restaurants and cafés chosen by the interviewee (usually neighboring their homes or workplace). On one occasion, an interviewee suggested that we met at a café wherein he usually spent time with his friends. Luckily, his friends –who were potential participants responding to all my research criteria– happened to be at the café at the time of the interview. On that day, I sat for over six hours at this café, rotating between half a dozen people, conducting one-to-one interviews and a group interview, as they were arriving one by one. On several occasions, interviewees would invite me to conduct the interview at their home, which allowed me to make interesting observations, from their decoration items to the language they speak with their families at home, to the books and CDs displayed on their shelves. Overall, putting effort into finding informants and interviewees in order to expand the network remained crucial for snowball sampling to be effective and to obtain a substantial sample size.

Interview process and structure

As mentioned above, interviews lasted between one to six hours, most interviews taking around 90 minutes during which the respondents shared their personal stories and background not only since arrival in China, but prior migrating and their plans for the future, if they had any. During the semi-directed in-depth interviews, I let the interviewee speak freely about their migration journey, guiding them to share more specifically about their social and cultural experiences in China, and how their experiences of "homecoming" (though almost none of them qualified their being in China as a homecoming at all) affected their own definitions of self, Chineseness, Chinese identity, home and belonging. Because they were recorded with an audio recorder, interview sessions would often begin clumsily due to the interviewee being self-conscious and overly aware of the recorder. Very quickly however, they would get used to it and continue with the interview very naturally, casually responding to my questions as the interview resembled more to a constructive conversation between two parties curious about one another. Interviews were roughly structured around three major parts with distinct aims for each. The first part's goal was to gather demographic data, and elements related prior to migration. The second part focused on aspects related to socio-cultural integration in China, and the last part aimed to understand the participant's view on Chineseness, home, and belonging, and the evolution of the meaning of those terms in time.

The first part of the interview was important for me because as I let the participants introduce themselves, I was able to gather some basic demographic details but also understand the reasons why they decided to immigrate to China and under what circumstances. Usually, at this stage of the interview, the respondent would also ask me questions, oftentimes phrased as simply as "What about you?", inviting me to share my own story and circumstances for being in China. As I was comfortable sharing my situation, I did so openly. However, it made me realize that self-disclosure was crucial in keeping the "conversation" undisrupted as well as to build trust, and to some extent, complicity and mutual understanding. At times, conducting interactive and dialogic interviews therefore required me to answer the interviewee's questions about my own life, not as a researcher, but as a person with a profile similar to theirs: a person of

Chinese descent, raised in a Western country, dealing with daily life in China. Meeting them halfway and answering their questions deformalized the setting and humanized the research, contributing to a natural and collaborative dialogue rather than a formal Q&A session, which in turn encouraged the openness and depth of the interview. Indeed, as Teerling (2010:69) shared from her experience doing fieldwork research, “when the researcher and the interviewee understand one another through a ‘healthy’ dialogue, a mature and nuanced representation is likely to emerge [sic].”²

The second part of the interview generally revolved around their socio-cultural situation in China since arrival. Questions asked included elements regarding their overall knowledge and understanding about China, Chinese people and Chinese culture, traditions and customs. Interviewees were also asked to evaluate the nature and levels of interactions with the local population and identify their circles of friends (in reference to Granovetter’s (1973) strong and weak ties), as well as the reasons they thought were behind such setting within their relationships. Information concerning group membership, views on intermarriages with local Chinese people, and other aspects relevant to understand issues related to socio-cultural integration extracted from the literature (see [Chapters Two](#) and [Three](#)) were recorded at this stage of the interview. To conclude this section of the interview, I asked the respondent if they considered themselves to be well-integrated, and to explain why they felt like so.

The third stage of the interview was unquestionably the most demanding part for the participant, not only because of the intensity of the discussion, but mostly due to the necessity for them to reflect on the true meaning of words and ideas they had been using on a daily basis without a second thought. This part aimed to understand how the interviewee had been re-evaluating (or not) their identity(ies) and positionality since migrating to China, and if their socio-cultural integration had any role in such process. Respondents were asked to share their views on the meaning of “being Chinese”, “home”, and “belonging”. They were then asked to provide their own definitions for these terms and position themselves based on their definitions. During the course of the

² However, this approach tends to be “opposed to mainstream interview norms where interview respondents’ questions about the interviewer’s own life are deflected’ (Lather, 1986:266).

interview, I kept challenging their answers, incessantly asking “why” for nearly everything they stated. This was crucial so that I could question them, ask for clarifications, even on the most basic answers. The interview format enabled exploring the same questions more than once, with different wording or simply by asking “why”, to then refer to their previous answers which seemed to contradict the present answer. However, this does not mean that seemingly contradicting statements or different answers to the same question jeopardize their validity. On the contrary, “going back to a similar idea more than once allows participants to reflect on their story as it is being narrated” (Teerling, 2010:64). As I just mentioned, it often occurred that interviewees never properly thought about a specific topic until they were clearly asked about it. Consequently, statements were often re-evaluated and reshaped as the interview progressed, making it a “highly dynamic and reflective process” (Ibid.). As Kleinman and Copp (1993:53) suggested, good qualitative narratives and accounts may be complex as they provide “contradictions and ironies rather than mundane descriptions”. This constant cross-checking contributed to the interviews’ robustness as emotions, feeling of belonging and home are not easily classifiable.

Profiles of the participants

[Appendix 5](#) provides a profile for each of the 58 Chinese ethnic remigrants who took part in this research. All the participants have been attributed a coded name (INTXX) followed by basic biographical information, as well as both personal and professional details, including: gender, age at the time of the interview, country of emigration (i.e. country they have grown up in, but with a specification if the birthplace is different), place of the interview (Beijing or Shanghai, which also corresponds to where they currently live), occupation in China and type of employment contract when relevant, marital status and whether they have children or people to care for. As mentioned, the sample size consists of 58 respondents aged between 18 and 47 at the time of the interview. There were 29 women and 29 men. The sample included 15 respondents from France, 10 from the United States, 8 from Canada, 5 from Australia, 4 from England, 3 from New Zealand, Spain, and Sweden (each), 2 from Germany, Italy and the Netherlands (each), and 1 from Belgium. As for the relationship status, 24 respondents were single, and 34 were in a relationship, including 16 being married. 12 out of the 34

in a relationship were involved with a Chinese partner. Although in this thesis, I will refer to the interviewees by their coded name, the table includes a given nickname that solely informs on whether the respondent's official name is Chinese-sounding, or Western-sounding.

Ethical concerns

It is worth mentioning that due to the nature of my research, participants were unlikely to be biased, oppressed, or in a vulnerable situation caused by the interview (or the researcher)³. After establishing preliminary contacts with the respondents, I provided them with informal written information on my research project (usually via an instant messaging application), specifying they were free to withdraw at any time of the process, without having to provide any reason for it. When we settled on a time and location to meet for the actual interview, I would bring an information sheet ([Appendix 2](#)) and a consent form ([Appendix 3](#)) for the participant to read and sign (as mentioned, none of them were coerced to participate, and were competent enough to understand, reflect and decide to take part in the research or not). I made sure to go through each point with the participants in case they had further questions and ensure they had a clear understanding of the research purpose. Usually, it was during this semi-formal/informal moment that the participants took full notice of the research and their role in it. Though all the participants agreed for the interview to be voice-recorded, I made sure a last time after the introduction that the interviewee agreed to it, and proceeded to the interview. All information and material provided by the respondents (or acquired other, through informants or direct observation for instance) is confidential and pseudonymized.

Obstacles and challenges

Overall, even though the fieldwork went on smoothly without any issues, there were a few occasions when I encountered obstacles that slowed down the data collection

³ This means that there were no unequal power relations insofar as my research did not involve respondents who could feel any sense of obligation to participate (such as patients, prisoners, or students for instance) or vulnerable people (such as undocumented migrants or children).

process. During the fieldwork preparation stage, I expressed general concerns regarding the difficulties linked to finding enough participants with diverse backgrounds as I was looking for a niche group in such large cities. As a result, I started the recruitment process from as many different starting points as possible to avoid sample homogeneity, as described above. I therefore relied on snowball sampling from each of these starting points, which proved to be efficient and reliable. However, in three specific instances, the recruitment process was challenged as gatekeepers refused me access to potential participants.

Difficulties in recruiting participants and going pass gatekeepers

One of the obstacles encountered happened rather regularly when I was trying to display recruitment posters throughout universities known to be frequented by foreigners (e.g. Beijing Language and Culture University, Renmin University, Beijing Foreign Studies University, Peking University and Tsinghua University). At first, I went to a first university (BLCU) to put up posters on as many information boards I could see (poster in [Appendix 4](#)). However, as I was walking out to move on to the next university, I took a glimpse of the posters I had just stuck on, only to realize that they had been taken off. I then spoke to the concierge who removed my posters. No matter how many times I negotiated or explained my intentions, that my posters were not advertisements for products, the concierge would brush me off, refusing me access to any of the board, warning me that any of the posters I displayed would be removed within minutes, unless I displayed my posters on one single designated board with a high turnover, as posters were torn out and replaced every other day. I proceeded to display the recruitment posters on the board, making sure they had a good visibility, as the board was placed near the university's canteen, which generates a high traffic of thousands of individuals every day. The posters lasted a full day until they were torn out and covered by a gigantic banner promoting discounted meals. All in all, none of the dozens of posters I displayed lasted long enough to generate a large number of respondents. They did result in two participants contacting me, starting points from which snowballing occurred.

On one other occasion, I was refused access to potential participants due to my lack of personal connections (*guanxi*) within the group I needed to contact. Indeed, after doing some ground research, I identified an American company that implanted a branch in Beijing and which half of the employees are Western-born second-generation overseas Chinese. Being a nest of potential participants, I immediately tried to get access to the firm by contacting them by phone, the only point of contact available. Although the receptionist who answered pre-refused me any further access to the company, she told me to “come and try”, which I did the following day. Upon arrival at their office, the same person told me off, refusing me access to the company, coldly warning me that she was busy working, and that her job was to “filter away all unwanted individuals”⁴. In that case, the receptionist was the gatekeeper who blocked access to potential participants. If in other situations, I managed to get through gatekeepers, it was “a difficult negotiation” every single time, when “fieldwork relations with gatekeepers” were crucial in accessing participants (Reeves, 2010:315).

International events provoking emotional turmoil among respondents

In addition to the aforementioned difficulties, international events occurring in Europe at the time of the interviews were important to take into consideration while collecting data in China. Indeed, the November 13, 2015, bombing attacks in Paris resulted in a massive international response from all spheres including overseas French nationals. The large majority of my interviews were conducted at the start of November, as it took me some time to establish networks from which I could recruit potential participants. Also, a quarter of the sample consisted of French emigrants interviewed from November onwards. Following the attacks, French institutions, communities in China gathered to commemorate the victims collectively, and for some, strengthen their sense of unity as they shared shock, sadness and anger together. As I was invited to a few of these gatherings, I was able to come across potential participants: second and later generation overseas Chinese born in France, then working in China. Although it was challenging to

⁴ Though her response was harsh in the way she formulated it, she was not wrong to refuse me access to the company. However, in many other occasions and in different situations, I always managed to talk my way through, or at least, to have the receptionist give me a helping hand by contacting a person to let me through.

recruit them given the emotional backdrop and intensity, I still introduced myself, first as a fellow French national who grew up in Paris, and then as a researcher interested in their profiles. Those who accepted to follow up with an interview (usually during another meeting) proved to have been affected by the events to different degrees.

4.2.3. Observation (qual₁) and document analyses (qual₂)

Direct observation (qual₁)

The purpose of the interviews was to gather data to understand the experiences of “returned” Western-born second generation overseas Chinese to China, as well as how they integrate into the society with its people, and how they culturally adapt over time. In the same way, direct observations were also made to better understand the attitudes, behaviors and interactions (or lack thereof) between the “returnees” and the local population. Observing participants was done on a regular basis. I found that observing the quantity and quality of interactions between “returnees” and the host population was key to evaluating the attitudes of one group towards the other, especially in cases when one does not necessarily admit negative feelings towards the other group: sighs, rolled-up eyes, short comments on “how upsetting they are”, were thus all ‘recorded’ as I observed participants. Observations were also made during times when interviews took place at the interviewee’s home, or even in their own neighborhoods, which revealed a lot about their approaches towards the culture they embrace in private, at “home” such as meal types and preferences, readings, home decorations, language spoken at home for instance. Field notes were therefore regularly taken, consisting now of two full notebooks. Direct observation was important in helping me detect subtle interactions between participants and the Chinese locals or facial expressions when talking about some issues for example, which could reveal repressed emotions the interviewee would not admit openly.

Although the ethnographic approach to qualitative research is often attributed to the field of anthropology (Trochim et al., 2016), insofar as this research studies the culture of a well-defined group, hints of ethnographic methods were used to complement interviews. This methodology only borrows some ethnography-inspired methods and

without a doubt, cannot be categorized as ethnography per se since ethnographic research usually involves much longer-term field research and active participant observation where the ethnographer is immersed in the studied culture as an active participant.

Document analyses (qual₂)

As stated, most data, retrieved primarily from semi-structured in-depth interviews were used in parallel with document analyses, mostly to supplement and complement the data collected during interviews. Among the documents I analyzed for this research are reports from Chinese think tanks, most notably China's Blue Book of Global Talents⁵ (2015), such as The Annual Report on The development of Chinese Returnees (Wang and Miao, 2013), the Report on Overseas Chinese Professionals (Wang and Miao, 2014) or The Annual Report on Chinese International Migration (Wang, 2015), produced by the Center of China and Globalization (CCG). These documents are important because not only do they acknowledge the issue of returnees' integration in China, but they also address it by presenting a plan for them to reintegrate into Chinese society more efficiently and smoothly. Other materials analyzed include Chinese official statements, newspaper releases, and journals⁶.

In addition to this grey literature, I also make use of less official sources of information by targeting specific blogs along with their respective comments if there are any, as well as forums and discussion threads to gather testimonies and anecdotes of individuals who may be out of reach for interviews, but who have reflected on their own migration journey to China. One good example of such blog would be Chris Biddle's blog, named

⁵ China's Blue Books Series are published annually since 2012 by the Center for China and Globalization, China's leading independent think tank. It consists of a series of "detailed and incisive reports dealing with *global talent*, with a particular focus on the growing trend of *Chinese coming back to China* after studying and working abroad". The question of reintegration of returnees into Chinese society is actually discussed for *haiguis* more than for Western-born overseas Chinese born migrating to China.

⁶ For instance, an interesting announcement was made in late 2015 about the introduction of the *huayi* card (华裔卡) for overseas Chinese, which facilitates every day activities for Chinese ethnics with foreign citizenships residing in China.

"The Otherside: An American student living in China"⁷ (2010-2012), wherein he retells stories of what he sees, experiences, thinks and feels about and in China, as a foreigner, with detailed narratives, pictures, anecdotes, examples. Another good illustration would be the reflexive article of writer and blogger Dorcas Cheng-Tozun (2015), a Chinese-American sharing her experience in China, her feelings of alienation and how she revisits her ethnic identity following the period she stayed in China. Although some may reveal their real names or even their faces online, they have the choice to remain completely anonymous, giving them the chance to express themselves freely, giving opinions, or sharing anecdotes in response to others' own experiences. As such, expatriate websites, forums and blogs⁸ not only display a specific community's shared experiences, but it also reveals a form a networking where individuals are willing to help one another by sharing tips and information to facilitate someone's settlement in China, as they may have struggled themselves when they once moved to China from the Western world. Overall, information retrieved from these less formal sources provides supplementary data that enable confirming the primary dataset (QUAL) by means of triangulation.

4.3. Methods of data analysis

4.3.1. Data processing

Although the research data was principally analyzed manually, it was then complemented with NVIVO, a computer software program designed to support qualitative studies. I chose to spend more resources analyzing the data manually so that I could increase my understanding and familiarity with the data collected, but also so that I could make use of my personal knowledge of events to recontextualize the participants' statements and experiences⁹. As McCarvill (2002:115) stated, a qualitative

⁷ Source: <https://othersidechina.wordpress.com/tag/american-in-china/>

⁸ Websites, forums and blogs visited include: bjstuff.com; inbeijing.net; beijingrelocation.com; thebeijinger.com; lostlaowai.com; shanghaiexpat.com; shanghaimamas.org; goabroadchina.com/blog; othersidechina.wordpress.com; blog.chinadaily.com.cn.

⁹ For example, I noticed that when participants were asked about ethno-national identity and sense of belonging, respondents who emigrated from France would answer in a similar pattern. This was due to the timing and period during which I conducted the interviews, i.e. not too long after the terrorist attacks in Paris in November 2015.

researcher should make good use of their “personal insight, feelings and perspective as a human being to understand the social life under study”.

Interviews were audio recorded, and field notes were taken throughout the fieldwork. After each interview session, I would take a moment to write down notes, first impressions and a minimal analysis, as the memory from the exchange was still fresh. Besides, although I did not fully transcribe the interviews, I listened to the recordings several times and proceeded to take thorough notes from the audio file. I then did a cross-sectional analysis¹⁰ between the two set of notes and the additional field notes taken, which equated to a substantial but manageable amount of data.

Interview and field notes were thus analyzed by means of a series of analytical approaches similar to the analysis outlined by Strauss (1987). Allowing for a detailed examination of the collected data, this approach focuses on a three-step analysis using (1) open, (2) axial, and (3) selective coding. To be precise, during the first stage, I read through all the data collected, allocating initial codes and labels to key terms to begin classifying the research data into distinguishable categories. Being the early stage of the analysis, new labels and categories are continually assigned and identified. During the second stage, I studied and reviewed the labels to identify recurrences and themes within the dataset which could help me address my hypotheses. These themes fall into the two main categories: socio-cultural integration and identity changes. In the final stage, I made a selection of accounts, statements and examples from the dataset in order to illustrate the key themes identified in the earlier stages of the analysis. For instance, in regard to the broader category ‘socio-cultural integration’, I was able to identify a series of recurrences which became common determinants of integration for the studied group in China. Finally, in case I missed out on important details, I decided to use NVIVO. I entered the data collected in the software and searched for cross-references and patterns using keywords which revealed to be consistent with the manual analysis, though providing a clearer thematic mapping of the data.

¹⁰ Cross-sectional analysis implies making comparisons across the entire data set, on certain specified themes (Mason, 2002:199).

4.3.2. Examining socio-cultural integration and identity

As discussed in [Chapter Three](#), migrants' integration within a new host society can be examined through the narrated experiences of social integration and cultural integration. While the former can be defined as an ensemble of social interactions between host natives and immigrants, the latter can be characterized as being the extent to which natives and migrants share cultural customs, values, and patterns (Van Tubergen, 2006:6-7). In this respect, the research participants' integration within Chinese society was explored based on a selection of factors retrieved from the interviews, put in parallel with existing elements discussed in the theoretical chapter. Although some of those factors are very straightforward, such as linguistic competencies or social circles, some other are subtler, and require a particular attention because of their importance, such as preparedness and prior transnational ties with the ancestral homeland or straightforward willingness to integrate.

As ethnic identity is considered to be a dynamic social process, it therefore implies a certain level of interaction. However, as expected, given the impalpable and immeasurable nature of identity, evaluating participants' ethnic identity turned out to be delicate. Therefore, evidence of ethnic identity construction (and the way it is impacted by socio-cultural (mis)integration) was done based on the interviewees' discourses and according to whether they end up identifying themselves either as Chinese, Western foreigners, both or none, which either confirms or affirms the hypotheses. Elements taken into consideration were as follows:

- (1) Interviewees' identification to native or ethnic country, to a culture and set of values, and to people in order to identify their anchors.
- (2) Interviewees' meaning of "being *Chinese*" (emphasis on "Chinese" being voiced out in English language¹¹ and not in Chinese language)
- (3) Where they call/feel "home" and their rationale for it
- (4) The place/country they feel they belong to

¹¹ The question related to "being Chinese" was tricky since there are multiple translations for the designation "Chinese" in Chinese language.

- (5) Whether (1) to (4) changed since arrival, and the way it evolved throughout the migration process

Additionally, speech indicators were scrutinized as part of the analyses of discourse to draw out elements supporting interviewees' identification to a country or another (e.g. the unconscious choice of words and subtle speech indicators, which may reveal distancing oneself from the other – "me" vs. "they"–). This again will be discussed in the following chapters.

4.4. Positionality, and status as an insider and outsider

As emphasized across this chapter, active reflexivity and positionality were crucial in the processes of data collection, analysis, and writing. As a researcher, myself being a second generation overseas Chinese born and raised in a Western country (France), I was fully aware of my own profile overlapping with my subjects', as I was trying to reach out to individuals with profiles similar to mine. During the course of my fieldwork in Beijing and Shanghai, I experienced moments of being an insider, an outsider, and both at the same time, depending on circumstances and factors such as age, gender, education, social class, lifestyles, interests and overall experiences. In many instances, I could relate to their stories, when they shared about their struggles in their birth country or in China, as well as the questions that came across their minds because of their hybridity as hyphenated Chinese individuals, often informally and colloquially self-proclaimed "bananas" –yellow on the outside, white on the inside. Being a Western-born second generation overseas Chinese in China myself, I was de facto an insider in the "banana" community, which was undeniably beneficial in establishing rapport with my interviewees from the very beginning, especially the ones from France, since prior to the interviews, we would informally exchange casual jokes, wondering if the other corresponded to the French-Chinese clichés. Even though I met almost all of the respondents for the first time at their interviews, most of them –if not all– seemed to be at ease with me. Without a doubt, this contributed to the interviewee sharing personal stories more willingly. Over the years, many other researchers observed similar effects (Israel and Hay 2006; Kvale 2007; Savin-Baden and Major, 2013; Kim-Yoo, 2015). Being in

China and having similar “banana” profiles as second generation overseas Chinese – meaning that we look Chinese, but being brought up overseas, are culturally “westernized”–, it was evident that what I experienced on a daily basis, my interviewees most certainly experienced it at a point too. Indeed, the forms of interactions I had with Chinese locals were unquestionably experienced by the respondents, interactions ranging from small talks with taxi drivers, to longer conversations with Chinese people who were curious about their overseas brethren, all of which more or less affected my sense of belonging and the development of my own ethnic identity most certainly affected my interviewees to a certain level. In that way, being an insider helped me understand the participants whenever they made references to events I had experienced firsthand, facilitating the overall process. Retrospectively, being able to share my experience of a similar event from a different perspective surely fed the conversations as the interviewee re-evaluated their own identities. As such, being an insider really helped me understand them better in many ways. The benefit of being an insider culminated when one participant contacted me a few hours before the interview meeting to reschedule the interview to another time when she was receiving her friends and family from overseas, clearly inviting me to conduct more interviews during brunch at her home, since it was going to be a gathering of “fellow bananas”.

Although most of my respondents acknowledged me as an insider given the similarity of our profiles, almost all of them also drew a line to mark our differences, as a reminder that “I was not really like them”, mostly since the purpose of my presence in China radically differed from theirs. My daily activities were limited in comparison to theirs nor did I have interactions with Chinese locals in my workspace on a daily basis like they do. Even though I visited hospitals, used a Chinese SIM card, and had a bank account, which means that I had to deal with local administration paperwork, it was only to an extremely limited extent. Indeed, unlike my participants, I did not have to pay taxes, did not have to deal with Chinese local property agencies or other formalities, I did not have to place my children in a school, or even shop for furniture to decorate a home. These daily concerns moved to a Chinese context were none of mine, which again, marked key differences in the way I experienced China, and therefore limited my understanding of their own journey. In addition to this, there were times I experienced moments of being an outsider due to our differences in career paths, interests, personal experiences,

lifestyles, or way to see the world. For instance, whenever I interviewed established expatriates or participants holding a high managerial position in a large multinational firm, I instantly felt the difference of our social statuses (and wealth). Overwhelmed by their charisma, I created a safe distance and positioned myself as an outsider, as a reminder that I was a researcher inquiring a respondent. In order to obtain more information and to get the participants to share more willingly, it was thus crucial for me to juggle between my outsider cap and my insider cap. As Kim-Yoo describes it, this was achieved by switching between my in-/outsider masks (2015:135), as what mattered was to close the distance to collect contextualized data, full stories of individuals who were more than directors or factory owners.

4.5. Reliability, validity and generalizability

Reliability and validity are two features which a qualitative researcher should be observing whilst designing the study, collecting the data, analyzing the results and judging the overall quality of the research (Patton, 2002; Golafshani, 2003; Rudestam and Newton, 2015). Certainly, a reliable qualitative research is essentially consistent (Carcary, 2009) and a valid qualitative methodology should use “appropriate tools, processes and data” to address the research question and hypotheses (Leung, 2015:325). Because the principal dataset for my research was extracted from primary original sources, accuracy of the data was thoroughly verified by means of constant comparison, triangulating the data with other sources from the secondary dataset listed in [Section 4.2.3](#). (Patton, 1999; 2002). The same results would therefore be achieved if the research was conducted by another researcher following the same methodology, though interpretation of the results may vary. Additionally, with the practice of active reflexivity (Mason, 2002), which is indispensable, for “researchers need to be active and reflexive in the process of generating data rather than being neutral data collectors” (Blaikie, 2009:53); optimum objectivity was striven for throughout the research. Although the core of this study focuses on the various subjectivities of the layered experiences of a group of individuals, it is crucial to remain “aware of the hegemonic biases of traditional positivistic concerns, especially as they pertain to issues of “objectivity” within the

research process whereby individuals must place their own values and concerns outside the research endeavor (Hesse-Biber et al., 2015:4).

Finally, according to Mason (2002:39), generalizability involves “the extent to which some form of wider claims can be made based on the research and analysis rather than stating that the analysis is entirely idiosyncratic and particular”, all of which refers back to the rigor of the analysis. Although research seeks to be reliable and valid, generalizability can only be achieved to a limited extent. On the one hand, my research on the case of Western-born second generation overseas Chinese’s ethnic “return” migration to China might be applicable to other second generation diasporic population relocating to their ancestral homelands because of predictable issues linked to integration and identity changes. My study thus provides an illustrative case of a more global phenomenon where individuals move across borders not only to meet economic needs, but also to close a cycle of migration with lingering issues of identity and place of belonging. Similarly, previous studies have discussed issues of other diasporic groups’ second generation integration and identity issues upon “returning” to the parental land (see [Chapter Two](#)). On the other hand, generalizability cannot fully be achieved because of the singularity of the personal stories and trajectories of each individual, and because of the peculiarities of the ‘China factor’, which includes: China’s history, socio-political background and mediatized economic prowess, Chinese culture, and the background history of Chinese diaspora. Lastly, as Leung (2015:326) argues, “most qualitative studies, if not all, are meant to study a specific issue or phenomenon in a certain population or ethnic group, of a focused locality in a particular context, hence generalizability of qualitative research findings is usually not an expected attribute”. Though my main argument that social-cultural (mis)integration occurrences impacts on ethnic identity might inform further research, the sample size does not allow room for complete generalizability, and the singularity of the lives and stories of my participants cannot be standardized. Therefore, the findings of my research do not aim to be generalized to all second generation “return” migrants, but to shed light on the multi-layered experiences of one specific group: second generation hyphenated-Chinese in China.

4.6. Conclusion

Built upon the previously stated research questions and theoretical framework, a qualitatively-driven multimethod scheme was designed to collect data, integrating various methods including semi-directed in-depth interviews as a core method (QUAL) and direct observation (qual₁) as well as document analyses (qual₂) as secondary methods. Completed during fieldwork in Beijing and Shanghai over a period of 4,5 months, the interviews targeted a subpopulation of migrants: Western-born second generation overseas Chinese living in China, the land of their ancestors. In-depth interviews were conducted with a variety of profiles among this targeted "returning" diasporic group, including participants from various age groups, professions and countries of emigration. Direct observation occurred mostly during interviews while document analyses from both informal and official sources were performed throughout the research process to support and enrich the information obtained during interviews. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were the most direct and effective ways to address the research topic, which is why they were given priority, therefore acting as the dominant method for this research, whilst direct observation and document analyses acted as supplementary methods enabling confirmation (or triangulation) of the data collected during interviews. Additionally, pilot interviews helped me get familiar and confirm the interview content which necessitated minor revisions, improving the overall quality and flow for actual rounds of interviews. Trying out the interviews during the piloting stage also helped me flag elements which I thought were less crucial while designing the interview structure, as for the importance of using English language for specific questions for instance.

Shedding light on issues that would otherwise be "enigmatic" (Eisner, 1991; Golafshani, 2003), this research purposes to "generate understanding" (Stenbacka, 2001:551) by means of multiple forms of data collected from various perspectives to address the research questions and hypotheses. The overall process of this qualitatively-driven multimethod research therefore enables a better understanding of the socio-cultural integration issues that frame the identity changes occurring upon migration of a previously scattered diaspora "back" in the parental land. Finally, since this research purposes to identify and understand overseas Chinese "returnees'" experiences,

generalizability was not striven for, given the uniqueness of each individual and the sample size. Indeed, although the participants were selected to give as wide as possible a variety of countries of emigration (as well as gender, age, and occupation), the sample does not intend to be representative of the global North (Western countries), or of each Western country concerned. However, it does provide rich data on their homecoming experiences. Moreover, the interviews were conducted in two key Chinese cities chosen to address the research questions. However, there is no intention whatsoever homogenize China and reduce its diversity to Beijing and Shanghai.

Chapter Five – Social networks and ethnic remigrants' socio-cultural integration

5.1. Introduction

As detailed in Chapters Two and Three, the existing literature largely documents the important role of social networks throughout individuals' migration journey, from the migration decision-making process to their settlement, and beyond (Massey et al., 1999; Arango, 2004; Haug, 2008; O'Reilly, 2012). Being self-evidently relational, social networks represent what Faist (1997) called the "crucial meso-level", which ranges between macro and micro-level interpretations of international migration, hence going beyond the impersonal push and pull theories, by linking the socio-structural aspects of migration with individual motivations (Goss and Lindquist, 1995). As mentioned, an essential indicator of social integration is when migrants establish social ties with individuals and groups pertaining to the host majority population. Previous studies also suggest that developing and maintaining social ties is determinant for minority groups' integration in further respects, including economic and cultural integration, as well as improving acceptance by reducing negative inter-group attitudes (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006; Heath et al., 2008; Verkuyten, 2016).

Hence, to better understand second generation overseas Chinese ethnic "returnees'" migration experiences through the lens of socio-cultural integration, it is necessary to investigate their meso-level social networks and how they are being capitalized. It is also important to examine the constituents of such networks, and take account of both strong and weak ties to identify the ways in which these ties impact on the migrants' socio-cultural integration experience in China. Indeed, throughout their migration journey, different social ties and networks play different roles that support or hinder ethnic remigrants' integration outcomes in China. Such roles may vary and range from simply providing practical advice on how to get around upon arrival, to bringing the

migrant closer to a job opportunity, to providing the moral support and bringing a sense of familiarity migrants need to feel at home and anchored in China.

This chapter thus looks into the social networks involved in Chinese ethnic “returnees” migration experience –existing ties as well as those in construction– and relates those social circles to understand their socio-cultural integration. To do so, I identified the most relevantly recurrent types of individuals and groups who have had a direct or indirect impact on their integration experiences, as mentioned by my interviewees and in the literature. Two broad categories emerged. The first category is mainly constituted of closer ties with whom migrants bond, while the second one is largely constituted of groups more broadly referred to as x or y communities, with whom migrants build bridges to connect (see [Section 3.3.1](#)). Interestingly, what came out from the interviews was a variety of networks ranging from strong ties, organizations, to virtual strangers, all of whom either facilitated or hindered their socio-cultural encounters with China and Chinese people. Finally, each group seemed to have its own distinct role in the interviewees’ migration journey and integration.

5.2. The impact of family on remigrants’ socio-cultural integration

Migration and family has been the subject of previous research wherein family refers to members of a network that facilitates the migration process, or when addressing issues of family reunification to justify migration, or to discuss the disruption migration itself may incur to the family (Boyd, 1989; Chan, 1997; Rumbaut, 1997; Cooke, 2008; Reynolds, 2009; Litchfield et al., 2015). However, this thesis explores the impacts that family has had –and still has– on ethnic remigrants’ social-cultural experiences in China upon migration. In this section, I first discuss how even before remigrating to the ancestral homeland, ethnic “return” migrants’ parents and extended transnational families’ support throughout their younger formative years may have contributed to facilitating their socio-cultural integration. The first part focuses primarily on family as kinfolks, and refers more specifically to parents, siblings, and other relatives. In line with the finding that family plays a central role in the migrants’ integration experience, the second part

concentrates on another strand of ethnic remigrants' family; it is to say their significant other (which could be a spouse, or simply boy-/girlfriend). The third part shifts the focus towards the impact that ethnic remigrants' children may have on their integration in China.

5.2.1. Kinship capital and integration

Consistent with existing studies on second generation ethnic "return" migration, findings suggest that maintaining transnational family ties during childhood and adolescence not only contributed to migrants' decision to relocate to the ancestral homeland (Wessendorf, 2007; 2008; Reynolds, 2009; Teerling, 2010), but also facilitated the formation and development of new social ties with local coethnics after "returning" to China. Kinfolk's impact on such processes is mostly related to the fact that many respondents grew up in family environments that directly and indirectly influenced their subsequent integration experiences in China. In some cases, this may include daily practice of Chinese language at home with parents or during larger family gatherings when celebrating Chinese festivals (INT15; INT23), watching Chinese TV channels at home during dinner instead of national news (INT15), or visiting extended family members in China over the summer holidays (INT05; INT35; INT37; INT55; INT57; INT58). These aspects of the family's contribution are vectors that make up remigrants' habitus (Bourdieu, 1990), which equips them when dealing with socio-cultural instances in the ethnic homeland. Respondents who grew up in a Chinese family environment with strong transnational practices embedded in their everyday activities certainly enriched remigrants' cultural capital. This in turn contributed to their developing dispositions and skills that include a certain level of linguistic and cultural competencies. Upbringing and shared experiences with kinfolks as a Chinese family therefore contributed to building their habitus, which itself impacts on their socio-cultural encounters and approach to and in China¹. Finally, social networks are essential in alleviating the risks linked to the costs of migration (see [Chapter Three](#)), and migrants resort to these networks, also relying on kinship capital when they decide whether or not they shall migrate, but also

¹ In [Section 6.3](#), I discuss how cultivating transnational linkages with China prior to relocating to the ancestral homeland (may they be cultural or with people) contributes to facilitating the integration processes once in the "homeland".

build up on this capital to channel their destination (Haug, 2008; 2012; Litchfield et al., 2015).

For instance, INT05, a Chinese-American expatriate in Beijing, notes that from an early age, her parents encouraged her to interact more frequently with her extended family in China, more particularly with her grandparents, who regularly visited from Hangzhou to live with them for several consecutive months a year in Texas, where she grew up. When her grandparents were to return to China, INT05 and her family would fly along, and spend the summer in Hangzhou, with occasional trips to other cities. This means that during her younger years, INT05 was in close contact with her “pure Chinese [sic.]” grandparents with whom she exclusively communicated in Chinese, for extended periods of five to six months a year. INT05 thus realized that these exchanges with her family helped her become fluent in Chinese. She further reminisces:

“We also used to watch Chinese TV channels at home, [...] from news to entertainment shows, [...] so I was pretty updated about China and generally knew how things worked here even before we [she and her husband] decided to move to Beijing.”

It thus appears that the family environment in which INT05 grew up in provided her with the tools to better her chances when playing the culture “game”, therefore facilitating her navigation through the unspoken cultural mechanisms of Chinese society. The analogy of the game was elaborated in Bourdieu’s (1986; 1990) work to refer to the importance of bodily and socio-cultural competencies social agents need for them to perform well in the practices of the social worlds they enter. Bourdieu’s idea of practice transcends space and time, and accounts for the processes that compose a person’s experience in a social context. This perspective echoes with discourses encouraging conformity, wherein migrants are to “play the game” and abide by the regulations and rules that direct their behaviors. In this respect, INT05 was fully equipped from a young age to play a better “game” when she and her husband chose to remigrate to China. Her ancestry and family ties largely contributed to her growing up in an environment that nurtured her socio-cultural equipment to better interact with their local Chinese peers in the ancestral homeland. By exposing her to Chinese culture during childhood and through adolescence, INT05’s family inscribed social dispositions –or in Bourdieu’s

terms, *habitus*– that largely aided her socio-cultural integration after migrating to China. Her aptitudes are especially flagrant when compared to her husband, another Chinese-American as she admits that her “cultural equipment”, much better than his, enabled her to connect with Chinese people more easily, to establish strong ties with friends. She concludes:

“Sometimes I don’t even say that I’m from the States, and they take me in as one of theirs.”

5.2.2. Significant others

Among the strong ties that can possibly affect remigrants’ integration experiences and outcomes in the ancestral homeland, are their significant others. Although other studies may refer to significant others to encompass all individuals who played an essential role in the research subjects’ construction of ethnic identity (e.g. McCarvill, 2002), in this thesis, discussions about significant others refer more colloquially to romantic partners. This may include spouses and fiancé(e)s, as well as boy-/girlfriends with whom migrants are in a relationship with. Surely, “significant others” is a less restrictive term than “spouse” or other references to marital status that specifically result from a legal union. In this part, I address the role of significant others in remigrants’ socio-cultural integration in China, referring first to trailing spouses, often regarded as secondary migrants in the literature. Second, I focus more specifically on intergroup relationships between remigrants and local Chinese people, and examine how partners impact on the migrants’ integration.

Trailing spouses

A significant portion of the literature stresses on the importance of migrants’ marital status and their family circumstances when observing the impact these have on the migrants’ integration performance in the new society. This is partly explained by the phenomenon of trailing spouses and the frequently-observed impacts they have on the

migrants' morale (Braseby, 2010; Trudell, 2015)². Along with respondents' testimonies, blogs powered by content retelling the ups and downs of being a trailing spouse, highlight how their own well-being has affected the partner they followed. With regards to their status as trailing spouses, well-being was reported to be influenced by their being looked down upon as "invisible and ambitionless sacrificial shadows" to their partners, which may self-evidently affect their self-esteem (INT12; INT49; INT51). This further echoes writings emphasizing on the negative connotations linked to trailing spouses unable to be happy, being an extra to their partner's relocation (INT51). In some instances, the trailing spouse's inability to get accustomed to the host society may result in feeling homesick, gradually missing the familiarity of "home", and growing incapable or unwilling to call China their home, even temporarily (INT12). This itself can be caused by the trailing spouse being unemployed, whether it be by choice or by default –due to the lack of skills, opportunities, or because of visa restrictions. As a result, some trailing spouses may indeed develop different ranges of resentment towards their partner, which affects both of their morale. In other instances, to compensate for the sacrifice of the 'secondary migrant', 'primary migrants' may choose to spend all their spare time with their spouse, as it was the case for INT24, a British-Chinese expatriate in Beijing whose spouse used to be employed before in the banking industry. When they relocated to China, INT24's wife quit her job as her husband took on a position to enhance his career. INT24 shares how in return, he gladly chose to let her decide what they should be doing during his free time:

"In the beginning, I was busy getting used to my new job and responsibilities in China. So I didn't have much time to spend with my wife. [...] I felt bad because she put her career on hold for me. So every time I had spare time, I chose to spend it with her. I did so until she grew her own roots here, made her own friends, found a job. Until she did so two years ago, I spend all my free time with her so I didn't have any contacts with other Chinese people, only some of my colleagues, but not so much in general."

² There is an abundance of blogs written by trailing spouses, sharing their experiences of dejection, and the logistics require, such as: <https://expatpartnersurvival.com> ; <http://trailingwife.blogspot.co.uk> ; <https://secretsofatrailingspouse.wordpress.com> ; or <https://globalxpatsblog.wordpress.com>.

As a result, the first year following their relocation to China, INT24's interactions with Chinese people were limited to his work environment. And even so, as he further shared, his contacts with local counterparts rarely went beyond work-related conversations in English with a few Chinese colleagues who had studied and worked overseas for years before pursuing their careers in China.

Intergroup romantic relationships

Authors such as Lee (1960) and Van Tubergen (2006) pointed out how migrants' choice of partner can be indicative of a migrant's social and cultural integration. As migrants get more involved with members of the host population, their likeliness to become more acculturated increases, which itself could result in inter-group marriages (or more broadly, in romantic relationships between groups). Generously discussed in previous studies, it was thus observed that migrants can be considered as socially and culturally integrated when (friendships and) marriages are common between the minority migrant group and the majority (Gordon, 1964; Song, 2009; Anniste and Tammaru, 2014). These studies document more profusely on migration and significant others by considering more particularly intergroup marriages as an indicator of social integration, suggesting that intermarriages are a sign that the population is becoming more diverse insofar as members of both groups are reciprocally adjusting to one another and developing mutually positive opinions and attitudes. However, this part intends to show how intergroup relationships³, or more specifically, ethnic remigrants' significant other impacts on their personal socio-cultural integration into the host society. It aims to show how in some cases, intergroup relationships have played a significant role in lessening the "social distance" (Kinloch, 1977; Lu, 2014) between ethnic remigrants and the host majority, while in other instances, its effect was opposite.

³ The literature often refers to intergroup marriages or relationships by focusing primarily on ethno-racial differences, but insofar as ethnic "returnees" already share the same ethnicity with the host population, it would be more accurate to refer to intercultural –or simply intergroup– relationships instead.

12 out of the 58 research participants were involved in a romantic relationship with a Chinese national, four of whom were legally married to their partner⁴. Among them, INT41, a Chinese-French remigrant married to a Chinese wife, explains how despite having retained his own group of foreign friends in Beijing, he enlarged his frequentations to his wife's circle of friends, engaging more often with Chinese people. INT41 précised that his closest friend, also Chinese, was his wife's colleague, who recently introduced him to his current employer. Crediting his wife for being the key link that connected him back to his ancestry, INT41 affirms that as a result of their principally Chinese-language daily communications, his language skills progressed dramatically. He further acknowledges his wife's role in bringing him closer to local coethnics as she regularly helps him better understand their surrounding peers:

"She basically teaches me how to cohabitate with Chinese people and I learned that just by being with her every day. [...] Before, I was more of a passive bystander living in China, but now I relate a lot more to everything around me as I understand it better [...], and this 'Chinese world' [emphasis with hands gesture] is growing on me, and I kind of like it."

INT41's testimony resonates with the literature indicating that social ties with members of the host majority can help improve their language proficiency, teach them about the local cultural norms –and values, and provide them with advice and information in finding work –in this case, benefitting from their extended professional network (Granovetter, 1973; Song, 2009; Wang et al., 2016). It is interesting to note however, that compared to INT41, INT03 (Swedish-Chinese) and INT54 (German-Chinese)'s language abilities were initially much less developed than INT41's, which resulted in their Chinese partner having to switch to English to facilitate communication and avoid repeated misunderstandings. Despite INT03 and INT54's Chinese language skills progressing over time, the communications with their partners eventually became almost exclusively English. On the other hand, some interviewees also involved in an intercultural relationship with local coethnics experienced different outcomes, and depict a darker picture of inter-group relationships. For example, INT30, a bubbly and outgoing woman reflects upon her past experiences:

⁴ Inter-group couples: INT03; INT07; INT25; INT32; INT35; INT38; INT42; INT54; including intermarriages: INT24; INT36; INT41; INT56.

"I dated a few Chinese men before but it never worked out. They're too different, and so am I, so we kept arguing over misunderstandings caused by different cultural upbringings [because of] different values and lifestyles."

To be sure, INT30 used to believe that since she had grown up in what she qualified to be a "traditional Chinese family", she would be able to communicate fluidly with a partner brought up in China. INT30 indeed –wrongfully– assumed that the home environment wherein she grew up in and her partners' overlapped, as she adds that "[she] didn't think [they]'d be so different". Still unsure about the reasons why these relationships failed, she is firm about her future relationships:

"I'm never dating a Chinese man, ever again. [...] Relationships are complex to begin with, so you don't want to add another level of complexity by dating a person who grew up in a world different from yours."

Similarly, INT25, who is two years into a relationship with a Chinese woman, admitted that despite being strongly attached to his partner, if for any reason their relationship was to come to an end, he would probably not date another Chinese woman again. He justifies this by explaining how difficult their intercultural relationship can be on a daily basis, and how "even for the smallest things, for everything", cultural differences need to be managed, from eating habits, clothing preferences, to more essential values, such as gender roles within their relationship and beyond. INT30 and INT25's experiences suggest that in some cases, failed intercultural relationships between host natives and ethnic remigrants may result in amalgamations. This may further produce instant prejudicial barriers, damaging their perceptions of all other Chinese people, reducing the number of future potential inter-group social interactions.

5.2.3. Nuclear families in China

The costs of raising children in China

Family planning is another important aspect to examine when observing Chinese ethnic remigrants' socio-cultural integration in the ethnic homeland. This part focuses mostly

on how parenthood among the “returnees” has affected their integration processes in China. Not only does it affect the migrant’s very decision to migrate to China, it also impacts on their daily experiences in many ways. Many respondents openly admitted that when they decided to migrate to China, the sole fact that they were not yet “burdened with family responsibilities”, such as having to care for ageing parents or having to provide for a family and children, encouraged them to take risks, and look for opportunities in China (INT32; INT33; INT34; INT37; INT45; INT55; INT57; INT58). As INT55, a young Chinese-American migrant working in Beijing commented:

“It is now or never. Now is the time to explore. If I don’t do it now [work in China], I probably won’t be able to move around later when I settle down with a family and all.”

Surely, the literature suggests that individuals and couples with children are less likely to migrate internationally due to the plausible increase of migration costs (Junge et al., 2015). This is especially true since foreign nationals tend to register their children in international schools, subsequently involving high costs which, unless covered in expatriate packages, may not be affordable to many.

On the other hand, some remigrants who relocated to China with their spouse were already parents of young children, which complicated their migration decision and settlement processes, but also affected their integration experiences. 12 out of the 58 respondents were parents, with half of these families having expanded once in China. Participants who were also parents certainly experienced different aspects of the ancestral homeland, as they have specific concerns with regards to their child’s development and well-being. Although many of the respondents’ children were still toddlers, those in age to attend nursery and primary schools were registered in international English-speaking institutions for most. However, such institutions in Beijing and Shanghai tend to charge exorbitant tuition fees, some of which are bordering towards an annual cost of RMB 200,000 (Wester, 2011). Since such fees are not always covered in company expatriate packages –for remigrants who benefit from one–, additional planning is needed to place children in institutions dispensing a program supported by remigrating parents.

Regardless of their marital status, interviewees were also asked about their intentions with regards to family planning. Almost all had similar preoccupations and voiced out their preferences for a “Western education system” that encourages leadership, creativity and critical thinking. However, aware of the high costs of raising a child in China, some redefine their plans to even stay in the ancestral homeland. For example, INT56, a British-Chinese journalist working in Beijing, is married to a Chinese woman and shared that they were considering having children. However, they were also discussing their plans to leave China because of pollution and dissatisfaction with the Chinese competitive education system. Although INT56 would prefer having his children to be educated in an international institution, his salary would not allow him to afford such high tuition fees.

Parenthood and social integration

INT06, an Australian-Chinese migrant who moved from Sydney to Beijing when he was a bachelor, is now married to another hyphenated-Chinese remigrant he met in Beijing. INT06 recalls his first years in China, and remembers how being free from familial duties allowed him to engage more with his peers during social events. For instance, going out with friends requires the wife’s approval as it requires planning since she would need to look after their twin toddlers by herself. He adds:

“I used to go out much more often because whatever spare time I had would be for myself, so I could meet friends, or just hit a bar and meet new people. [...] I met a lot of friends like that, *including local folks*. But now that I’m married and that I have kids, everything is different. Having twins... is a lot of work, so when I have free time, I spend it with my family.”

However, it is important to note that although he does not socialize with his local coethnics as often as he used to, INT06 disapproves of the idea that interacting less with Chinese people equates to stepping back from social integration. It can be said that INT06’s efforts have shifted naturally to other spheres as he entered a new stage in his life, which resonates with Jain’s study on ethnic “return” migration and life-course (2012). Indeed, before his children were born, INT06 used to interact more frequently

with Chinese people, but this does not necessarily mean that he really was anchored in the wider society. Now that his family has grown by two members, he realizes that the stakes in Beijing are greater, which is why he became more committed to local communities compared to before. According to INT06, after his children were born, his incentive to participate more actively in the neighborhood life increased along with his involvement and interests in local events targeted at families. INT06 and his wife's want to ensure their children "would not grow up to be completely estranged from [their local counterparts]". Hence, it can be said that INT06 decided to better anchor his family socially to their neighborhood by increasing interactions with members of other communities. As he shares:

"My wife and I are now involved in community life at church [...], but also with our neighbors, we've had family outings with their kids too."

These aspects are important to point out because they illustrate the shifting priorities individuals have as they enter different stages in their life course, as well as the various social spheres they can engage in accordingly.

5.2.4. Summary

This section examined the role of family in ethnic remigrants' socio-cultural integration in China. Here, family consisted of three main types of ties. First, I focused on kinfolks, which typically refers to the remigrants' parents, siblings, and extended family. Kinfolks' role is especially important during the remigrants' formative years. This is expressed through simple daily communications with the family in Chinese, considered as a native language, to more or less recurring trips to the ancestral homeland. Second, this section looked into remigrants' significant others, which included trailing spouses, as well as partners encountered in China, focusing more specifically on inter-group intercultural relationships with locally raised coethnic partners. Finally, the impact of the nuclear family on remigrants' integration experience was examined, especially with regards to children and family planning, as well as the effects of parenthood on societal integration. This section was developed following remigrants' natural growth through the different stages of their life course, starting with their family during their younger

years, moving on to their building a family themselves. All such –strong– ties constitute remigrants’ social capital.

5.3. Social networks and foreigners’ communities

In addition to having to navigate family ties, Western-born Chinese ethnic remigrants also frequently tap into larger social networks of existing communities, therefore extending their own social capital through these networks. Indeed, migrants’ social networks tend to spread beyond interpersonal ties of kinship and friendship, and represent a valuable source of information and help which potential migrants and migrants already in China seek to reduce the risks and costs of migration (Garip, 2008). Migrant social networks thus include organizations and institutions that assist migrants throughout the migration process. As Haug (2008) noted in her work on migration networks and the ways they impact on migration decision making, social networks are broadened and reinforced every time an individual migrates. Prospective migrants may thus benefit from the communities and networks that are already anchored in the destination country, as well as benefit from the experiences of those who have returned to the country of origin (Haug, 2008:588). These may also help them adjust to the new environment, facilitate access to employment, and help finding or even financing the travel, accommodations, and schooling for children (Haug, 2008; Poros, 2011; Wester, 2011). In the case of Beijing and Shanghai, data shows that such organizations usually include enterprises, from multinational corporations to smaller Chinese firms, universities, government-led talent programs (such as the 1000 Talents Plan), nongovernment organizations that range from humanitarian organizations to cultural and religious institutions, foreigners’ circles and expatriate groups, and so on. However, this section focuses on a few major distinct networks which, based on the data collected, seem to have had a greater impact on Chinese ethnic “returnees” migration experiences and socio-cultural integration. These include more specifically (1) expatriate groups and foreigners’ circles, including *huayi* communities, and (2) communities built on shared interests, such as religious communities and sports activities.

5.3.1. Expatriate groups and foreigners' circles

Navigating between friendships and instrumental networking

Throughout its process, the migration experience is actively intertwined and facilitated by the instrumentalization of existing networks already present in China. Most of the time, these networks are constituted of individuals that the remigrant never met in person before entering such circles, nor has had any real connection with besides their common foreign statuses in China. Because the presence of foreigners in traditional financial and economic hubs such as Beijing and Shanghai is already well-established, foreigners and expatriates have become organized communities with a regular planning of events, meetings, aperitifs, and other social activities to smooth their arrival in China through mutual support, and to sustain networking activities. Newcomers in these cities thus have the possibility to connect with and join those social circles to obtain practical information and tips during all stages of migration. INT44, a Canadian-Chinese who migrated from Toronto to Beijing was a member of the Canadians in China Network, and commented on these foreigners' circles' helpfulness when he first arrived in Beijing. From these networks, he affirms that "any kind of info [sic.]" can be obtained:

"You can get advice on how to get around in the city, which property agents have bad reputations for scamming us [non-locals], how to deal with all the taxes stuff, which hospitals provide the safest care or which international school is best for children."

Playing on clichés, INT44 half-jokingly specifies the reasons why he turns to these communities:

"I use these networks whenever I have food cravings. *Only experienced fellow Canadians* can tell you exactly where to buy those tasty Inferno Doritos, which supermarkets sell decent maple syrup and where to eat proper butter tarts!"

However, in addition to being sources of practical information for daily use, expatriate groups and foreigners' circles are also places where migrants "share the common feature of being foreigners in China" (INT04; INT08; INT16; INT27; INT33; INT41; INT52),

which provides a propitious environment to practice co-solidarity (INT01; INT10; INT36; INT51). Moreover, while most foreigners' or expatriates' communities are open to all foreigners in China from all nationalities, there also exist nationality-based communities where sub-groups naturally form based on affinities and cultural similarities. One of such traits is also the shared Chineseness, despite being foreigners in China –in other words, a hyphenated-Chinese remigrant in China.

In his interview, INT36, a Kiwi⁵-Chinese from Auckland who has lived and worked in Beijing for over a decade, acknowledges that being of Chinese descent “saved him from unemployment”, which allowed him to stay in China to build the life he now has. Now an entrepreneur in Beijing, he reminisces the days he was an office worker, and shared how tired he was of his job. Not only did he dislike working with some of his Chinese colleagues because of their conflicting working cultures, most of all, he hated his line manager. Despite wanting to resign, he struggled finding another suitable employment, so he thought that perhaps, his time in China was over, and that he had to return to New Zealand. During this period, INT36 would participate in ANZA events, the Australian and New Zealand Association of Beijing, which aim is “to provide a support network for Australians, New Zealanders and other international expats living in Beijing, sharing information and experiences about life in Beijing.”⁶ To INT36, these meetings represented much needed “breathers” from accumulated stress –places where he could find a sense of familiarity, by being surrounded by people with whom he could communicate fluently, without any linguistic or cultural barriers. One day, during one of such gatherings, INT36 encountered another Chinese-Kiwi fellow who also happened to share similar photography interests. After chatting with him, the man offered him a job interview opportunity at his firm, with a personal recommendation to support his application. To INT36’s surprise, the man turned out to be the senior manager of a company seeking to expand overseas, and therefore was in the process of putting up a team dedicated to the Australasian region. INT36 further shared how upon thanking him, the man’s response “sounded like [his] father”:

⁵ Kiwi is the name of a bird native to New-Zealand, which became a common appellation to refer to people from New Zealand.

⁶ Source: www.anzabeijing.com.

"[He told me to] try to get the job so that Chinese Kiwis rise among the White ones'."

This shows the importance of mutual support between fellow ethnic remigrants in the ancestral when compared to other foreign citizens competing for employment. To INT36, the man's remark carried a further meaning as racial minorities who both grew up in an environment wherein experiences of racial discrimination were incongruous, yet common in New Zealand:

"It had an 'us against them' feeling [...]. Like, this is our land, so we should get the jobs, not them. If my race prevents me from getting the job in NZ, here it shouldn't be a problem right?"

This episode made INT36 realize the importance of practicing solidarity insofar as based on his personal experience, Chinese ancestry played an essential part in triggering such act of solidarity. Moreover, as he specified, before China began flooding with talents including ethnic "return" migrants, "Most Aussies⁷ and Kiwis in Beijing were White expats." In the end, INT36's application for the position succeeded thanks to the man's recommendation. INT36 thus realized with hindsight that "this ANZA meeting changed [his] life". Indeed, in his new workplace, he met colleagues with whom he would occasionally have a drink after work. "One of my colleagues brought a few friends one day, and that's how I met my wife. It all started because I hated my job [...], I wanted to escape and I joined the ANZA network".

"It doesn't click"

Similar trajectories and stories were shared by other interviewees (INT06; INT10; INT45; INT51). Although INT44 and INT36's personal experiences reveal the impact social groups such as foreigners' communities and expatriate groups have had in their migration journey and experience of China, their testimonies reveal little on how much such social circles contributed to their socio-cultural integration within Chinese communities. In line with Lehmann's (2014) observations in her study on expatriates in

⁷ Aussie is a common term to refer to Australians.

Xiamen, these migrants' initial insecurities and uncertainties are eased as they integrate the social circles of their local expatriate community, slowly building an invisible wall between them, foreigners, and local Chinese.

Whenever interviews seemed to take this turn, I would ask the interviewee how those circles impacted on their socio-cultural interactions with Chinese people, wondering if such organized communities did not hinder them from experiencing the realness of China, with local Chinese people. Many admitted that overstaying in foreigners' circles would definitely create some form of distance between them (foreigners) and the host population, as the following episode illustrates. During my second trip to Shanghai, I scheduled an interview with INT28 at a location she had chosen: a fancy French restaurant on Jiashan Road in the popular Xuhui area that was hosting a social event organized by the UFE-Shanghai⁸, which gathered dozens of French nationals (regardless of their ethnic origin) living and working in Shanghai to raise funds for a telethon. Although it was supposed to be a one-to-one interview, it turned out to be a group interview with friends she was not expecting to meet (INT29 and INT30). Specifying that it was not uncommon to come across friends and acquaintances during such gatherings, INT28, a French-Chinese young woman living in Shanghai since 2013, explains how at first, she chose to join the UFE simply because she knew no one in China, but was confident it would be a good opportunity for her to "do some networking, and perhaps make a friend or two". In her opinion, such gatherings are "good places and occasions to socialize", so after participating in multiple events, she began meeting the same people more regularly. She adds:

"Before we realized it, we became friends and started meeting outside of the UFE events. Now the people I hang out with are those I met at the UFE."

⁸ UFE (Union des Français à l'Étranger, or Union of French Citizens Abroad) is an association which aims to create and maintain close contact between France and the French residing overseas, and to provide support to its overseas citizens. The UFE is present in 100 countries and has over 170 branches, including UFE-Shanghai and UFE-Beijing. Shanghai's branch is very active and organizes events on a regular basis (ufe.org ; ufeshanghai.com ; pekin.ufe.org).

When asked⁹ why she did not frequent more of her local coethnics, all three responded at the same time, with similar answers:

“Somehow, it doesn’t click [emphasis added] with Chinese people. It requires much more effort¹⁰ [sic.]. It’s easier to be friends with people like you, who grew up in the same cultural context.”

To which INT29, who spent a year in Beijing perfecting her Chinese language skills before moving to Shanghai for work, added to illustrate her point:

“For instance, the culture of having a drink with your (girl)friends after work, or going out on Friday nights is not the same here. I don’t see it happening much around me. But that’s how I usually have fun and relax from the stress I get from work [she looked at her friends to seek approval, and they nod in agreement], KTV and all is fine but you know... different environments, different cultures, different interests, I guess. Also, I’m a jogger, I like hiking¹¹ [...], I do krav maga¹² [...], it’s not so popular here.”

INT28, INT29 and INT30’s group interview reveals three important pieces of information. First, it shows -once again in line with Lehmann’s (2014) observations- how foreigners dwell in the comfort of their own communities, distancing themselves from the host majority of local Chinese people. Moreover, though expatriate groups and other gatherings of foreigners seem to enhance social integration, it does so within a closed localized expatriate group, which increases the enclave effect. Friendships are formed, but again, between “foreigners in China”, limiting their availability to socialize with local Chinese. Second, the interview also shows how foreign minority groups may create

⁹ Oftentimes, I would ask the same question repeatedly (sometimes phrased identically, some other times rephrasing it slightly), as the interviewee’s responses may evolve in the course of the interview, due to being made conscious about certain issues. In some other cases, repeating the questions was necessary for the interviewees to ‘drop the façade’ or for them to ‘stop beating around the bush’, and give straightforward answers that they thought I might judge them for.

¹⁰ Identical or similar responses were given, with more or less intensity, by almost all of the interviewees, except for INT07, INT18; INT30, INT32, INT41, and INT46.

¹¹ When talking about hiking, INT28 jokingly précised: “the real, adventurous hikes, not those mountains with crowded tracks where people just climb stairs to reach the top”, as she was referring to a few personal experiences she had during her year in Beijing (Xiangshan Park).

¹² Krav maga is a self-defense combat sport that requires intensive training and physical fitness.

distance with the host majority. While the literature states that minority groups, considered *abnormal* compared to the majority, tend to be labelled as the “others” (Zevallos, 2011), from their perspective and discourse, local Chinese people, despite being the majority, are the ones being “othered” (see [Chapter Six](#)). Finally, it shows that cultural similarity (evidenced by common interests, cultural references, way of thinking, and more generally, way of life) is a crucial component of socio-cultural integration. Without such cultural affinities, social integration is largely slowed down, and in some cases, considered as “an extra effort to make when the day is already packed with work” (INT03; INT14; INT23; INT26; INT27; INT28; INT43; INT49).

Another case demonstrating the importance of cultural affinities is that of INT25, a French-Chinese young man who migrated to China to work in the luxury hotel industry and who is an active member of the UFE-Shanghai. During the interview at his workplace, he paused at the sudden realization:

“You know the guy at the reception who welcomed you [he discretely points at his Chinese colleague behind the reception desk]? Well, we started working here on the same day. It’s been five years now, and we *neever* had any conversation [sic.]. We just say ‘hello, hi, goodbye, see you tomorrow’ and that’s it. I’m sure he’s a nice guy but I guess it just happened that way. You know, *it never clicked*. But remember Aurélie¹³? She started working here two weeks ago, and we already eat lunch together at work, and next Friday, we’re meeting up with other friends.”

INT25’s account clearly indicates that in some instances, regardless of ethnicity, cultural similarity and affinities remain crucial in the process of natural and effortless socialization, which is a contrasting observation when compared to other studies arguing that migrant groups are likely to form groups based on ethnicity –which occurs more often in the context of forced migrants or low-skilled migrants–, sometimes resulting in ethnic enclaves over time (Waters, 1995; Wimmer, 2004; Li, 2007). Previous research demonstrated the construction processes of many urban ethnic immigrant

¹³ Aurélie is a pseudonym. INT25 was referring to a young French woman (Caucasian) whom I had met a few days before, when I attended the UFE meeting to interview INT28, INT29, and INT30. When I talked about my reasons for attending the meeting (and therefore spoke about my research), Aurélie immediately introduced me to INT25 saying: “Here, a good target for you. He’s my friend, we work together, he’s nice, so ask him anything!”.

enclaves, revealing how immigrants made use of and reinforced their social networks as well as their “coethnic social capital in labor markets that primarily serve their own ethnic communities” (Poros, 2011), gradually reducing the necessity for members of such communities to seek goods and services beyond the enclave. Some of the most known visible enclaves include Chinatowns, Koreatowns, Little Italies, Indias, Havanas (Ang, 2014)¹⁴. Overall, despite facilitating the inclusion of migrants within a social community, it also hinders broader socio-cultural integration across groups with the host majority that is beyond the ‘walls’ of the enclaves.

Huayi (华裔) community

Another distinctive group emerged as I was collecting information during my fieldwork in Beijing and Shanghai. Less obvious but with clearly noticeable subtleties, are members of the *huayi* community. Often pertaining to a wider community of foreigners in China, some research participants were also actively part of a distinct social group reserved exclusively for other Western-born overseas Chinese ethnic “returnees” in China. While some are more likely to connect naturally because of their affinities (INT39; INT52), some others specifically reached out to their peers (INT47; INT48; INT57; INT58).

“Bananas”

Based on the criteria listed in [Section 4.2.2.](#), research participants had to be individuals of Chinese descent who had grown up overseas in a Western-culture-dominated environment and then migrated to China. Among them, I encountered many who would casually refer to each other as “Bananas”. Calling a person “Banana” is a figure of speech to describe people of Asian ancestry who have adopted a Western culture and mindset. They are considered to be “white-washed”, meaning that they have assimilated to the

¹⁴ Beijing and Shanghai have their own histories of enclaves. Beijing Legation Quarter (1861-1945) was an international enclave, while in Shanghai, there were the British (1846-1863) and American (1848-1863) Concessions that merged in 1863 to form the Shanghai International Settlement until 1945; as well as the French Concession (1849-1946). Nowadays, the boundaries are much less defined, though there still are districts with a high density of foreign residents (for example, Chaoyang, Dongcheng and Shunyi districts in Beijing, and Changning district in Puxi or Jinquai district in Pudong for Shanghai.)

dominant culture of the country they grew up in. Nowadays, both terms are used frequently, and depending on the context, they can either have a pejorative connotation, if the person using the terms criticizes the so-called banana for assimilating to another culture at the expense of their Chinese heritage; or oppositely, it can carry a neutral to friendly connotation to refer to oneself or others. The subtle difference between a *huayi* and a Banana lies in the former being a factual description, while the latter usually suggests that one has a lower (or even none at all) sensitivity and understanding of their ancestral cultural heritage, and whose behavior and mentality is “white-washed”. Hence, when I straightforwardly asked my research participants if they considered themselves as Bananas, it was in order to probe their level of awareness of Chinese culture and customs, as well as to assess their positionality as foreign migrants of Chinese descent in China (more details in [Chapter Seven](#)).

At the end of his interview, INT25 (mentioned above) asked me if I wanted to be added to “a small WeChat group for French Bananas in Shanghai”, specifying that sometimes, they publicized events, or even organized specific events in which I was invited to participate. Eager, thinking I would have access to 30 to 40 more potential research participants, I soon discovered that the “small WeChat group” involved over 250 members¹⁵, a third of whom actively contributed to the group conversations. In a matter of minutes following the conversation thread, I learned that this French Bananas WeChat group in Shanghai was a well-structured association that plans (sponsored) official and semi-official parties, galas, telethons, mini-job fairs, conferences, and many other events. Although such events were opened to all, the communication team clearly targeted French Nationals living in Shanghai, and for some gatherings, even excluded non-Bananas. Similar to the organization that exists within ethnic enclaves, this group constitutes a strong network that exchanges a wide range of information, from trustworthy daytime *Ayis*¹⁶ searches, to job openings in avant-première for members of the group. There again, despite facilitating the inclusion of migrants within a social community, it also hinders their socio-cultural integration with the host majority that is beyond the “walls” of the enclaves.

¹⁵ To date, there are 398 members in the group (May, 2018).

¹⁶ In this context, *Ayi* (lit. auntie) is a term to call middle-aged women employed maids or housekeepers. However, as INT53 affirms: “There are plenty of advice and warning pages online, on how to hire trustworthy *Ayis*, but a personal recommendation is always better.”

Passionate about overseas Chinese

In other instances, second generation overseas Chinese ethnic “return” migrants may choose to relocate to China because of their interest and curiosity, not necessarily about the ancestral homeland itself, but about other overseas Chinese. INT48, a young man who has been living in Beijing for year, remigrated from Sweden. When asked about his motives for coming to China, he enthusiastically shared that his curiosity about his Chinese side had led him to where he was. Even though there are Chinese and other Asian communities in Stockholm (and despite having attended Chinese school on weekends during many years throughout his youth), INT48 still yearned to meet other overseas Chinese people from his generation, from other places in the world. He shares:

“I thought that if I wanted to meet other people... like me, China would be the best place for that.”

INT48’s choice was therefore not strictly nor directly caused by China’s economic prowess, nor was he curious about China at first. To him, what mattered was that he could “meet other overseas Chinese of [his] generation, and share [their] experiences of being overseas Chinese in [their respective] countries and in China.” Likewise, INT47, a Chinese-Australian young woman who migrated from Sydney and who studied and worked in Beijing for five years, expressed her enthusiasm when it comes to the overseas Chinese communities in Beijing. Passionate about overseas Chinese in general, she organizes “overseas Chinese only” brunches and dinners at her place twice a month:

“We gather and talk about our experiences, and what it was like to be overseas Chinese in our respective countries and how it changed after we came to Beijing. A lot of other people come too [non-overseas Chinese], and that makes the conversation even more fascinating [...]. In Australia for example, there’s a large overseas Chinese community too, [...] but I was interested in meeting more overseas Chinese from different parts of the world.”

As evidenced in these interview extracts, INT47 and INT48 are examples of ethnic “return” migrants who actively build their own social network of other overseas Chinese ethnic remigrants with similar profiles. Unlike the larger social “Banana” group mentioned above, these unofficial and informal social clusters are much smaller in size but more widespread, and gather individuals who consider such meetings and friendships to be “a central part” of their migration purposes and experiences in China (INT39; INT40; INT57; INT58). Even though by definition, these overseas Chinese clusters do not actively work towards socio-cultural integration with their local peers, the experience gained from these gathering does have side effects –however small in scale– in some “returnees”’ social integration process in China. For example, INT54, a German-Chinese remigrant working in Shanghai, shared how growing up in a smaller town, all his friends were Caucasian, which is why upon relocating to China, he mostly socialized with Caucasian foreigners, since he was more used to this form of interaction. However, one day, he met another *huayi* at a work event, with whom he connected almost instantly. Struggling to put his feelings into words for me to understand, he shared:

“It’s like he understood me and my life, even if we’d only met [...], like we were on the same wavelength? This guy is from England, but he had similar experiences. He invited me to hang out with his other BBC¹⁷ friends, but there were other guys from Australia and everywhere, and they became like a family here for me.”

When asking him about whether he thought this prevented him from meeting and interacting more with local Chinese people, he informed me that his fiancée was a Chinese national brought up in China, but that he had met her partly thanks to the discussions he had with his –then– new friends:

“Sometimes we talked about our experiences here, and a friend was telling us why he thought it was important to make Chinese friends and all. [...] It didn’t even occur to me before, so I tried, and I met more Chinese people after a few years. Now my fiancée is Chinese.”

¹⁷ British-born Chinese

According to INT54, “some people need to be told” in order to take action and break out of their comfort zones in which they dwell out of habit, simply because it is the only form of interaction they have experienced prior to relocating to the ancestral homeland.

5.3.2. Communities with common interests

Western-born Chinese ethnic remigrants also joined and contributed to other types of organizations that provided community networking, but also support and development. While in some cases, these organizations caused more distance between migrants and local Chinese people, most of the time, they contributed positively to remigrants’ having more social interactions and cultural exchanges with members of the host population. In this section, I use the examples of Church communities and team sports activities (in contrast with going to the gym alone), as vectors or deterrent in remigrants’ socio-cultural integration in the parental homeland.

The literature has already documented the relationship between Church and migration, emphasizing more on how places of worship can contribute to bringing people together regardless of income, ages, gender or ethnicity, but also how different places of worship may reinforce ethno-cultural separation based on how the communities function (Ley, 2008; Passarelli, 2012; Conner, 2018). In this thesis, the example of Church was chosen based on the interviewees’ comments and experiences. For some Chinese ethnic remigrants, going to Church proved to have had an essential role in their migrant journey to China, and despite the limited applicability (due to obvious reasons, since not everyone is Christian nor goes to Church), its relevance is not to be undermined. For those who attended Sunday services and/or cluster groups, Church not only offered a spiritual support and a place to socialize, but most of all, as McCarvill wrote in his study on Irish communities in Birmingham, Church, as a meeting place and a community, provided them with some form of “continuity with their previous lives, representing a necessary bridge between the two societies” (2002:196), to find some form of familiarity in the midst of the unknown. However, in China, most foreign Church-goers tend to

attend international services¹⁸ rather than local Chinese ones¹⁹, which are principally English-speaking services, and more frequented by foreigners than local Chinese. INT17, a young British-Chinese remigrant in Beijing, expressed the necessity for him to integrate a Church when he arrived in Beijing. Regular Church-goer, he used to be a very active member of his Church, and participated in plenty of Church-related activities, studies and groups. Moreover, most of his closest friends were also regular Church attendees. He adds:

“When I came to China, I knew I had to find a Church, because normally, that’s where I tend to gravitate around [...]. My social life and sanity depend on it as well.”

INT17’s comment shows that being part of the Church community means that he mostly frequents people from within such community, which in turn, prevents him from spending time with Chinese people. His account reveals another important aspect of Church: in addition to providing spiritual and emotional support, it also played an important role in the hosting or organization of diverse social activities (breakfast meetings, social outings, etc.), some of which helped to put many in touch with the local communities, acting as bridges between the two populations (Putnam, 1995; 2000). INT22, a Canadian-Chinese who migrated from Saskatchewan to Beijing where she has been working for over two years, confirms that even though all Church services welcome local Chinese residents, the ones more likely to attend speak English, even if they are not fully proficient. When INT22 informed me that she met her closest friend at Church, she specified that her friend was also her colleague, but that they became closer as fellow Church-goers. With regards to larger-scale efforts to improve social interactions and diversity, she commented:

¹⁸ Some already well-established ethnic communities in Beijing and Shanghai have such a large number of Church-goers that they have their own services, in their own languages (Korean and Filipino, for example). I personally came across a few people who attended Spanish and ‘African’ services. However, most “Westerners” settle with English-speaking Church services.

¹⁹ Chinese churches are closely monitored, sometimes frowned upon, so many services take place in people’s, and are therefore called house or home church, or underground church (Sudworth, 2016).

“My Church often organizes special events and we invite Chinese people living in the neighborhood, so a month before, we’d go out and talk to people and all. [...] It’s like open doors for Christmas, with a lot of fun, without pressuring them either, you know, because it’s important to get involved with the local community. [...] For these events, we have translators, and have a lot of stuff in Chinese too.”

Interestingly, the Chinese people who do participate in such events are the ones being integrated into the Church community of foreigners, rather than foreigners integrating the wider Chinese society. In other words, members of the majority are being integrated into the minority community, while generally, the literature documents otherwise (see [Chapter Three](#)).

Unlike most of her peers, in addition to attending the international Church service that gathers a congregation of over a hundred people, INT18, a young Chinese-American woman who migrated from Chicago to Beijing, chose to attend a small Chinese underground Church which she was introduced to by her friend. The group, much smaller (8 to 15 members), is composed of Chinese middle-aged women. Despite being very unique, INT18’s account explains how she developed more socio-cultural awareness and closeness with Chinese local women through Church. Although she affirms learning a lot simply by being in the presence of these women, her initial motives for participating in these gatherings was not to practice language. Instead, she personally finds it essential to understand how Chinese Christians are in China. Mainly identifying as a Christian and a Chinese (two minority groups where she grew up), INT18 is aware that her life in the United States was very likely to have been fundamentally different from these women’s experiences of Christianity in China. Indeed, Christians still represent a minute minority in China²⁰, and despite being ethnically part of the majority, these women have had to live their profession in a more oppressive socio-political environment that INT18 could not originally fathom. However, even though they have different backgrounds, family situations, as well as a significant age gap, INT18 believes to have bonded significantly with many of these women. To her, the connections she

²⁰ See Kwok (2010) and Lim (2013) for more socio-cultural perspectives on Christianity in contemporary China.

formed with these women encapsulate a portion of Chinese society that many do not get to experience from such a close position. As INT18 shares:

“Understanding China and Chinese people doesn’t necessarily mean that you have to learn all the mainstream stuff or even the traditions. These Chinese women are part of China too. That’s how I decided to connect with China, and that works perfectly for me.”

Other than Church communities, data collected during the interviews shows that some of the ethnic remigrants practiced team sports activities prior to relocating to China, which they decided to pursue after settling down. This was not necessarily because of their physical fitness requirements or because it was their only way for them to “blow off some steam after work or during the weekends” (INT02; INT24, INT33, INT35), but also because they viewed sports activities as a simple way for them to connect with local Chinese people who share similar interests, as well as to improve their comprehension of Chinese language, people, and of China. Some studies have discussed the intersection of sports and migration, and more particularly the various roles of sports in migrants’ integration, demonstrating that participation in sports activities may have a positive effect on migrants’ social inclusion in a new host society (Amara et al., 2005; Kennett, 2005; Seifried and Clopton, 2013; Jeanes et al., 2015; Conner, 2016).

INT44, for example, is a Canadian-Chinese ethnic remigrant living in Beijing. Regularly meeting Chinese people in his neighborhood to play soccer or basketball, INT44 considers sports activities to be a good way to meet new people and socialize with his local coethnics “without thinking too much”, even when his Mandarin speaking skills are not fluent yet. Able to carry small conversations in Chinese, he finds the effort to be tiring after a short while since he needs to focus to find the right words. However, during a game, communication is easier:

“If I say ‘pass’, ‘shoot’ or ‘out’ and other simple sport stuff in English, they understand too.”

INT44 nonetheless adds that oftentimes, these working out sessions are followed by a quick hang out during which they usually eat a meal. Although he does not understand all the words exchanged during the discussions, INT44 finds it to be "good enough". Picking up on words and expressions over time, his language skills improved a little after he started playing with them.

"Now I usually know what they're talking about when they make TV and song references [...], works for me."

Another example would be that of INT43, a young Chinese-American woman who migrated from Seattle to Beijing. Working as an English teacher, she practices roller derby²¹ in Tuanjiehu Park twice a week. During her interview, she explained that periodically, they would organize seasonal recruitments and small tournaments. Although almost all of her teammates are foreigners, she proudly told me that recently, two Chinese girls had joined the team, as a result of the efforts to promote exchanges between foreigners and local Chinese, and try roller derby. The ratio of Chinese to foreigners taking part in roller derby activities can be explained by the location chosen for the gatherings, which is situated in East Beijing near Chaoyang district, two nests burgeoning of foreigners. However, to INT43, the main reason explaining this ratio is linked to the relative unpopularity of the practice of this sport in China. Although she agrees that Chinese people are less likely to be knowledgeable about this sport, her encounters with some local Chinese people shaped her opinion, and made her speculate that the main reason for this might be in fact linked to the way women are represented in Chinese society. INT43 refers more particularly to the restricted ways in which Chinese women are perceived in contemporary China, and how to some extent, they are expected to "perform traditional female virtues" and display more feminine qualities (Shen, 2015:49). Further studies have shown that even though urban Chinese women are increasingly high achievers, and despite their overall progress towards gender equality in various life spheres such as employment, health, and education (Attané, 2012); Chinese women are still often confined to traditional roles while at the same time, expectations to follow traditional feminine values are pressed onto them (Hao, 2012).

²¹ Roller derby is a contact sport that consists in two teams skating in the same direction around an oval track. Originally a sport practiced by women to empower them (Pavlidis, 2016), the Beijing team also has male members.

5.3.3. Remigrants' social anchorage

All of the above communities, whether based on professional affinities, common citizenship, religion, or hobby, have one thing in common: they also serve as a possible anchor which remigrants can associate with and which can contribute to their social inclusion within a narrow group and reinforce the enclave effect and obstruct their integration into the wider majority. However, on the longer run, remigrants' stakes and perspectives may differ. INT31 is a Chinese-French ethnic "return" migrant who has lived in China for over a decade, and is thus one of the most veteran respondents of the research sample. Sharing his personal observations, INT31 explains how after living in Shanghai for 13 continuous years, he has now identified four main types of foreigners in China:

"First, there are the ones who, you know, come here for a year or two at best. They're younger and they party a lot, so most of the time, they hang out with other foreigners. [...] Second, there are those who stay in China for two to five years. Those are the ones who want to gain some professional experience to put on their CV. Sometimes they will have a drink or dinner with their colleagues, but that's about it. When they finish their mission²², they leave. [...] Third, you have those who stay for five to ten years. There are less of them, but you know, they still exist! To me, they're the ones who *think* they want to stay in China and live in China forever, but most of the time, they realize that China is not for them, or they have family stuff going on... [...] anyway, because of x or y reason, they leave. Finally, you have those like me. Those who have lived in China for over ten years. Even if you wanted to remove us from here, you wouldn't be able to!"

INT31's –frustratingly accurate– profiling of foreigners in China gains in relevance as he further shares his own trajectory. Reminiscing about his first few years in Shanghai, he

²² During the interview, INT31 explains that when he said "mission" it either meant pre-schedule expatriate business work, with an already defined duration stipulated in the contract; or it could have a more general meaning, i.e. "whatever business they plan to do in China during those years to add a line on their CV".

remembers that his friends constituted primarily of foreigners, though he specifies that “after a while, like other expats²³, they leave”. He adds:

“So if you want to stay sane and have some friends, not the short-term ones, but those who you can visit spontaneously, have a drink with, have different stories to tell over the years, become the godfather of their kids and be there when they celebrate their [the kids’] birthday parties [...], you have to have at least some Chinese friends among your other friends. Of course, you can make new friends all the time, but when your expat friends are all gone, you have to go through process all over again. [...] It’s fine when you’re in your twenties, but after a while, you need some ‘stable friends’ [uses hand gesture].”

As developed in [Section 3.5](#), the idea of stability is essential in the concept of social anchoring (Grzymala-Kazłowska, 2016). Therefore, although friends “come and go” after a few years venturing in China, building stable social ties with people who are less likely to vanish away remains a necessity for remigrants to ground themselves into a new society, and provide them with psychosocial stability, necessary to integrate socially (Ibid., 1131.). However, due to the temporary nature of their stint, many members of such circles tend to have a limited time in China. This in turn causes remigrants such as INT31 to turn to local ethnic brethren to establish longer-term social ties for stability. Members pertaining to the above communities may serve as remigrants’ social anchors, and as Clopton and Finch observe, this strengthens the sense of community and belonging, and “enhances trust and reciprocation within social networks” (2011:70). Surely, this argument is less applicable to remigrants who do not intend to stay in the ancestral homeland, and are like the “expats” mentioned in INT31’s testimony. The question of anchorage (again, with a backdrop of longer duration of stay, among other contributing factors), is important when it comes to the migrants’ willingness to interact with local Chinese people and to stay in China, which in turn, enhances socio-cultural exchanges, and facilitates integration.

²³ INT31 used the term “expat” to designate all foreigners in China. Though he is aware of the differences and specificities, he still used that term in order to simplify his talk.

The idea of social anchoring is therefore most relevant in this context insofar as it takes account of ethnic remigrants' social networks as their footholds in the ancestral homeland. Whether they pertain to expatriate groups, *huayi* groups, or to the basketball team, members of these social groups may impact on ethnic "returnees'" migration experiences in ways that go beyond the usual instrumental function of social networks by acting as remigrants' social anchors; they play an indirect role in promoting or hindering socio-cultural interactions with local Chinese people. Although INT31's above personal experience was not shared unanimously by all the interviewees (due to his unusual longer time in China and age, but also because of his own personal history and trajectory as an ethnic remigrant from Paris to Shanghai), his account remains a valuable example of the necessity for some to befriend their local coethnics²⁴ in order to strengthen their anchoring in, and to China. However, in such case, linguistic and cultural competencies are indispensable to communicate with Chinese people on a deeper level (more details in [Chapter Six](#)).

Finally, as discussed in [Section 3.2.2](#), social integration mostly refers to intergroup interactions between members of the minority group (here, remigrants), members of the majority group (the wider Chinese society), rather than increased interactions within the minority group. Charsley (2004) argue that intergroup interactions are usually considered to be crucial when it comes to broader integration while in contrast, social interactions within the minority group are often interpreted as a lack of integration instead. Nevertheless, as the authors further maintain, migrants establishing social ties with members of the same minority group already in the host society (here, other foreigners) cannot completely be dismissed from the analysis since social integration generally refers to migrants getting involved in the new society (Ibid., 28.). Instead, the authors consider a lack of integration to be closer to instances wherein migrants fail to develop social ties or to engage with any social network in the new host society.

²⁴ By no means do I suggest that strong or long-distance friendships are impossible to maintain, however, as INT31 mentioned, "The possibility to visit someone in person (and vice versa) after work, or not having to deal with time difference [...] are important to consider too".

5.3.4. Summary

This section was developed based on the main social groups identified during data collection in China. Constructed around the information shared by research participants, it looked into the respondents' personal experiences to explain the ways in which meso-level social networks have impacted on their socio-cultural integration in the ancestral homeland. Although there might be further categories (notably with regards to "common interests", as the possibilities are nearly limitless), the ones developed in this section referred to the most common ones shared in the research sample. As such, the main meso-groups covered in this thesis, are foreigners' social circles, and may include specific expatriate groups which memberships principally targets co-nationals foreigners in China, or groups that welcome other foreign coethnics in China, such as the mentioned Banana group in Shanghai, or the *huayi* gatherings in Beijing. In most of those instances, shared ethnicity may be a differentiator among other foreigners that triggers the practice of co-solidarity. On the other hand, even though other meso-level social networks such as churches and team sports activities are supposed to be targeted to either foreigners or local Chinese people, the details of the organizations (language of the sermon or location of the gathering) may curtail the possibilities for further inter-group interactions. Finally, regardless of the social group which remigrants are anchored into, this section shows that their integration is enhanced within the group, and unless remigrants put conscious efforts into mingling and interacting with their local coethnics, such groups are likely to further separate them from the larger host society.

5.4. Conclusion

Overall, this chapter examined two broad types of social ties which have been most recurrently mentioned by interviewees who acknowledged the impact these ties have had on their integration experiences. The first category largely refers to family, and looks into the ways in which through the remigrant's life-course, kinfolks, significant others, and eventually children, may affect their socio-cultural integration in the ancestral homeland. As such, closer family ties represent a helpful capital, as they contribute and facilitate with settlement and the circulation of information, and informal tips to circulate

around the new place, but also their role during the remigrants' formative years may have contributed to facilitating the integration process once in China. In a way, they may promote integration to some extent by helping to better understand some local social and cultural mechanisms.

The second broad category is constituted of larger communities within which remigrants bond or bridge with other members of the social group. In many instances, bonding within smaller communities with mostly foreigners impeded bridging with the larger local community of local coethnics, unless putting in specific efforts to do so. As Poros (2011) argued, this may indicate that in spite of the benefits of migrant social networks, ultimately, these may in fact be disadvantageous to migrants insofar as they may result in cultural isolation. Hence, foreigners' circles can produce two outcomes which may determine whether -or not, the social-integration process can be completed successfully or not. In contrast, foreigners' circles may help with anchoring the migrant in China, as they provide a sense of security, since the migrant is surrounded with peers, he or she feels that they are not thrown in the wilderness and unknown.

With regards to social anchoring, this chapter shows that what matters for successful intergroup interaction is mostly anchoring oneself in China with Chinese people. Anchoring oneself in a community is good, and might increase integration, but on a meso-level only as it might restrain integration to the wider society. As Clopton and Finch (2011:70) defined, "social anchors support the development and maintenance of social capital and networks at the community level, and provides an attachment for the collective identity of that community".

Chapter Six – Everyday interactions in the ancestral homeland

6.1. Introduction

Through a series of accounts and testimonies from research participants retelling the stories of their integration experience, Chapter Five highlighted the importance of social networks and the ways in which they enable or disable socio-cultural integration with the host population and local communities. Within such networks and beyond, socio-cultural interactions between Chinese remigrants and their local coethnics are also often dictated by other aspects that largely affects their overall migration experience in China. Depending on a multitude of determinants varying from straightforward factors such as language proficiency, to much subtler and nuanced factors such as migrant's purpose of migration, intent to stay, or even personality, this chapter thus examines migration experiences by focusing on everyday interactions. Three major aspects are discussed. The first two sections address issues related to the importance for ethnic "return" migrants to be proficient in the Chinese language, and to have a sufficient cultural knowledge and understanding of China to facilitate encounters with local coethnics, so that they can develop meaningful social ties with them. Cultivating transnational linkages and being prepared before remigrating to the ancestral homeland is then discussed in detail with participants' stories to illustrate points. Linguistic and cultural competencies are argued to have a direct impact on remigrants' interactions with their peers. The second main aspect revolves around the idea that remigrants' intentions to stay are directly linked to their migration motives, which in turn, may affect their willingness to integrate in China. Remigrants' own willingness to integrate is also to be taken in consideration. Finally, this chapter examines migrants' experiences at work, and how their professional environment either enhances or discourages their integration in China.

6.2. Linguistic and cultural competencies

Scholars generally agree that proficiency and use of the host country language largely facilitates interacting with the host natives, facilitating socio-cultural integration (Van Tubergen, 2006; Hedberg, 2009; Takenaka, 2009). Communicating with the local population is one necessary condition to build bridges between the two groups, and proficiency in the native language increases the immigrant's possibility to communicate and interact with the host natives (Hosseini-Kaladjahi, 1997; Magnusson, 2014). Although this might be true for all migrants, ethnic "returnees" may experience this aspect differently. Indeed, while Western-born overseas Chinese remigrants are of Chinese descent by definition, growing up in a Western society in which the dominant language and culture is *not* Chinese naturally made it more difficult for them to learn and practice Chinese language regularly, even for "returnees" whose mother language could be practiced daily at home in a family setting, with relatives, or even during Chinese classes during weekends (Kibria, 2002; Louie, 2002; Wolf, 2002).

6.2.1. In-/ability to communicate with Chinese people

INT39, a young Swedish-Chinese woman studying in Beijing explained that, besides mandatory interactions with her language teachers and service workers at the places she frequents, the reason why she had no interactions with Chinese locals was her inability to hold a proper conversation in Chinese. Acknowledging her lack of proficiency, she finds that every conversation attempt she has resembles more to guesswork than actual exchanges with her interlocutors. And although she herself is a foreign national, she insists on not wanting to sound "stupid" or to be associated to "foreigners", which is why she chose to refrain from making Chinese friends as long as she is not fluent enough to express herself clearly in Mandarin. Blaming exclusively her own ineptitudes, she adds:

"For now it's not a priority [...]. I just don't know how to be friends with someone I can't talk to. It's not because they're Chinese, it's me. I can't speak Chinese just yet, so how are you expecting us to communicate?"

Comparably, INT04, a Dutch-Chinese migrant who moved to Beijing from the Netherlands, confessed speaking exclusively Dutch at home, which is why he had

enrolled in a Chinese language university to take intensive language lessons, starting from the beginners' level. At the time of the interview, he had already spent a few months in Beijing, so he knew how to count, introduce himself, order food, and understand the most basic conversations. He retells the many episodes he experiences regularly when he goes out with his foreign friends met at the university. For instance, when they go out to the restaurant, the waiter always turns to INT04, thinking he will be the one placing the order for the group because of his Chinese outlook, even though his Chinese speaking skills are worse than his friends'. INT04 further shared than in other instances, strangers would randomly ask him if he was the group's tour guide or translator. Seeing his confused face and blank stare showing that he had no idea what was asked of him, INT04 would face two responses from his local coethnics:

"Best scenario, the person laughs, gives me a word of encouragement and leaves [but] most of the time, they sneer at me, or I get some unclear criticism. One time, someone even lectured me! I don't mean to be petty, but I get a bit irritated when this happens."

Undoubtedly, INT04 and INT39's inability to communicate in Chinese prevented them from seeking friendships beyond the circles of foreigners. While INT39 consciously chose not to befriend local Chinese until she improved her speaking ability, INT04's repeated negative experiences caused by his much-too-broken Chinese made him step back from it a little. His account hints at the common expectation ethnic "returnees" regularly face when they relocate to the ancestral homeland, also documented in previous studies (Cerase, 1974; Potter and Phillips, 2006; Kim, 2009; Takenaka, 2009). Because of their common Chinese phenotype, they are often mistaken for Chinese locals, and are therefore addressed in Chinese, which includes being spoken to in Chinese, sometimes with a local accent. On such occurrences, ethnic remigrants fluent enough to slip through the cracks tend to have more positive experiences (INT07; INT12; INT30; INT32; INT41; INT46; INT55) compared to their less proficient peers whose local Chinese interlocutor's responses may vary, depending on their opinions on overseas Chinese's perceived duty to speak the mother language, among others. This refers more specifically to the idea that Chinese people, regardless of where they live, should remain faithful to their ancestry and patria, by remaining proficient in Chinese language and respecting Chinese core values and culture inherited from Confucianism. This "responsibility as Chinese people" will be addressed in more detail in [Section 7.2.3](#), when

tackling questions related to Chinese identity. Similar responses to INT04's experience are recorded in online blogs and articles wherein ethnic remigrants experience similar dejections. Alisa Zheng, columnist for eChinacities¹, shares her own in an online piece where she lists some of the pros and cons of being an American-Chinese living in China (Zheng, 2014). In the following extract, she comments about the Chinese locals' expectation from her, triggered by her ancestry:

"Even when the locals learn I was born and raised in a different country, they still expect me to act far more Chinese than I actually do. One thing that bothered me far more than it should have was the utter lack of support I received when studying Chinese. Even after shutting myself in my room and studying furiously for several hours a day after class, I was still scolded by complete strangers for my accent or for misunderstanding a sentence here and there. Imagine my annoyance when I went to the mall with the worst student in the class and he received praise for a simple *ni hao*."

Being negated by her local counterparts for failing to speak fluently or for being culturally incompetent, Zheng developed mild bitterness vis-à-vis the lack of support she experienced during her stay in China, especially compared to other foreigners.

6.2.2. Connecting with local coethnics

On the other hand, as mentioned in [Section 3.2.2.](#), previous scholarship already established that language proficiency unlocks the possibility for migrants to further communicate with members of the host population, and develop a better mutual understanding to eventually step towards better social-cultural integration (Verkuyten, 1997; Ghani, 2008; Song, 2009). For ethnic remigrants however, although such necessity might be even more pronounced because of the abovementioned expectations caused by shared ancestry; "returnees" who are linguistically competent –and who therefore meet said expectations– may become more accessible to their local peers.

INT42 is a French-Chinese migrant who has been living in China since 2010, and who is now working as a mechanical engineer in a French multinational firm. In addition to her

¹ eChinacities is an English-language website that provides a comprehensive range of services and information for both international visitors and China-based expatriates ([eChinacities](#), 2016).

tasks as an engineer, she is also acting as a bridge between her managers, who are French Caucasian expatriates, and her subordinates who are Chinese nationals. Though she claims having “no problems with complex technical conversations in Chinese, because these are part of [her] job”, she nonetheless specifies that even though she is fine with casual conversations in Chinese, she finds it a little more difficult as well. Certainly, according to her experience, INT42 found that being able to communicate with her subordinates in their own language made her more approachable. In fact, she is certain that being Chinese *and* speaking Chinese was essential for her local colleagues to visit her more often to ask questions and to have small talks, rather than just sending formal work emails in English. Aware that these small interactions allowed them to talk a bit more each time, she added that she became good friends with a few of them. Compared to her predecessor, also a foreign-national of Chinese descent who could not communicate in Chinese very well, she also noticed that nobody at work was afraid of going to her to engage in a conversation or to formulate requests. In contrast, her colleagues were a lot more hesitant when they had to speak to her predecessor:

“They know I speak Chinese, so they just have to talk, they don’t have to formulate their ideas in a foreign language, so it’s easier for them.”

INT42’s account not only demonstrates that being proficient in Mandarin is beneficial in her workplace, it also shows that the work relations with her Chinese colleagues are facilitated by her ability to communicate with them in Chinese. Furthermore, her testimony hints at the fact that their shared Chinese ethnicity contributed to making her more approachable compared to other foreigners. This interpretation applies to other environments and profiles as well, as INT53’s personal experience suggests. Describing the friendly relations with the *Ayi* (housekeeper) he has been employing three times a week for three years, INT53, an American-Chinese expatriate in Shanghai compares his experiences with his wife’s:

“I have a really good relationship with her because we chitchat a lot. She tells me about the latest gossip in the neighborhood, and every time before she goes back home, we spend another 15 minutes chatting about pretty much everything [...] I learned a lot about less conventional Chinese stuff with her.”

While INT53 is perfectly fluent in Mandarin, his wife, an American-Chinese English teacher is fluent in Cantonese, but “clueless” in Mandarin. INT53 notes the difference in their relationships with the housekeeper:

“They try to talk, and somehow, they manage to communicate, but it’s rudimentary and always about practical issues. Carrie² quite likes her, and so does our *Ayi*, but the language barrier is too strong, so *they don’t interact much.*”

These views were unanimously shared by all research participants with similar experiences. Although the correlation may not be systematic, the ones who were proficient in Mandarin confirmed being more likely to interact with local coethnics, and therefore enhance the quality of their socio-cultural encounters, contributing to a more positive migration experience in China. Quality interactions refer to what Valentine (2008) called “meaningful encounters” that go beyond simple contact, even regular, with individuals. It refers more particularly to interactions that give the two involved parties a chance to gradually upgrade their social ties from weak to strong, however long that process may be. As Alouia (2008) and Gsir (2014) argue, quality interactions therefore imply a lasting relation and a higher level of reciprocity rather than an occasional, less meaningful contact that generates simple courtesy or formalities.

INT41 for instance, a Chinese-French engineer living in Beijing, affirms that in order for him to feel further integrated, it was essential for him to improve his –already fluent– Chinese-speaking skills. Although he has been married to a Chinese woman for a few years with whom he speaks Mandarin daily, he insists on the necessity to upgrade his vocabulary with Chinese slang, so that he can understand and participate in conversations. To him, in order to develop genuine connections with local Chinese people, it is an absolute necessity to be able to communicate with them in their own language, which requires more than the “survival kind of Chinese”, since this would only allow for “superficial conversations”. He adds:

“You must be able to talk about more complex issues or crack a few jokes. That’s why I had my wife teach me some Chinese slang. [...] You can connect

² Name was changed.

with them on a more personal level and have more meaningful exchanges that strengthen your links with them.”

Therefore, by upgrading his Chinese vocabulary and jargon, not only does INT41 increase his participation in conversations, but he also enhances the quality of the relations with his local Chinese peers, which in some cases, eventually leads to increased participation in social activities during group outings with local coethnics. Undoubtedly, this helps integrating him in Chinese society. Gsir (2014) describes immigrants who have the ability to actively “participate in the new host society at the same level as natives” as socially integrated, or at least, have the possibility to be integrated. In INT41’s case, linguistic proficiency largely contributed to his social integration.

Nonetheless, it could be argued that regardless of their ethnicity or country of emigration, it is critical for all migrants to acquire the host language to facilitate exchanges with the host natives (Hosseini-Kaladjahi, 1997; Van Tubergen, 2006). However, as INT04’s above testimony demonstrated, it is precisely because remigrants are of Chinese ancestry that they face their expectations with regard to their language proficiency and cultural knowledge (Wong, 1982; Chan, 1997; Kibria, 2002; Tjon Sie Fat, 2009; Song, 2009; Tong, 2011).

6.2.3. Assumptions, misunderstandings, and reality

In addition to language proficiency, comprehension and consideration for the host population’s cultural norms, as well as popular cultural references has shown to facilitate interactions with Chinese locals, and thereby, socio-cultural integration. From this perspective, China-related knowledge and Chinese Culture spread beyond the knowledge of its historical timeline, but implies knowing, or at least, being aware of popular cultural references which have a direct influence on the contemporary society on a daily basis.

Navigating through popular cultural references

INT23, a second generation Chinese-American who migrated from California has been working as a financial analyst in a Beijing bank for three years. She explains that growing up, she was raised in a “typical Chinese family living in the West”. Indeed, like many other migrant families, when her parents immigrated to the United States in the early 1970s, they replicated some aspects of their former Chinese lifestyle in their new home (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1973; Kibria, 2002; Forero and Smith, 2010). Therefore, although she grew up in a Western country, INT23 believed she daily bathed in Chinese culture, provided that –some aspects– had been reproduced by her immigrant parents. For instance, her family used to speak Chinese at home and eat Chinese food for dinner using chopsticks every day. Groceries were shopped in Chinatown on Saturdays with the family and Chinese school was attended –for twelve full years– on Sundays. Every year, all her relatives gathered to celebrate Chinese New Year, and during *zhongqiujie*, the Chinese mid-autumn festival, her family would purchase a box of mooncakes and make sure to be moon gazing together. As such, before she settled down in Beijing, all of the habits she acquired during childhood and adolescence were enough for her to vouch for her Chineseness (see [Section 7.2.3.](#)) and knowledge of Chinese culture. Interestingly, this impression was voiced in similar ways by half of the interviewees, while many others alluded to it.

However, as the interview progressed, INT23 ended up calling herself “naïve”, acknowledging that her former understanding of Chinese -contemporary- culture was superficial if not nil until she experienced China hands-on and spent time with the local acquaintances and friends she made over the years. Realizing she has been in the position of being educated by them with contemporary Chinese (popular) culture, INT23 recognizes the striking truth:

“I always thought that I was more than the stereotype of second generation immigrant kids. [...] For example, I’m fluent in Chinese, but my vocabulary is completely outdated. [...] China has evolved a lot, and so did the language. New slang, new expressions, new popular cultural references [...].”

INT23 then proceeded to explain that when she still lived in the United States, whenever she took part in conversations about China, she and her interlocutors rarely ever spoke about Chinese society, nor did she try to understand social issues affecting Chinese people, or what was on trend or of interest to her peers in the ancestral homeland. Instead, the conversations generally revolved superficially around politics or big events that had occurred in China, such as the 2008 Olympic Games, or disasters (such as the Sichuan earthquake that happened the same year), or tensions that would be reported in the American media. To be sure, Willnat and Luo (2011) suggest that this may be caused by the limited coverage of social and cultural aspects in China in foreign television news, which tends to focus more on politics, economy and foreign affairs for instance. In contrast, when INT23 takes part in conversations with her local peers, the topics are more likely to gravitate around more casual talks. She pursued:

“Here, with *most* people, unless you know about things like the dead frogs story³ or the shrimp scam⁴, you quickly get lost in conversations. [...] There’s also popular culture which I’m not too keen on.”

As such, whenever she spends time with her Chinese friends and they start talking about current trends, whether it be about the newest popular franchise in town, TV shows, music, or expressions, INT23 quiets down, stops participating in the conversation actively, and learns from her friends while they explain “the real China” to her. INT23’s testimony shows that in addition to being linguistically competent in the host language, it is just as important to be aware of popular news and social issues that are part and parcel of Chinese culture ensemble. Noticeably, to INT23, speaking fluent Chinese does not suffice to consider herself as an insider. Despite the inherited linguistic fluency from before she even migrated to China, conscious efforts were needed to fill in these lacunae. Gradually gaining knowledge about “what makes China today, and *what matters to Chinese people*” (INT23; INT32; INT35) for example through the learning of the

³ Reference to a buzz story in China, the “Gaokao Guardians” who refer to parents of teenagers taking the *gaokao* university entrance exam. To silence any surrounding sounds potentially disturbing their children, some parents took drastic, and sometimes excessive measures, one being the poisoning of the frogs in the nearby community ponds.

⁴ Another reference to a buzz story in China. A man who ordered a plate of prawns in a restaurant. On the menu, the dish was priced RMB 38, but when he asked for the bill, the total amount was RMB 2175 and was told the price marked on the menu indicated the price *per* shrimp.

miscellaneous viral news is what enables her to shift from the feeling of being an outsider to that of being an insider to Chinese society.

Unawareness of social cues and subtleties

Chinese ethnic “return” migrants in China share, by definition, the same ethnicity as their local counterparts. However, similarly to the expectations in regard to their language proficiency as hinted above, Chinese ethnic remigrants from overseas are facing other expectations from the local Chinese society. Kuo⁵, a renowned American-Chinese artist and writer who spent twenty years in China, commented on what he found to be the biggest con of being an American-Chinese in China, which he largely links to the expectations faced by Chinese-looking individuals in China who are expected not only to speak Chinese *well*, but more:

“You're often held to a different (“higher”) standard, expected to understand subtleties of the culture and the language that no one who wasn't brought up in both should really be expected to grasp intuitively.”⁶

INT34's unlucky experience below perfectly illustrates this statement. INT34, is a young Italian-Chinese sales branch manager working in the luxury flagship store in Beijing. Born in China, he moved to Italy with his parents at the age of four, and grew up in Milan. Educated in Italy, he went to Shanghai to complete his degree for a year. Since he found a job opportunity in Beijing, he decided to relocate further north, where he has settled for the past four years. Despite having flawless Mandarin and a relatively good understanding of Chinese society, he recalls an embarrassing experience at his workplace, caused by the misunderstanding of a detail specific to Chinese society. As a branch manager, INT34 is more likely to orchestrate workflows, his employees' schedules and target sales in back-office, which is why he does not do sales very often. However, INT34 is familiar with all the regular customers, and their purchasing profiles:

⁵ Kaiser Kuo juggled between his multiple roles as a musician, a columnist writing on current affairs and society in China (2001-2011), and as the director of international communications for Baidu, China's number one web search engine (2010-2016) before migrating 'back' to the United States. He often writes comments online, sharing his experiences and opinions about being an 'ABC' (American-born Chinese) in China, and Chinese society in general.

⁶ Source: <https://www.quora.com/What-is-it-like-to-be-an-ABC-aka-an-American-Born-Chinese-living-in-China>

he knows how often they come, what products they are likely to purchase, and what other products to prepare as recommendations during their next estimated visit. One day, an important customer already known as a “big spender” entered the store. Embarrassed, INT34 retells the episode:

“He already came a few times with his two daughters and kind of spoils them. He usually sits on the sofa and waits, while his daughters shop. [...] So this customer comes in, this time he was with his wife, a very classy lady. [...] I recognized him and like I normally do, I try to flatter him by remembering that he came not too long ago, to make him feel special, so I say something like ‘oh hi, nice to see you again, would you like some tea or coffee, blah blah, oh, how are your daughters, I hope they like the bags you bought them last week’. [He starts laughing] Things blew up in seconds, he and his wife started arguing in a different dialect, and two minutes after, they were gone. He never spent a *kuai*⁷ in my store again. ”

Surely, INT34 had failed to understand what had happened right before him. Visibly confused, he remembers turning to the subordinates present in the store only to realize that they were shocked at *his* behavior, because of what *he* had said to the customer. Dumbfounded, INT34 learned that the two “daughters” were in fact the man’s mistresses, which everyone in the store knew, as though it was an obviosity. Later on, INT34 went through the customers list with his team who pointed at more than half of the names to say that those were all mistresses. While retelling the story during the interview, INT34 still could not believe how oblivious he had been despite having worked in the sector in China for so many years. Unaware of China’s mistress culture (Pattberg, 2013; Hong, 2014; Beech, 2015), INT34 then shared other “embarrassing experiences” – one of which almost got him dismissed– of when he was unable to detect socio-cultural cues that were “apparently common knowledge” in China. He added: “Some things work differently here, and I blend pretty well, so people assume that I’m [local] Chinese and that I know.”

6.2.4. Summary

This section showed how for Chinese ethnic remigrants, linguistic and cultural competencies were important to enhance their integration in China. Socio-cultural

⁷ Kuai (块), unit of money.

integration requires some form of social participation with the host natives. It is thus necessary for ethnic “returnees” to engage in social interactions with their local coethnics in order to enhance their integration. To do so, language proficiency is essential to communicate with them, and fluency in Chinese by incorporating slang while speaking, may help connect with local Chinese on a more personal level, as the conversations quality and content improves. Remigrants’ shared ethnicity and similar phenotype with their local counterparts often required them to be proficient in both areas as they face their peers’ expectations to speak Chinese *well*, and to be aware of and understand the subtleties of Chinese society. Being dismissed or denied for failing to meet such expectations resulted for some in bitter feelings that impeded on further attempts to integrate and thus, hindering their chances of anchoring within local social groups and communities. Moreover, acquiring knowledge of, and freely navigating between local cultural references is key to improve the quality of the interactions between ethnic brethren: not only does it enable a truer participation in conversations – rather than just making appearances and having everything explained, like one would to an outsider, it also enhances social participation, eventually increasing the sense of belonging to one group.

6.3. Cultivating transnational linkages and preparedness

Due to reasons of their own, but most often because they naturally assimilated into the culture of their birth country at the expense of the one of their ethnic heritage (Heisler, 2000; Portes and Rumbaut, 2001; Kasinitz et al., 2002; 2004), some unprepared China-novice “returnees” migrate to the ancestral homeland while being estranged to the local language or culture, or more generally, to Chinese people’s way of life (INT04; INT08; INT20; INT26; INT39; INT49). And despite being of Chinese descent themselves, they risk facing a major cultural shock that would require an adjustment period. On the other hand, some other returnees have retained more or less strong ties with their cultural heritage before migrating. Well-informed, they may possess up-to-date knowledge of Chinese contemporary culture or have a good awareness of China-related news, which helps them navigate more efficiently in Chinese society (INT07; INT16; INT30; INT32; INT35; INT37; INT38; INT55; INT57; INT58).

As Kim's (2001) integrative theory of cross-cultural adaptation suggests, migrants crossing borders bring "their own unique experiential backgrounds that serve as a prologue to the subsequent adaptation process" (p.165). In other words, migrants' life before they relocate to a new country shapes how they are facing newness in the new society, and how they deal with new cultural norms. Kim thus identified three key aspects that make up a migrant's adaptation potential, which has a direct impact of their integration processes and outcomes: preparedness for change, ethnic similarity with the host population, and personality attributes. First is preparedness for change, which has been covered above. This can be enhanced by formal education and training (Krau, 1991; Brislin and Yoshida, 1994; INT33) as well as by prior intercultural experiences (INT05), or intensive planning (INT19's example further below)⁸. Second is ethnic proximity with the host population. Being of Chinese ancestry, ethnic "return" migrants understandably share similar –not necessarily identical– salient ethnic markers with their local coethnics. According to Kim (2001) salient ethnic markers may comprise of "skin color, facial features, physique, dress, common behaviors and symbols, or speech patterns" (pp. 168-172). However, it is interesting to note that "returnees'" outward appearance may be slightly to substantially different from their Chinese local peers due to the sole fact that they grew up in different environments with different climates, diets, or cultural norm practices (Kim, 2009). Nevertheless, in line with Kuo's statement, and with INT34's unlucky episode in the luxury flagship store he manages, unawareness of local cultural cues and the lack of knowledge thereof can result in unfortunate experiences for "returnees". Most interviewees expressed how in practice, sharing the same ethnicity as the host population could be a double-edge sword since they were often held to the same standards as their local coethnics. Finally, personality attributes are regarded as primordial insofar as "adaptive personalities" (Kim, 2001:172-179) facilitate socio-cultural integration. Indeed, people with such traits tend to know how to adjust themselves in foreign environments, so attributes such as openness (Stewart and Healy, 1985), positivity, or emotional strength are thought to enable individuals to face culture shocks without being overwhelmed, and therefore overcome challenges of intercultural adaptation.

⁸ Kim also details how intentional relocations, as opposed to obligatory and forced ones (mostly referring to refugees) contribute to enhancing migrants' adaptation potential when crossing cultures.

It is therefore important to look into how much ethnic remigrants stayed in touch with China prior to relocating on their own to the ancestral homeland, and examine how such exposure before migration facilitated their socio-cultural integration. Several respondents pondered how they developed understanding and attachments to China over the years as they grew up in the West within families wherein Chinese cultural elements were incorporated into their childhood, becoming an integral component of their daily life. For instance, a number of interviewees reminisced about their younger days, when some joined Chinese cultural events organized by associations⁹ by participating as a lion dance performer during Chinese New Year festivals in Chinatowns (INT02, INT13, INT17, INT19), or by interacting with other Chinese families during holidays, sometimes traveling to China during summer breaks. Another interesting observation relates to the frequency and quality of transnational linkages remigrants maintained over the years prior their actual decision to migrate, which overlaps with the idea that preparedness for change admittedly plays a significant role in remigrants' response to the parental homeland, which again directly affects their migration experience.

6.3.1. Prior trips to the parental homeland

Before remigrating on their own, some second-generation Chinese maintained close transnational social ties to China owing to relatively regular visits to the ancestral homeland during the summer holidays. Whether it be on family trips over the summer holidays to do some tour-organized sightseeing across China with travel agencies (INT01; INT10; INT15; INT31; INT44; INT51), visiting extended family living in China (INT05; INT35; INT37; INT55; INT57; INT58), or to enjoy a second family home investment purchased in China (INT12; INT30; INT40; INT46; INT58), these repeated trips allowed them to have a faint foretaste of their own future relocation. However, in line with homeland trips recollections as retold by other second-generation ethnic "return" migrants (Louie, 2004; Joshi, 2006; Kibria, 2009; Jain, 2011; 2012), respondents also noted that because most of these trips to China were initiated by their parents, they would normally be closely monitored due to their young age. This caused their

⁹ Most precisely: local Chinese language school, Chinese church or Chinese cultural associations.

experiences to be limited to what their parents and relatives prepared and filtered for them (INT10; INT31; INT37; INT55; INT58).

INT05, whose example was elaborated in [Section 5.2.1](#), is one of such cases. During childhood, her parents encouraged her to interact more frequently with her extended family in China. Now working in a large multinational based in Beijing, INT05 shares how at the behest of her parents, every summer from when she was eight years old and until high school, she was compelled to make homeland trips at her relatives' in Hangzhou:

"I was kid, so I had no choice. [...] I was *dragged* to China every single summer and I was forced to stay with my relatives all day. [...] They were all much older, and they had no children, so I had no one to play with. [...] So every year, every day, we only talked about... stock exchange... Because that's the only thing my uncles ever talked about with me."

Recently promoted to the position of Operations Director, she started off as a financial analyst, and is convinced that –among other skills and achievements– her capacity to mediate between the Chinese teams and other international employees thanks to her ability to switch between English and Chinese financial jargon, contributed to her promotion. She also recognizes with hindsight that what used to feel like “endless and boring conversations” with her uncles were in fact times during which she acquired this jargon:

"A decade ago, few people could boast from this [skill]. I'm sure this really helped me make it this far. When I moved to China, somehow I felt confident... *Probably because I'd been there before*. I really should thank my parents for taking me here every summer, and my uncles for training me!"

INT05's experience thus shows that regular homeland visits over the years not only gives the future “returnee” a sampled preview of how life in China will be, but may also help them absorb some form of knowledge that prepares them to face Chinese society, sparing them from being completely estranged when they remigrate to China as independent adults.

6.3.2. Blooming late

Nevertheless, not all ethnic “returnees” have had the opportunity to travel to China when they were younger. This does not necessarily mean that they had no opportunity to cultivate some form of ethno-cultural transnational linkages before they chose to remigrate. For example, INT33, a Canadian-Chinese remigrant with mixed ancestry living in Beijing shares the reasons why growing up, he had very little exposure to his Chinese cultural heritage. According to him, it was not only because he grew up in a neighborhood with few visible migrants, but it was mostly due to his –tiger-like– mother (Chua, 2012; Guo, 2013) prioritizing his societal integration, pressuring him to achieve high academic performances. As a result, INT33 went to what he called an “elite, full-of-rich-White-kids private boarding schools” until he entered college, which coincides with his living more independently from his parents. Released from such pressures, he chose to major in Chinese studies:

“I decided to do Chinese studies *because I’m Chinese*, partly at least. Otherwise I think I would’ve majored in something broader like international business or something like that. [...] I just really didn’t want to be white-washed anymore, and I wanted to learn more about my roots and the culture that my mom failed to pass down onto me. [...] She never even spoke Chinese to me.”

Now working in the import-export trading business, INT33 explained that when he figured he would ultimately migrate to China, he chose to pursue a graduate degree in international business development in emerging markets focusing on the Chinese region, *in preparation* for his eventual remigration.

“When I moved here [to Beijing], I had many apprehensions of course, but I sort of received training during five years in Uni, so I wasn’t a total stranger when I arrived here. [...] I could speak, read, write... I learned it all about Chinese history, cultural differences and all, and that really helped me a lot.”

Certainly, the classes he took allowed him to better understand Chinese’s rich culture and historical heritage, as well as the underlying mechanisms behind Chinese society. However, as INT33 also noticed, no matter how good those classes were, there remained a significant gap between such broad knowledge as opposed to the concrete day-to-day practical knowledge necessary to live harmoniously with Chinese people, and

eventually become part of that society. Although INT33 did learn the theories behind most of the specificities of Chinese cultural norms (principally in business contexts), such as the notion of face (*mianzi*), the importance of interpersonal social relations (*guanxi*), or the practice of gift-giving, he thought that the reality of living in China among Chinese people was much more different from textbook cases:

“I learned all that in class so when I moved here, I sort of knew what to expect... [...] but knowing in theory and experiencing it for real are really different after all. No school will ever teach you how to deal with your Chinese neighbors or how to embrace their culture, but at least they teach you how to speak their language, and a little more.”

Hence, INT33 succeeded in creating increasingly strong -though mostly intellectual- transnational ties, which were determinant in shaping his socio-cultural experience in China. These conscious transnational linkages with his ethno-cultural heritage and ancestral homeland were formed despite being deprived of such ties during his childhood and adolescence. Interestingly, INT33's efforts to learn about his heritage stemmed from the emotional craving to know his ancestral roots, which gradually turned into the structured accumulation of intellectual academic knowledge. By adapting his theoretical knowledge to the societal realities in China, INT33 thus managed to adjust his new cultural experiences in the homeland through “a series of trial and error, and real-life experiments”.

6.3.3. Personal interests

If some remigrants like INT33 were late in building transnational linkages with China, others have been nurturing and cultivating them regularly from a very young age, continuing to do so even after having “returned” to the parental homeland. For instance, INT15, a Spanish-Chinese entrepreneur in living in Beijing, explains that growing up in Madrid, she used to be like “any other kid growing up in a Chinese family there”: she used to have other second generation Spanish-Chinese friends with whom she would spend time with regularly after their weekly Chinese extra-curricular classes on Saturday mornings. Moreover, because her parents wanted her to preserve Chinese culture, they kept a strict “Chinese only” rule at home that had her forge her Mandarin-speaking skills naturally over the years. With such predispositions, she did not encounter language

barriers after relocating to China, which she believes made it easier for her to break out of foreigners' clusters, and communicate with Chinese people. However, what really facilitated her socio-cultural integration in China was not so much linked to her language proficiency, but rather because she used to watch transnational Chinese TV channels at home. Recalling her memories, she shares:

"We rarely ever watched Spanish TV... just the weather forecast from time to time. Whenever the TV was on, you'd hear Chinese. I used to watch the news in Chinese on CCTV4, but I liked soap operas and entertainment shows the most. [...] Before we had satellite TV, I remember watching the VCD collections my aunt brought us [from China]. She used to visit us every summer and every time, she had this huge suitcase loaded with VCDs of the latest films and popular soap operas."

INT15's testimony parallels INT23's earlier statements insofar as both "returnees" are referring to what they think is of interest and "matters to Chinese people" (INT23). The two are indeed convinced that knowing Chinese popular cultural elements is essential to better understand their host coethnics, but also to be better integrated socially and culturally. Until she really experienced the cultural gaps, INT23 thought she used to bathe in Chinese culture simply because she was living in first-generation-immigrant-reproduced Chinese cultural elements. In contrast, INT15 really absorbed elements of Chinese contemporary culture over the years, and was constantly on top of the latest trends and viral news popular among Chinese people, primarily owing to transnational television and later on, Internet news. This enabled INT15 to follow the changes occurring in China and among its people, to understand and participate in conversations about topics that involve current popular figures or joke using relatively newly coined terms. This pre-remigration life highly affected their socio-cultural experience in China after their relocation. Surely, INT15 has cultivated strong transnational linkages with China through various channels, which resulted in what she thought were better-quality relationships with her local peers:

"When I meet someone new [Chinese person], we get passed the formalities very quickly. [...] Sometimes they [her interlocutors] don't even know unless I tell them that I'm a not local. [...] We connect much more easily because we have *common interests*. Our conversations don't have to be very deep, sometimes we can talk about the latest popular dramas for hours for example. That's how I became good friends with a few [Chinese] people."

With this statement, not only do we learn that INT15 has knowledge of Chinese popular cultural references, helpful to enhance the quality of her interactions with her local coethnics, but she also hints to the fact that she developed a genuine interest in these specific aspects of Chinese culture, which she thinks Westerners are generally less likely to enjoy.

“I’m comfortable talking about all these things [...] and yes, I do think it helps me make more local friends here. But it’s not like I lie and pretend to like those things you know. I’m in my element here, and this just so happens to help me connect with Chinese people better, that’s it.”

INT15 here established genuine social ties with members of diverse communities, based on their shared interests (see also [Section 5.3.2](#)). The above testimonies imply that when crossing geographical borders and cultures from the West to China, some upstream conditions or preparation may help smooth the transition, and eventually, remigrants’ socio-cultural experience after settling in the ethnic homeland. Being of Chinese ancestry and growing up in a Chinese family, most of them thus have some advantageous natural predispositions when remigrating to China. Whether it be owing to regular trips to the homeland during childhood (INT05), formal education and training (INT33), or to personal interests and curiosity (INT15), preparedness for change can contribute to remigrants’ potential to achieve better results in terms of socio-cultural integration (de Haas and Fokkema, 2015).

6.3.4. Flexibility and preparedness

(Lack of) flexibility

Adaptive personalities can be paralleled with flexibility, and tolerance of the other’s difference (Beeckman, 2008; Butcher, 2011; Paas and Halapuu, 2012; Butcher and Dickens, 2016). Unfortunately, due to cultural encounters turning into negative experiences, some remigrants’ response was to withdraw themselves from further interactions with their local coethnics, choosing to remain within foreigners’ clusters. INT20 illustrates this specific case. INT20 is a dynamic young remigrant working in Beijing who has been living in China for the past four years. She studied Mandarin for a

year in Taiwan, and became proficient enough to work with Chinese colleagues with relative ease. INT20 has mixed ancestry (her mother is Chinese, her father is Vietnamese), but she could be mistaken for a local Chinese resident, if not for her Western-style makeup and dressing. To get to the café where I conducted the interview, INT20 picked me up on her pink scooter at the subway station. Concerned about safety issues (*"Was it alright for both of us to ride such a tiny flimsy scooter, with our backpacks, and with no safety helmet on?"*), she tried to reassure me:

"No worries, when in China, do like the Chinese."

She then proceeded to zigzag ruthlessly between cars, yelling at people in Chinese to move their cars a few extra inches, so that we could squeeze our way past them while other scooters were bumping ours too. When we got to our destination a few minutes later, she explained her earlier behavior:

"I'm like that now because I learned to adapt. In the beginning, I used to drive with much more reservation but it took me forever just to get pass the roundabout. You have to adapt otherwise you'll never see the end of it, and it'll take you twenty minutes just to get here instead of five."

Although INT20 thinks that somehow, she has managed to adapt to China, later during the interview, she shared how when she arrived in China four years ago, the cultural differences were so overwhelming that she ended up quitting her job after a year. With hindsight, she realized her lack of flexibility and tolerance towards her Chinese co-workers, and visibly embarrassed at herself for her former attitude, she discloses:

"I was only pointing at their faults, but not everyone is like that. And they may have their flaws, but so do I. I was applying my own logic and methods to them, but I never thought about trying to understand theirs. At the time, I had zero flexibility, and I couldn't tolerate those differences, it was too much."

Even after INT20 found a new employment, her experiences had left such a strong negative impression on her that she decided to separate her professional and private life cleanly. Now, although she has had friendly working relations with her Chinese colleagues for the past three years, she has never met them out of the office, and she prefers spending time with her –foreign– friends during her free time. Dwelling in her well-established routine, she no longer makes attempts to approach Chinese people,

like she used to during her first year in China. Apart from sharing a 9-to-5 office cubicle with them, she has very few interactions with Chinese people at all, and stays most of her time in the comfort of the foreigners' cocoon, within the walls of the foreigners' enclave she chose to live in.

Preparedness for change

INT20 dedicated a full year to polish her Chinese language skills before she remigrated to China, and in so doing, she tried to prepare herself to acquire skills that would enhance her employment possibilities. However, unlike INT33 who received formal education –but still struggled with popular cultural references, or INT15, who cultivated her knowledge thanks to transnational media, INT20 failed to develop her cultural competence (Lin and Rancer, 2003; Butcher, 2010a; 2010b), necessary to develop interactions with culturally diverse individuals and spaces, which unavoidably generates “unfamiliarity and ambiguity on a daily basis” (Butcher, 2011:16-17). Hence, uniquely relying on newly-gained language skills¹⁰ and shared ancestry with the host population did not suffice to prepare her to the reality of Chinese society.

In comparison, INT19, an American-Chinese pastor living and ministering in Beijing, explains how together with his wife, relocating to China was a project they had been considering for years before finally leaving their families and life to remigrate to China. Unlike INT20, he refused to solely rely on shared ethnicity or what he acknowledged were “limited and superficial understandings of China”. Hence, as part of their preparation, they visited China before their final relocation, to scout the area and to start building a strong network of friends they could contact for future help. Though INT19 grew up in a Chinese family, and was relatively proficient in both language and culture, his wife, a Korean-American scientist, grew up in a very Westernized family. Unfamiliar with Asian culture in general, she was even more clueless about Chinese culture. Although they both decided to migrate to China together, INT19's wife can be considered as a trailing spouse insofar as she quit her job to live this project with her

¹⁰ Here, new-gained language skills imply that although INT20 became fluent in Chinese, her knowledge was still limited to classroom-contexts, as she had not incorporated fluid language cues that one learns by practicing the language every day with local Chinese (informal language or slang, for example).

husband. INT19 and his wife thus decided to learn as much as they could about China and Beijing, but even more so about Chinese people: they contacted former migrants who had returned to the United States, they spoke with Chinese immigrants living in their neighborhoods, and kept regular contacts with the network of people they met during their scouting trip. Owners of a large house in the United States, they decided to sell it out, and purchase a small apartment in a residential area in the outskirts of Beijing, where they think they can build “interesting ties with their new neighbors”. Intending to live in Beijing permanently, they thought it was important for them to get involved with the local communities. INT19 happily shared:

“When we arrived, the community life wasn’t very vibrant in our neighborhood. People seemed to rush in and out of their homes, and even though they were friendly people, they wouldn’t interact much. Ellie¹¹ and I worked hard to bring people together and now these people here trust us, and we trust them, and we really feel like they’ve accepted us.”

In order to “bring people together”, INT19 shared that he and his wife had to spend conscious efforts to approach their neighbors whenever they saw them around. Even though in the beginning, it was “a bit weird and unnatural” for the couple as well as for the residents, INT19 and Ellie’s efforts paid off, and within a year, their presence in the community was known to many local neighbors. Well-acquainted to many families in the building he lives in, and friends with a few of them, INT19 explains how he and his wife organized activities on a regular basis, for residents to participate in during the weekend. Activities included picnics in the park nearby, hiking, English practice in small groups, and occasionally, botanical workshops organized by Ellie. As a minister, INT19’s motives for migration clearly require him to interact with local Chinese people. However, in order to minimize cultural shocks and mismatches between theoretical knowledge about Chinese society and real Chinese people, they carefully prepared their relocation by planning the logistic details ahead. With such solid foundations, INT19 and his wife were less distracted by the cultural differences, and could focus on spending quality time with their Chinese neighbors.

¹¹ Name was changed.

6.3.5. Summary

This section stems from the previous one and addressed ways in which proficiency and awareness of Chinese popular culture may be cultivated during younger years prior to remigrants' decision to migrate. Some respondents recalled regular visits to China with the family or in groups as childhood to adolescence, which gave them a more or less detailed pre-glimpse of the ancestral homeland before they remigrated later as independent adults. These prior experiences of China, whether they were within the family's reproduced culture or during limited exposure during trips to the homeland, often shaped the interactions to be had with Chinese people. Some others, who have not had the chance to visit China when they were younger, formally learned about their ethno-cultural roots much later, as they consciously and purposely chose a curriculum to study China. However, the acquired understanding of Chinese society often mismatches the realities and needs to communicate and build strong ties with local coethnics. Respondents whose personal interests naturally leaned towards Chinese popular culture also nurtured transnational linkages before migrating, and were more likely to have good and updated language skills and knowledge about what matters to Chinese people, which was found to be helpful to engage in conversations and befriending coethnics by sharing similar interests. Finally, this section looked at other channels enabling "returnees" once they arrived in China, by exploring the stories of inflexible respondents with limited adaptability, which impeded integration; and examples of remigrants whose preparedness facilitated the settlement and integration processes.

6.4. Migration motives and intentions to stay

While migrants' receptivity to the host country and its people depends on a multitude of factors, their very circumstances upon migration play an important role in shaping their journey to China and the way they *choose* to experience it. Therefore, as it came out from the interviews and from the existing literature, it is essential to discuss how ethnic remigrants' reasons for relocating to China are linked to their intention to stay, and how they impact on their integration experiences. As mentioned in [Section 2.2.](#), despite general assumptions, ethnic "return" migration is primarily triggered by economic

reasons more than for reasons linked to ethnicity (Tsuda, 2009). Instead, motives related to ancestry tend to determine where migrants choose to relocate, and channel the migration flow to the destination country. In the case of China, considerations in regard to economic contributions are predominant insofar as the past decades have seen China steadily rising economically, providing opportunities for highly-skilled migrants (Iredale, 2003; Ellerman, 2006; Dunnewijk, 2008; Parsons et al., 2014). Nevertheless, some Chinese ethnic remigrants relocating to Beijing and Shanghai also behold purposes different from purely economic ones. The reason why Chinese ethnic remigrants choose to relocate to China will have an impact on their migration experiences. For instance, individuals migrating for purely economic purposes as part of a short-term expatriate assignment are likely to have different experiences compared to those who choose to move to China to reconnect with their ancestry and coethnics, as part of a journey for self-discovery. This section thus explores the experiences of migrants who have had characteristically different purposes of migration to China, and sees in what ways their primary motive to migrate, along with their intentions to stay affected their migration experience.

As mentioned, ethnic “return” migration often occurs with migrants prioritizing economic considerations over ethnic reasons. And China, often marketed as a new Eldorado for western industries to expand thus represents a golden mine for opportunity-seekers, including Westerners of Chinese descent. When conducting interviews, I systematically probed my research participants to understand the reason(s) why they came to China. The respondents’ answers were found to be multiple and diverse. Some unwaveringly affirmed that they chose to relocate to China only for economic reasons, and therefore instrumentalized their ethnocultural heritage to achieve their professional goals (INT16; INT28; INT40). Others were less straightforward, and tended to believe that their Chinese roots played some role during the decision-making process (INT32; INT37; INT55; INT56; INT58). Interestingly, a few more respondents whose migration incentive were visibly strictly pecuniary, tried to justify their choice to move to China by finding more honorable reasons, saying that they also wanted to use the opportunity to reconnect with their heritage (INT04; INT09; INT10; INT21).

6.4.1. Economic motives

The following example illustrates the first case. INT29, a French-Chinese chemist is a chemical engineer in a French multinational based in Shanghai. Right after graduating, she was employed for a position with responsibilities in a competitive sector, with an attractive salary. Young expatriate, INT29 reveals that she was hired for a “dream job with fantastic benefits”: she lives in a luxurious condominium which rent is covered by the company, and her salary is twice as high compared to what she could have earned had she stayed in France. The determining factor in obtaining this position was not so much her scientific or managerial skills, but rather in her being of Chinese descent, as she shares:

“There are other French recruits [who are not of Chinese heritage], but I have a competitive advantage precisely because I am of Chinese ancestry. It wasn’t because I’m better than the other hires or that I had more experience than them, but because I am Chinese, and I speak both languages fluently, I can act as the S.P.O.C.¹² for the locals and the French. Chinese employees are more likely to come to me, so even though there is an additional hierarchical layer between the managers and the other staff, at least there are far fewer confusions or errors caused by communication problems.”

In other words, INT29 acts as a bridge between the two cultural groups to smoothen the work environment and communication. Enquiring further details on her motives, INT29 acknowledges that she chose to move to China because “it would have been a shame to pass on such a great *opportunity*”. She knows that it would have taken her at least seven to ten years to reach the same position had she started her career in the West. Comparatively, it only took her a little over a year in China. To her, being Chinese and speaking Mandarin fluently were simply natural advantages that made her more competitive in the job market –inherited advantages which she instrumentalized to find better employment. Clear on her migration motives, she cut my suggestions to move onto a different topic:

“I came here for work. Nothing to do with my roots. I just happened to be Chinese, which was useful to land a good job, that’s it.”

¹² S.P.O.C., Single Point Of Contact.

Other interviewed remigrants (INT16; INT28; INT29; INT40; INT56) shared similar views indicating that the main reason they decided to migrate to China was closely linked to the economic potential of the nation. Although most of them were less categorical than INT29, their point came across: their decision to remigrate was principally driven by the benefits a professional experience in China could bring to their resume. This thus implies that their migration motivations and their intentions to stay in China closely depend on one another¹³. These highly-skilled individuals chose to migrate to China temporarily, long enough to build up marketable professional experiences before returning to their country of emigration, or before migrating to another country. The latter case refers to onward migration (sometimes labeled multiple migration, serial migration, secondary migration, or multiple state migration), a process whereby individuals emigrate from their country of origin, temporarily sojourn in an intermediate country -here, China- before migrating to a third destination (Takenaka, 2007; 2013; 2015; Kelly, 2013). Since in both cases, remigrants sojourning in China are aware of the short to medium duration of their stay in the parental land, their approach to integration is affected. As Luthra et al. (2014) stated, "variations in migration motivation and future intentions undoubtedly result in variations in social, economic, and cultural integration" (p. 1).

INT40, for instance, is another French-Chinese young expatriate in Beijing. She first moved to China for a year as a student to complete a dual degree that partnered with Tsinghua University in Beijing. After graduating, she found a job in a large multinational firm and therefore stayed in Beijing. In only three years, she climbed the corporate ladder, eventually holding a higher-grade decision-making managerial position. Now that she has accumulated enough experience, she is planning to migrate to the United States. If her efforts are successful, INT40 would become an onward migrant whose migration journey started in France, to then transit in China for a few years before migrating to the United States. Indeed, INT40 disclosed that she has always wanted to work and live in the U.S., but she also knew that right after graduation, her resume was too weak to be competitive on the American job market. Since she knew that Americans tend to value professional experience more than diplomas, she thus found a good job in

¹³ INT54 and INT03's experiences further down show that based on personal integration experiences in the ancestral homeland, these are subject to change.

Beijing and decided to stay to build up her professional experience and increase her value on the U.S. job market:

“I always knew my time here was going to be short, so I just focused on working hard to add a few strong lines on my CV. [...] I didn’t spend much time or effort building ties with the locals. I mostly hung out with my co-workers or other expats. Quick and easy.”

INT40’s experience and testimony reflect the many other examples of transient highly-skilled remigrants who have no intention to settle in China in the long term. Subsequently, they put less effort into building lasting connections with their local coethnics, or even into interacting with Chinese people beyond service personnel, justifying their behaviors by evoking their intentions to eventually leave China (INT08; INT14; INT16; INT27; INT28; INT29; INT56). Like many of her peers, INT40 thus mostly remained within expatriate enclaves, and had few intercultural interactions with Chinese people during the years she has been living in Beijing –observation to which she adds:

“Most friends I made here are foreigners or expatriate workers, and they are more likely to move around. We have similar lifestyles and there’s a higher chance for us to meet somewhere else in the world even after I leave Beijing. With Chinese people, it’s a bit more unlikely.”

Comparatively, INT54, a German-Chinese remigrant working in Shanghai, shared a very dissimilar migration journey. Like most other interviewees, his migration trigger was essentially economic. Now working for a large multinational firm, he remembers contemplating migration as an option while he was working in a small firm in Dusseldorf. Since his career prospects seemed to hit a wall, he started applying worldwide with no particular preference for any country. However, he soon realized that the combination of his foreign upbringing, his Chinese heritage and proficiency in Chinese language gave him a competitive advantage on the Chinese labor market. Considered to be a valuable resource to acquire, his current employer offered him an attractive position as a communication specialist. Lured by the economic incentive he was presented, INT54 thus migrated to China with intentions similar to those of INT40’s: he originally planned to acquire professional experience to reinforce his resume before going back to Germany, and find a better job in a large firm. Nevertheless, unlike INT40, he believed that since he was going to spend at least “a year or two, maybe a bit more”

in China, he should take this time to try to reconnect with his ancestral heritage, and understand the mechanisms behind Chinese society. As a result, he dedicated a day each week to socialize with Chinese people, with whom he went exploring different neighborhoods on weekends. After some time, his circle of friends saw a growing number of Chinese people, which eventually included a Chinese woman who is now his fiancée, and with whom he is happily living in the new apartment they recently purchased in the Hongqiao area of Shanghai. INT54's story demonstrates a case of successful socio-cultural integration with host natives. Nine years has passed since he left Germany to migrate to China, and although his migration motives influenced his initial intention not to stay in China for too long, his successful social integration and his positive migration experience affected his decision to stay in China for much longer than he had originally planned.

6.4.2. Reconnecting with their ethnic roots

Although the majority of my respondents relocated to China for economic reasons, some of them specifically chose to "return" to the ancestral homeland principally to reconnect with their heritage, which understanding and knowledge has been diluted due to the lower exposure thereto in the West. Among this smaller group are students, who can be considered as temporary migrants (Brooks and Waters, 2011; ONS, 2016). Some of them may dedicate a semester to a year in China, enrolling in universities language programs to improve their Chinese skills (INT03; INT04; INT39) or complete a degree in a Chinese university (INT27). Others may be gap year students choosing to work in China-based NGOs or as interns in companies, to learn new skills and have more international experiences (INT18). Fundamentally, gap years have straightforward aims: to learn about different cultures while completely immersing oneself in new surroundings, new communities, and to get out of one's comfort zone and challenge oneself with new encounters and experiences (Hansnata, 2015). Among those gap year students, the ones of Chinese descent may have additional motives. Although the positive aspects of gap years abroad are valued as being "good investments" (INT03; INT04; INT16; INT17; INT39), temporary Chinese ethnic remigrants do not necessarily lose sight of their heritage and the reason why they specifically chose China as a destination for their time abroad. INT03, a Swedish-Chinese language student in Beijing

shared that he wanted to make sure to make the most of his time during his gap year in China. He says:

“I want my Chinese side to catch up with my Swedish side. I know a lot about Swedish culture and lifestyle, but I don’t know anything about China. I can ‘behave’ like a Swedish guy, but I wouldn’t know how to ‘behave’ like a normal Chinese guy. [...] I want to perfect my Mandarin, make Chinese friends, understand how China works. [...] I want to learn as much as I can about China –everything that I missed because I grew up in Sweden, I want to learn it this year.”

INT03’s testimony clearly shows that he wants to reconnect with his heritage, which is why he decided to take a gap year abroad and temporarily migrate to China. Since he is limited to a one-year timeframe, he put extra efforts into accomplishing his goals and create socio-cultural connections with China, and Chinese people. Very proactive, INT03 subsequently participated in, and organized social gatherings, joined sports clubs, and even approached local Chinese students to take part in language study groups wherein he could tutor them in English in exchange for tutoring in Chinese. While in Beijing, I would meet INT03 regularly since we had become friends. Every time we met, he would update me on his progress. After five months, his Mandarin had considerably improved, and he had made a close friend, another Chinese ethnic “returnee” from Japan, and many more friends and acquaintances, most of whom were local Chinese. INT03 also introduced me to his girlfriend, a Chinese student he met at one of the social gathering *he* had organized. Deeply attached to them, he was contemplating staying in China for longer than the year he had initially allocated himself to reconnect with his roots. Indeed, he originally planned to return to Sweden after a year:

“After all, objectively speaking, the standard and quality of life are still superior in Sweden, so I’m not so sure it’d be wise to stay here just because I feel more comfortable”.

Visibly troubled, he compared his experience in China with his life in Sweden. In Sweden, his friends are mostly Swedish, but his closest friend is a Swedish-born Chinese as well, who INT03 identifies as “the only person [he is] truly close to”. Although he gets along well with others, he always felt like he was role-playing to fit into that group, as he used to adapt his behavior to suit his friends’. He adds:

"I behaved like a Swedish guy because my friends were like that, and I was completely fine with it... until I came here [to China]. Here I'm just me. A Swedish-*Chinese* guy. I don't need to behave like others to be in a group and have friends."

INT03 managed to anchor himself in China by surrounding himself with a strong social entourage of Chinese peers who facilitated his socio-cultural integration process, making his migration experience in China an overall positive one. As discussed in [Section 3.5.](#), social anchoring proves to be critical in forming emotional attachments to one place, and in the establishment of indispensable footholds in migrants' lives and social contexts (Clopton and Finch, 2011; Seifried and Clopton, 2013; Grzymala-Kazłowska, 2016). Additionally, INT03's accounts show that ethnicity was a determining factor leading him to Beijing. However, although journeying to China for self-discovery and roots-seeking were his primary goals, he openly admitted that if China's economic potential had not been as performant as it is nowadays, he might not have had the same considerations in regard to finding out more about his cultural heritage, emphasizing the potential gains to be had from being in China. In fact, this opinion was shared by all the respondents (except for INT43 below) whose main migration trigger was to reconnect with their Chinese roots: all admitted that if China was void of economic opportunities, they would not have even thought about remigrating. "Maybe for a summer trip to do some tourism, but that would have been it", confessed INT32, a French-Chinese scientist working in Shanghai.

Despite it all, I encountered an American-Chinese ethnic remigrant whose sole purpose was to reconnect with her long-lost heritage. INT43 works as an English teacher in Beijing, and shared her story of being adopted in a Caucasian American family. Though she was born in a small town in Anhui province, she was abandoned as a baby, most likely because she was a girl. Now a young adult, she chose to work in Beijing to reconnect with her ancestral patria. When questioning her about the reasons for deciding to live in China, she shared:

"I came to see what I missed. I was born in China and I was supposed to grow up and live here but I was abandoned. [...] I was curious to know what it would have been like to grow up and live in China, because that's kind of where I was supposed to be originally."

INT43 then began speculating on a life she would have had in China, had she not been adopted and lived in the West, but in China instead. Indeed, she would have had an entirely different life and different mentality. Her being Chinese would not be limited to looking like one, but also thinking and behaving like one as well. INT43 thus decided to move to Beijing and enrolled in a language program so that she could learn how to speak Chinese and better understand China as a whole. However, she realized that always being surrounded by international students prevented her from interacting with Chinese people. She thus decided to work as an English teacher so that she would be able to have more interactions with local Chinese people of all ages. INT43's example thus shows that her reason for migration had an important impact on her overall migration experience, and also on her later social interactions with the host population. She adds:

"Some of my students are preschoolers, some are teenagers, and some are much older working adults. Sometimes when I'm with the kids, I think that 'wow, it could've been me if I'd grown up here'. Same for the teenagers who need to take extra lessons after school, just because it's so competitive here. When I was in high school, I'd hang out with friends after class. But here it's different. It could've been me."

INT43 knows that children growing up in Anhui and Beijing usually face different pressures. Also, her biological family's circumstances must have been different, so her fate would have been different as well. However, she cannot help putting herself in her students' shoes when she sees them struggling with such pressures. After three years living in Beijing, she says it is time for her to "go back home". Her goal was achieved: she saw what she missed growing up in the U.S. Although she gets along well with her students and with the people she has met during her sojourn in China, more than ever, she feels like an outsider:

"The more I learn about China and how everything works, the more I feel like I can't ever belong here. [...] It's not that I don't like it, but it's not for me. It's too different. It's fine for a short time, but not for a lifetime. [...] It's time for me to go back home."

Although INT29, INT40 and INT54 initially migrated to China for purely economic reasons, their migration trajectories and integration experiences in the ancestral

homeland ended up being quite different. Certainly, INT03 and INT43's experiences and stories resulted in different trajectories.

6.4.3. Summary

This section showed how remigrants' integration experiences in the parental homeland are directly affected by their intention to stay in China, which itself is linked to their migration motives. On the one hand is the majority of Chinese ethnic "returnees" (of the sample) who primarily relocated for predetermined short-term employment in Beijing or Shanghai. These are transient highly-skilled remigrants who have no intention to permanently settle in China and were aware of their limited time in China, which resulted in minimal efforts to integrate into local communities. Those were more likely to stay within foreigners circles. On the other hand, remigrants whose purpose for "returning" to China included reconnecting with their ancestral roots were more likely to have a different approach to integration, and put conscious efforts into interacting with their local counterparts. Although intention to stay is often determined by predetermined expatriate missions, "intentions" can change over time as INT54's experiences showed. This section therefore suggests that migration motives and intentions to stay (even though the latter may evolve) are likely to affect migrants' willingness to make conscious efforts to integrate in the ancestral homeland. Other aspects of "returnees'" willingness to integrate in China are discussed below.

6.5. Willingness to integrate

[Sections 6.2.](#) and [6.3.](#) showed how socio-cultural integration in the ancestral homeland can be enhanced through a multitude of upstream conditions at varying degrees, from linguistic and cultural proficiency to having an adaptive personality. Admittedly, these are important to facilitate ethnic remigrants' integration process in China since it equips them to better navigate the Chinese social world. However, this does not necessarily imply that well-equipped individuals are automatically integrated into the host society. This section thus explores how Chinese ethnic remigrants' socio-cultural integration largely depends on their own un-/willingness to integrate into China. Among the various

groups within Chinese ethnic remigrants in Beijing or Shanghai (beyond their gender, age, income, or emigration country differences), two distinct groups emerged in regard to interactions with their Chinese coethnics. On the one hand are the ethnic “returnees” who consciously and actively choose to mingle with Chinese people. On the other hand, are the ones who spend their days within foreigners’ circles or expatriate bubbles. In both cases, some consciously choose to remain within or step out of those social boundaries, which may require extra efforts on their part, while others do so unconsciously, naturally following their social preferences.

6.5.1. Choosing to mingle

INT03 –mentioned above– prefers spending time with local coethnics more than with foreigners or other international students populating the language university he studies at. Surely, befriending Chinese people and understanding their lifestyle are part of his goals. However, the other reason why he prefers frequenting Chinese people over foreigners is because he wants to avoid being associated to the hordes of international students who “drink all week long”. So as not to be conflated with other foreigners giving off negative impressions as excessive disrespectful partygoers, INT03 therefore decided to meet Chinese people through various channels: social gatherings, sports clubs, or study groups. He explains his strategy:

“The school organizes a lot of *huodong*¹⁴ for people to meet. There are also various clubs. I’m part of the table tennis, tennis, and a few other clubs. They’re not the typical ‘Chinese culture 101’ kind of club, like tea ceremony or Chinese calligraphy, so there are less foreigners.”

On the other hand, INT18, a young Chinese-American woman living in Beijing, attends a Chinese underground Church service each week. Every Sunday, her hectic schedule is packed to the minute as she visits two services in different locations in Beijing. Unlike the majority of foreigners who prefer to attend larger English-language international Church services on Sunday, she chose to attend an additional service that only gathers 8 to 15 members in an underground Church. Therefore, every Sunday, she takes the Beijing subway early in the morning to attend the international Church service. When it

¹⁴ Activities.

finishes, she takes a few minutes to meet up and greet her friends before racing out to the subway again to attend the next service which takes place 40 minutes away from where she is. On her way, she stops at one of the many stalls and buys a bun or a snack for lunch, which she munches in a few bites. Stunned hearing her weekly adventure, I asked her if it really was worth going through the trouble of attending the Chinese service since all her friends were at the morning one. Without hesitating, she immediately responded that the experience really was worth going the extra mile:

“Sure, my Sundays are packed and I’m worn out at the end of the day. But it’s so worth it. [...] I don’t think you can get this kind of experience elsewhere. I get to have a glimpse of China that not many are lucky to have. *When I’m with them* [the women from the Chinese Church group], *I am 100% submerged* into Chinese culture when they tell me about their lives every week. It’s quite a unique experience.”

Similarly to INT18, INT50, a young Canadian-Chinese interior designer who migrated from Toronto to Shanghai chose to live a complete Chinese experience during her time in the ancestral homeland. In order to do so, she opted for a full cultural immersion. Hence, instead of living with other foreigners like many of her predecessors and peers did, she chose to cohabitate in an apartment with Chinese flatmates. Except for one Shanghainese (the owner of the apartment), the flatmates are actually internal migrants from other parts of China who work at the same office. Moreover, she made the conscious decision to mingle with Chinese groups only. As a result, even though she still has a few foreign friends -three Canadians she knew before migrating, and two Americans she met since her arrival-, the majority of her friends are now Chinese. Undoubtedly, this was facilitated by her fluency in Mandarin and Cantonese (a good number of her friends are highly-skilled and educated economic migrants from Guangdong), her good exposure to Chinese news and entertainment since before her relocation to Shanghai, as well as her Chinese phenotype which makes her stand out much less than other foreigners. She shares:

“I think that if I was [Caucasian], the relationship I’d have with them would be different, much less... truthful. [...] But I look like them, so I’m less ‘interesting’ in a way. There are less chances for them to fake friendships with me because it sounds cool to have a foreign friend... Though I noticed that when they introduce me to others, the first thing they say is that I’m Canadian. Other than that, it’s normal.”

Determined to blend as fully as she can, INT50 confesses that for once, she wishes to be part of the ethnic majority. Even if she used to live in a part of Toronto with a high density of Chinese residents, she still remained a minority among her colleagues and her friends. She thus applied for a position as an interior designer in a smaller Chinese firm instead of one of the larger international firms implanted in Shanghai. INT50 disclosed that in fact, when she looked for employment in China, she primarily targeted Chinese firms, even though that meant earning a lower pay:

“I could’ve worked for a larger firm and have a slightly better salary, but *I wanted to get immersed in Chinese culture* and be surrounded by Chinese people, speak Chinese every day and see how it’d turn out. [...] That’s why I chose to work for a local SME. I may not have all the flashy stuff¹⁵, but I think I get to learn what it’s *really* like to be Chinese and live like one.”

INT03, INT18 and INT50’s experiences of socio-cultural integration in China demonstrate that going the extra mile to mingle with their local coethnics, and making the conscious choice to gravitate more towards Chinese social spheres implied interacting with Chinese people. Their efforts to anchor themselves within Chinese communities and social groups largely impacted on their integration experiences. In their cases, socio-cultural integration is reached by this conscious choice and active submersion into Chinese culture alongside with their coethnics.

6.5.2. Expatriate bubbles: “Do I really have to integrate?”

In contrast, some Chinese ethnic remigrants prefer staying within the closed boundaries in which privileged foreigners’ circles live in. This part focuses on two interviewees’ experiences who did not find it *necessary* to mingle with their local coethnics. For instance, before moving to Shanghai, INT25, a French-Chinese remigrant, used to work in Wuhan, a second-tier Chinese city. Because the number of foreigners residing and working in Wuhan was much lower, INT25’s former social circles were primarily composed of local Chinese people.

¹⁵ She is referring to the compensation packages and other benefits expatriates enjoy, discussed in [Section 6.4.1](#).

“It just happened that way. Even if you wanted to have foreign friends, you’d have to find them first. There wasn’t a lot of them where I worked either.”

However, after transferring to Shanghai, a city nesting the largest number of foreigners and expatriates in China, his social life and circle of friends took a radical turn. The former ratio of 1:10 foreign versus Chinese friends was reversed. When scrolling through his contact list on his mobile phone, INT25 counted 9 Chinese names apart from professional contacts. The remaining 200¹⁶ are foreigners, and more than half of them are French nationals. This can partly be explained because Shanghai (and Beijing), as opposed to many other cities, are established hubs and have good international exposure. Foreigners and expatriate neighborhoods keep growing, with more and more shops and services designed to cater to foreigners, many of which offer services in English so that the customers have the possibility to proceed to their daily routines without struggling with Chinese language (Boncori, 2013). For example, Central Park, Sanlitun, in Chaoyang district (in Beijing) or Gubei, and Hongqiao areas (in Shanghai) are examples of such popular neighborhoods that contribute to the formation of enclaves. While in Wuhan, INT25 had no choice but to socialize with Chinese people, in Shanghai, befriending his local coethnics is no longer a necessity. INT25 justifies his situation by explaining his original motives: “[he] moved to China to work, not to make friends”. Very pragmatic, he originally chose to relocate to Wuhan because of a good employment opportunity. Even though INT25 enjoyed living in Wuhan and appreciated the city and its people, he still had concerned about his career progression. Interested in working in a more dynamic environment, he looked for openings internally and applied for a vacancy for a manager’s position in Shanghai, which he obtained. Not losing sight of his original purpose when he decided to remigrate to China, he added:

“I didn’t come here to travel or to discover Chinese culture, this is secondary. I came here to forge my professional experience and work. I become friends with people naturally, so when I go out, I don’t *target* foreigners or Chinese people, I don’t really care. It’s just that it seems that for me, natural affinities are more likely exist with foreigners, so I have more foreign friends.”

¹⁶ Obviously, INT24 does not communicate regularly with all of his contacts, nor does he maintain close relationships with all of them. However, the ratio of foreigners and Chinese people he came across in Shanghai, and with whom he exchanged details was interesting.

Despite this testimony, INT25 later revealed that the girlfriend he has been dating for two years is a local Chinese woman. He also admitted that his Chinese language skills and understanding of China had dramatically improved since he had “returned”. However, to INT25, all these are just “bonuses”, or “byproducts” of his stay in China that “just happened this way”. To him, his girlfriend just “happened” to be Chinese, but could have been of any other nationality or ethnicity. His Chinese linguistic and cultural competencies improved naturally from speaking Chinese at work every day, but again, INT25 simply considered those to be side-bonuses of his long stay. And although better communication skills facilitated his day to day activities, he stresses that his main purpose for coming to China was to work, which is why his social relations with Chinese people just “happen”, which was expressed in his earlier testimony in [Section 5.3.1](#).

Another example would be that of INT12, a Chinese-French remigrant who owns an upscale French restaurant on Hankou Road, a street parallel to the popular Nanjing East Road in Shanghai. During the interview, I quickly figured out that with her expatriate husband and son, they live within the privileged boundaries of the expatriate community, and both only frequent other expatriates, which she later confirmed multiple times. While her husband -also an ethnic “return” migrant- cannot speak nor understand Chinese, and only has a superficial knowledge of Chinese culture, INT12, however, was born in China, and migrated with her parents to France at the age of seven. Thus fluent in Mandarin and Wenzhou dialect, she also rapidly learned how to speak Shanghainese, where her family has settled. Moreover, she understands all the mechanisms of Chinese society, and is well acquainted with Chinese cultural traditions and customs. Visibly a refined woman, she blends in seamlessly among the wealthier residents in the upscale neighborhoods she frequents. Nevertheless, despite having the potential and possibility to be perfectly integrated both socially and culturally in Chinese society, she remains within the expatriate compound and lifestyle. Her only interactions with local Chinese people are with service people in shops and taxis, and with her Chinese clientele at the restaurant. Unlike INT39, whose interactions with Chinese people are also limited to service people because of her inability to communicate in Chinese (see [Section 6.2.1](#)), INT12 has limited interactions with her local peers because she does not feel the necessity to do so. To her, being in Shanghai, a large international city with plenty of French-speaking foreigners to befriend, befriending Chinese people

seems to be an additional effort to make in her already busy schedule, which echoes INT25's above testimony. Indeed, when inquiring her why in her private life, she does not frequent more of her local coethnics, she responded, almost trying to justify her behavior:

"It's not that I don't *want* to... It's just that... I don't really feel the *necessity* to do so? After a day's work, I don't feel like going out to meet new people either, I just go back to my family. I already have my friends who live in the same compound. It's fine like this, *I don't really need to make Chinese friends to get by in China*. [...] Do I *have to* make Chinese friends just because I live in China? It's not like my parents you know¹⁷, I don't *have to*... especially not in cosmopolitan cities like Shanghai where you can find anything anywhere!"

In response to her comment, I proceeded to ask her if, based on what she had just told me, there was any difference between living in an expatriate bubble in Shanghai, and living in an expatriate bubble in New Delhi or Dubai¹⁸, since her social circles were limited to the compound and the restaurant, also highly frequented by expatriates and foreigners working in the nearby offices. She then replied:

"Yes, but here, however few they are, the small interactions that I have with the [service people] are in *Chinese*, and I'm surrounded by *Chinese people* too. It feels more familiar to me, *because I'm Chinese too* and even though when I walk in the streets, I am aware that I'm "abroad" [i.e. not in France], I don't feel like I'm in a foreign country either. If I was in Dubai or New Delhi, I would still have to go out to do some groceries shopping and all, and all these little things would have to be done... not in Chinese."

INT12's integration experience echoes more particularly Verkuyten's (2016) Integration Paradox addressed in [Section 3.2.2](#), which refers to migrants who may 'tick all the boxes' without necessarily be integrated into the host society. Even though remigrants such as INT12 are structurally integrated in China, these highly-skilled and educated ethnic "returnees" are nonetheless separated from their local coethnics. In the case of Chinese ethnic "returnees" in China, cultural distance with local coethnics, breaking off the

¹⁷ Reference to the generation of migrants (economic, political) who emigrated from China to Western countries for a better life. During their time, many of them had to integrate - sometimes assimilate- to the host society and culture in order to survive in the new environment. Even so, many retained their strong Chinese culture.

¹⁸ Earlier in the interview, INT12 revealed that her husband could choose between Shanghai and these two cities for an indefinite assignment, but they chose Shanghai.

routine, and temporariness in the ethnic homeland can be some of the causes for their withdrawal and social distance from the host society.

6.5.3. Summary

Chinese ethnic remigrants who were willing to put extra efforts into anchoring within local Chinese communities and social groups improved their socio-cultural integration experiences in the ancestral homeland, and expressed their reasons for doing so. While some mingled with their local coethnics to distance themselves from other foreigners whose lifestyle in China did not match theirs (INT03), others chose to surround themselves with Chinese nationals because they wanted to experience China from the inside, and be socially and culturally immersed in Chinese culture and people (INT18; INT50). Whether it be out of curiosity, to reconnect with their heritage, or experience unique settings, these remigrants were more likely to have a positive approach when they remigrated to China, which enhanced their socio-cultural experience altogether as they chose to spend time with Chinese people, and work on building strong relations with them. In contrast, some other ethnic “returnees” chose to stay within the foreigners’ social circles finding it unnecessary to mingle with Chinese people in order to get by every day in China (INT25). Although they have encounters with Chinese people on a regular basis in their workplace, they prefer building social ties with culturally-similar individuals in private, and this, despite having the full potential to successfully integrate in China (INT12). It can therefore be said that Chinese ethnic “return” migrants’ socio-cultural integration was directly affected by remigrants’ own willingness to integrate in the ancestral homeland, which itself depends on many interrelated circumstances including for instance, their initial migration motives and intentions to stay.

6.6. Work experiences

Nearly all the research participants admitted that their primary motives for remigrating to the parental homeland was not so much for ethnic reasons, but mostly because of economic opportunities. This implies that their decision to relocate was principally driven by the anticipation of a more rewarding Chinese professional experience than if

they had chosen to pursue a sedentary career in the West. Therefore, unless they rely on large savings or on the help of others, regardless of their migration motives, and whether their “return” to the homeland is temporary or permanent, these remigrants have to work in order to support their daily expenses. Their employment, or more generally, their work life in China, thus represents a significant portion of their days. For a regular 9-to-5 job, this means a potential pool of encounters and interactions with local Chinese people. It is also important to look into work relations insofar as many respondents shared that their work and social lives overlapped. In this section, I examine remigrants’ work environment by focusing on the professional interactions they have with their local Chinese coworkers. Analyzing these recurring professional encounters helps us understand remigrants’ integration in China, in particular as they find themselves in positions where they may benefit from preferential treatment due to being foreign nationals, or oppositely, experience discriminations at work caused by their shared ethnicity with their local counterparts. Drawing on some experiences of discrimination at work as retold by respondents –both positive and negative experiences, I explain how such circumstances affect their overall experiences of socio-cultural integration in China. Since this section focuses on work experiences, student remigrants will be omitted insofar as their finances tend to be taken care of by scholarships or by their parents¹⁹. Visa restrictions for students’ work is also a reason for their omission.

Since work represents such a significant portion of their life in China, it is essential for ethnic remigrants to be satisfied with their working conditions and environment. Then again, most of them flew across the globe for this reason. Therefore, if they are unhappy with their work life in China because of negative experiences caused by long-lasting, structural reasons that are not likely to change anytime in their foreseeable future, this is likely to affect their overall “return” migration experience, and possibly impact their decision to shorten their stay in China. For example, most circumstantial issues such as discontentment with coworkers (INT01; INT04; INT20; INT43; INT51), with uncompetitive employment terms and conditions (INT10; INT21), or even with office location (INT34; INT43) can be solved by switching to a different department or even to a new job. On the other hand, well-established issues such as deep-rooted cultural incompatibility with

¹⁹ Students in the research sample are INT03; INT04; INT08; INT16; INT17; INT18; INT39.

which the “returnee” believes cannot overcome (INT14; INT15), or ingrained discriminatory practices and treatment that result from societal pressures, are more difficult to ignore. These can therefore impact on Chinese remigrants’ social integration in the ethnic homeland, as explained below. Discrimination, for example, can be either positive and negative, and have opposite effects on the one being on the receiving end. However, according to *China Labour Bulletin* (2017), a movement supporting workers in China, it is worth noting that although traditional workplace discriminations can be found in China as much as in other countries (the ones that are based on race, age, health and disabilities, sexuality or gender), Chinese employers may practice additional forms of China-specific discriminations, based for instance on household registration (*hukou*), gender and family planning, and ethnicity²⁰.

6.6.1. Preferential treatment

Positive discrimination, sometimes called positive action, usually refers to the policy or practice whereby individuals pertaining to groups suffering from discrimination are given preferential treatment to counteract the unfairness they are victim of. However, in China, and more specifically in large megacities like Beijing and Shanghai, positive discrimination policies tend to apply to China’s own ethnic minorities²¹ more than to foreign nationals who already enjoy other privileges. Ethnic remigrants, despite sharing the same ancestral root, are foreign nationals, and therefore benefit from other advantages compared to their local coethnics (e.g. higher salaries (INT06; INT09; INT11; INT13; INT17; INT22; INT40; INT46)). Since positive discrimination is generally being regarded as a policy, I prefer to speak of preferential treatment instead.

INT35, Chinese-Kiwi, and INT55, Chinese-American, are two remigrants²² employed in Beijing in the same firm, holding similar positions: both are in charge of developing the company’s business overseas, and each manages a specific region. INT35 manages business development in New-Zealand, while INT55 focuses on the Western Coast in the

²⁰ Referring mostly to China’s ethnic minorities more than foreigners.

²¹ The most common –and disapproved of by the ethnic majority– positive discrimination policy is actually applied to Chinese university enrollment (*gaokao*), which follows a system of “extra points” allocated to applicants from ethnic minorities, among others (Xinhua, 2014).

²² Interviewed separately.

United States, where they respectively emigrated from. Recruited at the same time, they entered the company along with two other recruits: two Chinese nationals in charge of business development in other provinces in China. All four recruits thus have the same job description, the only difference being the geographical zone they have to manage. However, INT35 revealed that his and INT55's salaries were at least twice higher than their Chinese peers' wages, even though their workload, number of business trips to take a year, and responsibilities were equivalent. Slightly surprised, I tried to find the reason behind such a wage gap, and thought it might have been a generous compensation for the longer distances INT35 and INT55 have to travel when on business trips. To these questions, INT35 bluntly explained to me the procedures:

"When we go on a business trip, we have a business bank card to cover our expenses, and we have a bonus to compensate for the distance. It's actually in our contract. But the others [Chinese colleagues] have to pay everything with their own money first, and claim it afterwards, but I heard it takes a while to get the money back. And they receive no extras when they travel."

In other words, not only do they benefit from higher base wages, but their working conditions are also better. When asked about the reasons behind such preferential treatment, INT55 just shrugged quietly before adding:

"Foreign passport, probably. That's the only reason I can think of. Even so, it's still unfair. But of course, nobody says a word about it, not the management, and neither do we [the beneficiaries]. I don't think my Chinese colleague are even aware about this, they'd probably complain a lot, and we'd end up having bad relations."

When asked if these advantages affected their relations with their Chinese colleagues who did not enjoy any of such benefits, INT35 and INT55 both admitted that to avoid arousing any suspicions, they often "changed topics", or even concealed the details of their contracts when their Chinese colleagues enquired about those, usually straight out lying to them. INT35 further shared that in order to avoid conflictual situations with some incredulous colleagues who were particularly insistent; he chose to stop interacting with them completely. Similar disparities were noticed as more respondents shared their stories and experiences. Seemingly, the sole possession of a foreign nationality gave them a ticket to better salaries, or better employment terms. INT22, a Chinese-Canadian journalist working in Beijing confirmed how those preferential

treatments for remigrants were a generally unspoken, but widespread practice. As a matter of fact, she is a beneficiary of such advantages herself. INT22 discloses some of her employment terms:

“My salary is the same as other Chinese employees. Not too bad, but really, nothing exceptional. The thing is, because I’m a Canadian, I have *very interesting* side bonuses.”

To be sure, INT22 lives in Western Beijing in an apartment complex owned and provided by her employer. Not only does she get to reside there free of charge, she has a monthly allowance to cover her daily expenses. Moreover, her company pays for one return ticket per year to visit home. Finally, INT22 enjoys five weeks of paid vacation per year, which is twice more than her Chinese colleagues. In comparison, Yiping²³, her colleague and good friend, also lives in the same building, a few floors higher. Yiping is a Chinese citizen from Shaanxi, and despite speaking flawless English –she managed to fool native speakers for years–, having two graduate degrees in journalism from a Chinese and an American University, and her many years of experience as a reporter, she does not enjoy any of the benefits INT22 does. INT22 reminisces the times before they became friends:

“I didn’t want to flaunt my extras in front of her, so I pretended to pay my rent every month. I lied about so many things for about a year [...] because I’m conscious that it’s not very fair [...], but it’s not like I’m going to refuse those extras either. [...] It’s only after we became *good* friends that I told her, and even so, I only told her because my lies became obvious. [...] She was not very surprised but it confirmed her doubts so I could tell she was a bit upset at first. Now we’re still very good friends, but we try to avoid the topic.”

The situations above are classic examples of preferential treatments wherein ethnic “returnees” benefit from perks solely based on their foreign nationality. Although these incentives are gladly received by remigrants, there are times when they may generate conflicts between them and their Chinese peers. INT22 and Yiping’s example shows a fraction of the potential damages such preferential treatment may cause to the relationships between the Chinese workforce and the foreigners. INT57 is a French-Chinese business analyst who has been working in Beijing for three years. Like many others, she enjoys privileges because of her nationality, but also because of her

²³ Name was changed.

professional capacities. She explained that on the first year after she remigrated to China, the tensions at work were so intense that she eventually quit her job to work someplace else. The tensions were caused by rumors spreading among the Chinese employees, that foreigners had higher salaries. INT57 retells how the situation degenerated to the point she and four other ethnic Chinese foreigners were ostracized by their Chinese colleagues:

“From what I understood, they accepted it if the foreigner [with alleged higher salary] was [Caucasian], but for us [ethnic Chinese foreigners], it was a different story. They didn’t make a formal complaint to the company, or to us. They just stopped being friendly to us: many of them stopped talking to us completely, and it started to affect our work. The management told us to wait it out, but the tensions were so palpable it became unbearable just to go to work.”

INT57’s former work experience in this medium structure gravely affected her work life, which in turn impinged for a while on her interactions with Chinese people in general. Unsure about where she should position herself, she shares:

“I know it’s not fair, and I don’t think I’m any better than them but I know for sure that if the package [salary and other perks] wasn’t at least as good as what they offered me, I would’ve gone somewhere else. And if all Chinese firms offered the same salaries as for Chinese people, I think I wouldn’t even have considered working in China to begin with.”

Although these are speculations, INT57’s statement is rather clear: if Chinese employers want foreign talents to bring in different perspectives and expertise, they need to offer competitive incentives to lure in foreigners. However, since this preferential treatment is often unfair to Chinese colleagues, remigrants tend to conceal these advantages. To avoid potential conflictual situations, some may resort to lying to their peers (INT35; INT55), or even avoid them completely (INT35). Unless colleagues are also close friends (like in INT22’s case), such preferential treatment may degenerate in rising tensions affecting work life negatively, and future relations with Chinese coworkers (INT57).

6.6.2. Negative discrimination

INT57’s experience above hints at some of the racial prejudices Chinese ethnic “returnees” are facing in the workplace and elsewhere. In some way, the injustices some

of them are facing are similar to the ones experienced by local Chinese workers. One of such prejudice commonly experienced by Chinese remigrants is their being considered inferior to other Caucasian foreigners, simply because of their Chinese outlook, as demonstrated in the following experiences. In turn, these often triggered sentiments of bitterness towards local coethnics whose lack of solidarity and ethnic rejection aggravated the relations remigrants had with their local counterparts.

INT01, a Canadian-Chinese remigrant, works in a language school in the north of Beijing. She relocated to China after graduating to work as an English teacher, and has lived in multiple Chinese cities for five years before settling in Beijing three years ago. Now that she is well-established in the capital, she knows very well how the city's language schools operate, and which ones tend to recruit teachers based on their appearance more than on skills. Although she is an English native speaker, she also has a degree in English literature, and obtained certifications to teach English as a foreign language. She remembers struggling to find a job the first few months following her arrival in China:

"I read nasty stories on the internet about discrimination against non-White looking people, especially when they apply for English-teaching jobs in China [...], but I didn't think it'd be the same for me because I'm a native speaker, and I even have a diploma and certifications to prove my qualifications [...]. It was harder than I thought to find a good job."

INT01 then shared her repeated experiences of being openly discriminated by employers during job interviews, simply because of her Chinese outlook:

"One time, I contacted the employer over the phone, and she seemed interested in hiring me, but she flat out rejected me when I came in person. She said they were looking for White people. [...] Another time, I applied for a job I'd seen online. The salary was pretty good, and based on qualifications and experience I fit all the criteria [...], but when they saw me, they offered me less. The recruiter said that the salary advertised was for Caucasian applicants, so she offered me a discounted salary."

After a series of similar job interviews and after accepting that being of Chinese descent would penalize her chances to obtain the employment she was after, INT01 eventually conceded for a teaching position in a language school with a "discounted salary". At the

time, she did not yet know her ways around in Beijing, and her savings were running out:

“I really had to stop being picky and get a job. The pay was okay, but I felt like it was lower than what I deserved. [...] It was so unfair, I felt so bitter.”

Even though the salary was passable, INT01 nonetheless felt the pay was lower than what she deserved. The unfairness she experienced had left her bitter towards Chinese people who had discriminated her for being “too Chinese”. Other respondents employed in language schools shared comparable experiences of being offered lower salaries, simply because they were “not White enough” (INT43; INT45). Although employment opportunities proliferated, many had to settle for less until they started developing their own networks to find better positions. For instance, INT45, German-Chinese, was born in Germany but grew up in England. INT45 works as an administrator and occasional teacher in an upscale private school in Beijing ran by an American couple. Starting off as a full-time English teacher, she worked in a multitude of language schools before landing at her current institution. She recalls unfair situations in one of her former workplaces from when she first arrived in China almost a decade ago. She distinctively remembers two fellow teachers who benefited from preferential treatments because of their being Caucasian, while on the other hand, she suffered from looking Chinese:

“One was American and the other one was Polish. The American guy took a year off to travel across Asia, and he occasionally taught English whenever he was short on cash [...]. Obviously, he was fluent in English, but the Polish guy definitely wasn't. There were times I couldn't even understand him. [...] I have a degree from Cambridge and certificates to prove my qualifications but I was paid much less than them because I wasn't White.”

Like INT01, INT45 eventually learned how language schools operate in China. Very satisfied with her current employers, she specifies that although her current institution hires teachers based on their qualifications and not based on their appearance, she still received regular reprimands from Chinese parents who questioned her teaching abilities. INT45 also expressed her anger when retelling how a while ago, a group of parents threatened her institution to withdraw their children from the program unless they replaced her with a Caucasian teacher:

"It's like they didn't care about qualifications or ability, they just wanted a White teacher."

As a result, INT45 chose to gradually reduce her contact hours with students and parents, and spends more time training and managing new teachers along with working on other administrative duties. She explains her choice by expressing her disappointment in her local coethnics: indeed, she unconsciously expected them to be more supportive and show some solidarity on the basis that they shared the same ethnic roots:

"I felt so nauseous because of their lack of solidarity [...], they preferred a *laowai*²⁴ instead of a fellow Chinese."

Rationalizing their behaviors, she acknowledged that these parents spent extravagant sums to enroll their children in the institution for their offspring to receive the best international experience, and for many parents, having a Caucasian instructor teach their children was an integral part of it. More importantly, INT45 realized that no matter how offended she felt, there was nothing much she could do to change such deeply ingrained mentalities. Knowing such mishaps would happen anywhere else, she came to the conclusion that it would be futile to switch to another language school. Instead, she decided to keep working in the same institution, on the condition that her encounters with Chinese parents were limited. INT45's experiences of being openly discriminated in her workplace over the years not only affected the nature of her employment –her job description drastically changed ever since that episode– but also had negative impacts on her relationships with Chinese people and her willingness to remain in China altogether. INT45 now keeps her relations with her Chinese coworkers to a strict professional level, and makes sure never to speak Chinese in front of anyone whenever she is on school grounds, as though she wanted to prove herself and others that she is proficient in English, and that she is competent in her work:

"I didn't really care about it before, but now I become hostile whenever people question my abilities so I purposely [avoid speaking Chinese] [...]. I finally opened my eyes, it's been like this since I came to work here [in

²⁴ INT54's comment may seem racist against Caucasian foreigners, but she is not. In fact, her partner is Caucasian, and her statement simply underlines the bitterness she felt at this moment.

China]. I've been treated like I'm some second-rate teacher *just because of [my Chinese outlook].*"

Although many foreigners, including Chinese "returnees" view English-teaching jobs in China as an easy way to make a –good– living, INT45 chose this path because it was her vocation:

"I've always wanted to become an English teacher, and it was my dream to teach English in China, but I've grown so tired of that [...]. It's been ten²⁵ years now and nothing much has changed; they don't seem to see past my appearance and treat me like a second-rate teacher. [...] Now I just want to leave."

Unfortunately, such discriminations are not limited to language-teaching jobs. INT21, a British-Chinese remigrant living in Beijing shares her professional journey in China, retelling the dreadful experiences she went through because of her Chinese outlook. Although INT21 recently founded her own business a year ago, she worked for two years as a sales representative for a European exporter of refined mechanical goods. The European firm was a small structure which shift in strategy led to their expansion towards East Asia. Since the Chinese market had more potential, the firm decided to establish a joint venture with a local Chinese firm with offices in Beijing. Three years ago, INT21 was thus deployed to Beijing as a technical sales representative, along with an assistant, a –Caucasian– intern. Upon arrival, INT21 was sent to work under a Chinese senior manager with whom she and the intern often went on business trips across China and other regions to promote the new venture and products. Very enthusiastic about being expatriated to her ancestral homeland, her delusions quickly shattered during her first trip to Guangzhou to visit clients. Although she was the one trained with technical expertise, her manager requested for the intern to be the one to meet with the clients, and formally instructed her to stay in the back. Despite being dumbfounded at his behavior, she complied. During the following year, whenever they would go on business trips, the same scenario repeated:

"One time, he even told me to wait outside. Maybe it was because I'm a woman and this industry is traditionally male-dominated, so it wouldn't

²⁵ INT45 worked in China for 3 years before moving to Singapore with her partner for a year. They then returned to China for another 5 years. Therefore, to be more accurate, she has lived and worked in China for a total of 8 years.

make him look good to have a woman with stronger tech knowledge than him, I don't know [...] What I know for sure is that having a white blonde on his side made him feel good about himself. [...] He basically turned the intern into a monkey."

Ironically, her employer had specifically suggested expatriating INT21 among other selected technical sales representatives, precisely because of her being Chinese:

"We wrongly assumed it'd be easier to build trust with our new partners in China just because I'm Chinese."

Although she was thrilled to be given such a professional opportunity, she discovered at her expense that many Chinese businesses preferred a Caucasian interlocutor representing the foreign firm, since to them, it vouched for the products' authenticity. On the contrary, being Chinese seemed to have the opposite effect on their perception of the products' quality:

"He still took me along because after all, I was the tech expert [...]. When they were done meeting with the clients, he sent me to speak to the tech teams but he always tagged along to make sure I didn't speak too much... [...] It's like *me being Chinese* lowered the value of the product and his chances to sign a deal or something."

No longer able to cope with such working conditions, she asked her employer –in Europe– to reaffiliate her to a different –Chinese– division. Instead, she was offered to return to Europe. After pondering her choices, INT21 decided to quit her job. Since her fiancé's employment was China-bound, she chose to stay in Beijing and start her own business. However, INT21 expressed how these negative experiences at work caused her to conflate all Chinese people with the negative images she developed of her former manager. She shared:

"I couldn't help but wonder if everyone here was the same, and I was like, 'So *this* is China? So China produced a guy with a backward way of thinking... Are they all like that?' [...] I became so bitter towards everyone, because of stress at work, because I thought it was unfair [...] It took a lot of time for me to calm down and see that the problem wasn't 'Chinese people', but probably just that one guy... and a few others, but still... I was so angry."

6.6.3. Summary

Like in many other countries, workplace discriminations are widely practiced in Chinese firms, and Chinese ethnic remigrants are not spared from such a phenomenon. In some testimonies, Chinese remigrants shared how they benefitted from preferential treatments –usually by being rewarded financially– because of their foreign nationality. Oppositely, some others suffered from discriminations as their Chinese outlook penalizes their work, as though it discredited their skills. In both cases, these situations reveal some underlying socio-cultural realities in China as Chinese businesses are ready to pay higher prices to showcase foreign recruits, even at the expense of the Chinese-looking ones, regardless of their skills or nationality. Overall, whether they are positively or negatively discriminated, the recorded experiences of research participants show the multiple effects of such discriminations. Being on the receiving end of either evidently affects work life and relations with co-workers, and sometimes beyond. These may be affected directly as remigrants, aware of the unfairness, simply refrain from interacting with their Chinese co-workers in order to avoid conflicts. Oppositely, Chinese colleagues who are made aware of unfair circumstances may be the ones initiating disruptions in the work relations with remigrants. Not only these affect work, which itself constitute of a significant part of remigrants' life in China, since most of them relocated for professional reasons, these may also affect their other interactions with Chinese people, and for some, even have them reconsider their stay in China.

6.7. Conclusion

This chapter examined Chinese ethnic “return” migrants' socio-cultural integration experiences in the ancestral homeland by looking more specifically at their everyday interactions in China, highlighting three main aspects that impacted on their integration or lack thereof.

First, as it was already documented in the previous studies, language and cultural competencies were shown to be essential in increasing social participation. However, simply knowing how to communicate in Chinese and traditional knowledge of Chinese culture are not enough to develop meaningful interactions and social ties with the host

population. Socio-cultural integration in the ancestral could be enhanced when ethnic remigrants were better equipped with linguistic and cultural skills for improved interactions with local coethnics. These took the form of knowledge of Chinese popular culture and trendy references, or the use of slang while interacting with local coethnics enabled largely facilitated inter-group interactions, which eventually increased their sense of inclusion for some respondents. According to the data collected, all such were reached through different channels. This included prior trips to the homeland as young children with the family or as adolescents during organized youth groups, though independent experience of the homeland only came later on. Those who did not get to experience the parental homeland when younger may have been exposed to China-related knowledge through formal education. Personal interests nurturing transnational linkages prior to remigrating (as well as during the sojourn) were also found to facilitate contact with Chinese people. Other aspects impacting on remigrants' socio-cultural integration experiences included their adaptive personalities and preparedness for change since they were more likely to accept or reject cultural differences. Prepared migrants were also more likely to avoid grave cultural shocks when relocating to China. All of these factors influenced remigrants' anchoring into Chinese society and their integration outcomes.

Second, migration motives and intentions to stay were examined to understand how those impacted on their day-to-day interactions with local people. Oftentimes, remigrants' whose expatriate mission was short, or those who did not intend to stay for long were more likely to have remigrated to China for economic purposes mostly, and deliberately chose not to invest too much effort to integrate, knowing that they were going to leave. However, respondents who chose to relocate primarily because of their shared ancestry and who wanted to reconnect with their roots were more likely to try surrounding themselves with local coethnics. These surely influenced remigrants' willingness to integrate and the communities within which they chose to anchor themselves into. While some "returnees" made conscious efforts to connect with their local coethnics, others preferred remaining within the comfort of expatriate bubbles. The latter case echoed Verkuyten's (2016) Integration Paradox insofar as it shows how migrants who have the potential and ability to integrate successfully into the host society actually turn away from it. It can therefore be said that Chinese ethnic "return"

migrants' socio-cultural integration was directly affected by remigrants' own willingness to integrate in the ancestral homeland, which itself depended on many their initial migration motives and intentions to stay, as well as their linguistic and cultural competencies.

Finally, the different treatments Chinese ethnic remigrants' received at their workplace show how their relations with Chinese people were affected, often negatively. This was an important aspect to explore since the majority of the research participants expressed having "returned" to the ancestral homeland because of better employment opportunities and to boost their careers. Also, because work generally consists of a significant part of their every day, the social interactions taking place in workspaces influenced their perceptions of Chinese people's ways of being and behaving. As such, ethnic remigrants' shared ethnicity with their local counterparts while being foreign citizens both played significant roles in their being the recipient of preferential treatments or discrimination. These in turn often affected their relations with their Chinese colleagues to varying degrees, and sometimes also to other circles beyond work.

Chapter Seven – Identity

7.1. Introduction

Sequencing Chapters Five and Six, this chapter aims to understand how remigrants' socio-cultural integration experiences impacted on their ethno-cultural identity re-evaluation and construction, and how some developed new spaces of belonging and identification after they relocated to the parental homeland. This chapter also highlights the ways in which ethnic identification is influenced by the intercultural encounters between ethnic brethren from different socio-cultural, political and ideological backgrounds. These encounters triggered a more or less active and conscious identity questioning, resulting in "returnees" repositioning themselves, developing new ways to identify themselves. While initially, one predominant way of identification was through their ethnicity, the China-experience often leads them to reinforce their cultural identity, which is predominantly "western", contrarily to what they thought prior to relocating to China. This chapter's main goal is to answer the following question: How do these experiences of migration, the positive and negative experiences of social integration impact the formation of their ethno-cultural identities?

It is important to note that looking at ethnic identity does not mean that ethnicity is the only aspect that defines a person's identity per se, as multiple other dimensions are involved when trying to process one person's identity, including for instance, gender, occupation, age, political or religious beliefs. I chose to focus on ethnicity because of the "ethnic" component of "ethnic 'return' migration". In the process of ethnic "return", and with the experiences of socio-cultural integration that follow, there are changes in the way migrants identify themselves with regard to ethnicity, and identification based on race and culture. Surely, while most used to identify majorly by their ethnic identity, they gradually shift to identifying with their cultural identity, or focus more on their profession. As mentioned in [Section 3.4.1](#), it is crucial to note that this chapter considers a partial identity in a specific context: the remigration of Western-born second

generation overseas Chinese in China by hinting at how social anchoring stands halfway between a positive socio-cultural integration in the ethnic homeland, and ethnic identity changes.

The first section examines the link between socio-cultural integration experiences in the parental homeland and remigrants' identity changes, and shows how ethnic remigrants begin reevaluating their ethno-cultural identities and attachment upon "return". The second section then looks at some of the different types of ethnic identities that resulted from the reevaluation process, largely tailored on Tsuda's (2009a; 2009b) work on diasporic homecomings discussed in [Section 2.4.2](#). Finally, the third section examines ethnic identity being fluid and circumstantial, and provides cases wherein ethnic returnees developed some aspects of their ethnic identities in different situations.

7.2. Integration experiences influencing identity questioning

This section focuses on how socio-cultural integration experiences in the ancestral homeland triggered identity changes and how Chinese ethnic "returnees" began reevaluating their ethno-cultural identity. First, it shows how ethnic identity, being a social process, was influenced by ethnic "return" migration, and explores how ethnic "returnees" re-evaluate their ethno-cultural identity and attachment to the parental homeland after experiencing China on a daily basis, in relation to their cultural identity. It then notes that many remigrants' identity reevaluation was not necessarily a conscious or active process while at the same time, some others were very active in questioning their identity changes. Finally, this section delves into the different ideas of Chineseness and what it means for Chinese ethnic remigrants to be "Chinese", as well as what they believe being "Chinese" involves, in the light of the primordialist/circumstantialist understandings of ethnic identity.

7.2.1. Integration experiences' effect on identity changes

The social groups and "life footholds" (Grzymala-Kazlowska, 2016:1133) within which remigrants are anchored and integrated often influence drastically their ethno-national

identifications. As mentioned in [Section 3.5.1.](#), identity questioning is often triggered and shaped by remigrants' social anchoring and is also often based on their perceived socio-cultural experiences and performances. As it was discussed in [Section 3.4.3.](#), even though identity can be personally and subjectively determined, it is also highly socially-constructed, as it is shaped by the interactions –and lack thereof– with the host society, country, and culture. Ethnic and cultural identities, two partial identities constituent of an individual's identity among other partial identities, are revisited by Chinese ethnic "returnees" as their socio-cultural integration and experiences in China challenge their understandings of Chineseness. Previous studies on ethnic "return" migration pointed out how unexpected social, economic, and ethnic marginalization after relocating to the ancestral homeland compelled remigrants to re-evaluate their ethno-national and cultural identities, as well as their understandings of home (Kim, 2009; Tsuda, 2009c; Hong, 2010). And even though in most of these studies, disillusion and negative experiences are identified as the main triggers of identity questioning, these are in fact, *unintended* outcomes brought about by migration (Tsuda, 2009b:15, emphasis added). This is principally because even though ethnicity did channel their relocation to the ethnic homeland, the majority of ethnic "returnees'" migration motives remain largely economic, so few of them anticipated experiencing identity changes during the migration journey (Ibid., 334.).

At the same time, while such studies argue that remigrants are less well integrated socially and culturally because of their socio-economic marginalization and downward economic integration, the experiences of Western-born Chinese ethnic remigrants slightly differ, primarily due to their emigration countries pertaining to the Global North. Indeed, as discussed in [Section 2.4.3.](#), many ethnic "returnees" emigrating from less developed countries are more likely to be unwelcomed by their local coethnics as they suffer from undesirable labels or stereotypes linked to their emigration country (Remennick, 2009; Takenaka, 2009), causing a negative experience of "homecoming", which itself influences the ways in which their ethnic identity evolves. And even though remigrants from more developed countries, such as Western-born Chinese ethnic "returnees", are more likely to benefit from the better reputation of their emigration countries, oftentimes, they are still ethnically marginalized as foreigners. Additionally, as it was shared during multiple interviews (INT07; INT37; INT44; INT53), a few remigrants

were surprised to be the recipients of contemptuous comments from some of their local coethnics who viewed them –or more precisely, treated their parents or grandparents who previously emigrated from China– as unpatriotic opportunists who abandoned the patria for a better life abroad. INT44, for instance, a Canadian-Chinese in Beijing, shares how during a conversation he had with his Chinese coworkers during which he made a mention that in Canada, the working culture was a bit different compared to the Chinese culture with which he was unfamiliar with, some coworkers mocked him with disdain. He recalls:

“One even told me that if I was *so proud* to be Canadian [emphasized by INT44], what was I even doing here. He said that now that China has become so powerful, I’m begging my way in and that I was just an opportunist, *not a real Chinese* [emphasis added].”

Other respondents shared similar instances wherein their local peers expressed envy (*xian mu*¹) towards them for having lived overseas in what they thought were enviable countries, while occasionally being quite vocal about their pride in China becoming a new superpower surpassing the West (INT07; INT37; INT46; INT53).

As it was shown in [Chapters Five](#) and [Six](#) and above, “returnees” are often faced with ambivalent reactions from their local counterparts who treat them as overly Westernized cultural foreigners but at the same time, are expected to be linguistically and culturally apt precisely because of their Chinese ethnicity. Oftentimes, this impacts on how their ethnic affinities and identity develop (see also Kibria (2002), Park (2006) and Kim (2009). INT04 and Zheng’s experiences in [Section 6.2.1](#) showed how their lack of cognizance in China had caused them to be denied as proper Chinese by their local counterparts who expected them to honor their ancestry by being linguistically and culturally apt. Similarly, INT49, an Australian-Chinese remigrant in Beijing shared how her local coethnics’ denigrated her and her upbringing on cultural grounds, triggering identity questioning. Recalling multiple encounters during which she was assumed to be “just another Chinese”, she remembers how she was often met with contempt. Although INT49 can converse comfortably in Mandarin, she sometimes struggles understanding or

¹ xiàn mù (羡慕) – to envy / admire

expressing seemingly trivial yet specific words such as “conditioner”, “detergent”, or “power socket” because of her lack of vocabulary. Moreover, her strong foreign accent gives her away when she speaks Chinese:

“I open my mouth and they know right away that I don’t belong here, and of course, they make sure to let me know that. ‘How can you not know that, aren’t you Chinese? Can’t you read? It’s written right there, are you stupid?’ [...] It’s like they don’t want you to be here if you can’t be like them. [...] But that only goes for people like you and me [ethnic Chinese], not for the others [visible foreigners].”

Growing more aware of the cultural differences that separate her from her local coethnics, INT49 indeed realized that oftentimes, what she used to think were unacceptable ways of behaving were considered as perfectly normal in Beijing (not respecting people’s personal space, not queuing in line, or staring down others openly for instance). Oppositely, some of her habitual ways of being and behaving were seemingly out of place or ill-received (ways of relaxing, dress, being an achieving woman and being vocal about her opinions). While INT49 mostly blames her linguistic shortcomings, she notes how the frequency of such remarks fed her exasperation nay reluctance to befriend Chinese people and fueled her othering of China and of Chinese people². Nevertheless, INT49 did refer to a few times when she actually took the time to explain that “as a *huayi*, maintaining ethnic roots alive and fresh [was] not that easy of a task”. She added:

“If you take the time to explain that, assuming they’ll listen to you and try to understand, they might not be as harsh. [...] But it’s like finding excuses to justify that it’s not completely your fault if you can’t speak well, and I don’t like that. [...] And again, that supposes that you take time to explain it to them, otherwise they assume you’re a failure as a Chinese.”

Being referred to as a “failure as a Chinese”, as INT49 expressed, was a reaction met by multiple respondents who felt culturally inadequate when they failed to understand or express themselves properly (INT03; INT08; INT09; INT22; INT39; INT48; INT52). INT08, another Australian-Chinese in Beijing, expressed how at some point, he was made to feel guilty for failing to “honor [his] ancestry”. Having “returned” to the ancestral

² See also Kim (2009:318).

homeland and being surrounded by coethnics had made him realize that “after all, [he] might not be as Chinese as [he had] previously thought”. At that realization, INT08 (and INT49) began wondering if “[they] were not simply outsider[s]”. Hence, in addition to impeding on socio-cultural integration in the host society (see [Chapter Six](#)), linguistic and cultural gaps can highlight cultural difference and cause remigrants to experience ethno-cultural marginalization which in turn triggers ethnic identity questioning and impact on remigrants’ affinities to where they feel home really is.

Interestingly, even socio-culturally well-integrated proficient remigrants can still be ethnically marginalized by their local coethnics. INT32, a French-Chinese remigrant working in Shanghai blends in easily with his coworkers and his many Chinese friends. Fluent in Mandarin and in Shanghainese, he can go on for weeks without uttering a word in French or English, and oftentimes, he does so only because of work-related phone calls with international business partners. However, regardless of how proficient he is, and despite having integrated rather well, his friends deny him “authenticity”³ as a Chinese. And although they acknowledge his fluency in Chinese and impressive knowledge of China-related matters, INT32 is constantly singled out, even within his group of Chinese friends, as “the French”⁴.

“For them, I’m just French. [...] Even if in the beginning many didn’t even realize I was not Chinese [national], once they knew, they started picking up on anything to ‘prove’ [hand gesture] that I was not a ‘real’ Chinese [idem]. For example, when I just miss out on a [Chinese] word, they say ‘ha, you see, you’re French, we would have known that’, even if it’s about something very trivial. If I say or do *anything* that is anywhere close to French stereotypes, then I’m done! They won’t let it go easily and they say, ‘yes, yes that must be because you’re French’.”

Even though most of INT32’s friends’ nitpicky teasing remains friendly, they are nonetheless indicative of how most of the time, INT32 is made to feel different from his local coethnics who deny him authenticity as an ethnic Chinese. He added:

³ See also Fox (2009) and Song (2009) for ethnic remigrants’ debates on ethno-cultural ethnicity, and Tuan (1998; 1999) for discussions about the authenticity dilemma.

⁴ See also Fanon (1961).

"I can tell we're different, but I still think that I'm Chinese. I mean it's more than a fact: I really feel Chinese... I mean it depends, when they keep saying 'no, no, you're French', well, you know, *it makes you think.*"

INT32's example shows the ambivalent reactions local coethnics may have towards their "returned" peers who do not perfectly conform to the Chinese socio-cultural norms –any perceived difference is pointed out to justify difference from the majority group. Despite being socially accepted, he is still ethnically marginalized, repeatedly othered by his peers. This also shows that ethnic identity reevaluations may occur regardless of the outcome of remigrants' integration while it is their interactions with the host population during the integration process, as well as their experiences in the homeland that prevail, which influence the ensuing identity questioning. Although the outcome of remigrants' integration does matter, its process prevails.

7.2.2. Variances in identity questioning activeness

It is important to note that if almost all respondents underwent ethnic identity self-revaluations as a result of their "homecoming" and integration experiences, the intensity and the significance given to such questioning differed among remigrants. Identity repositioning was neither systematic nor uniform, but varied in terms of personal involvement and interest when seeking ethnic identity and belonging. On the one hand, some respondents actively discussed integration experiences and how such impacted on their identity questioning (e.g. INT01; INT03; INT08; INT14; INT18; INT37; INT40; INT47; INT48; INT57). INT47, for example, mentioned in [Section 5.3.1.](#), regularly organizes friendly *huayi* gatherings at her apartment during which ethnic "returnees" in Beijing can meet and share their personal experiences growing up as Chinese ethnic minorities in different parts of the world. During these gatherings, attendees also often share about how their remigration to the ancestral homeland has impacted on their understanding of where home really is to them, and how their identity evolved. Even though many most of these remigrants relocated to China for professional reasons, some of them still actively sought out others in a similar situation to discuss experiences in shifting ethnonational and ethnocultural identifications after their "return" to the homeland.

On the other hand, many more respondents openly admitted not having had any active thoughts about the question before the interview (e.g. INT04; INT07; INT17; INT25; INT27; INT35; INT38). And even though issues related to ethno-cultural identity changes occurring after their “return” to China may have crossed their minds, it is possible that remigrants do not find such issues important enough to actively re-evaluate themselves. Matters related to ethnic identity and questions probing respondents’ understanding of Chineseness and the changes they might have experienced were the last part of the interview. I could tell that respondents were tired because of the length of the interviews, but also because they were asked to think about concrete examples and stories to illustrate seemingly normal aspects of their life they did not necessarily pay attention to before the actual interview. Hence, as I was asking them to voice out their opinions on ethno-cultural identity changes, and what it meant for them to be Chinese, I could detect tiredness which may have led some of them to vocally process the question about their identity changes out loud –if they believed there had been any– seriously for the first time.

It can thus be said that regardless of how actively remigrants reevaluated their ethnic identities and belonging, most of the respondents, if not all, perceived subtle to palpable changes in their ethno-cultural identity and attachments, as well as in the ways in which they identified to all things Western and Chinese after they remigrated to the ancestral homeland. Indeed, whether ethnic “returnees” participate in gatherings similar to INT47’s brunches or not, engage in reflective discussions with friends, or even have any active thoughts about identity changes since relocating to China, most respondents share one common trait: their understanding of what being Chinese entails after they moved to China has changed, which brings us to the importance of defining Chineseness.

7.2.3. Chineseness according to ethnic remigrants

Primordialist and circumstantialist understandings of Chineseness

After identifying the link between ethnic “return” migration by focusing on how remigrants’ integration experiences prompted further identity questioning, I asked

interviewees who expressed having experienced changes in the ways they identified as a Chinese person, what they specifically meant when they thought they “felt more Chinese” and how they would define Chineseness. It was indeed important to understand how Western-born second generation overseas Chinese ethnic remigrants thought “being Chinese” entailed which helps investigating how their ethno-cultural identities evolved. As discussed in [Section 3.4.2.](#), the dichotomy of primordialist and circumstantialist understandings of Chinese ethnic identity enables clarifying how remigrants experienced such identity changes after relocating to China. On the one hand, primordialist, or perennialist concepts of ethno-national identity suggest that ethnic identity is shaped based on a combination of ascribed characteristics such as ancestry (blood), language and culture, essential for one to identify with a particular ethnic group (Fenton, 1999; Verkuyten, 2005; Hong et al., 2012). Therefore, based on a primordialist understanding of ethnic identity predominant in China (Tan, 2012; Zhuang, 2013), ethnic remigrants not only need to share common ancestry, but also be linguistically and culturally proficient. Not only does this largely applies in China among the majority⁵, the analysis of the interviews revealed that most respondents also complied with primordialist understandings of Chineseness. When asked what they thought being Chinese entailed, most answered with straightforward characteristics. Their responses always started by describing basic physical attributes shared by Chinese ethnic individuals and gradually progressed into other primordialist attributes corresponding to linguistic proficiency, but also cultural traits, such as culinary habits and preferences, community behaviors, or values linked to filial piety for instance. INT39, a Swedish-Chinese in Beijing, summarized her idea of “being Chinese” in the following statement:

“For me, if you’re Chinese, it means that you have yellow skin, slanted eyes and black hair [...], that you speak Chinese well, eat Chinese food, stick to

⁵ More particularly among the dominant Han Chinese present in Beijing and Shanghai. Chinese ethnic minorities practicing different languages and cultures were omitted. See also [Section 1.5.](#) that acknowledges in the scope of work the diversities among Chinese but simplified for the needs of this thesis.

other Chinese people all the time, [...] I think being Chinese means that you have stronger family values too, you know, like *xiaoshun fumu*⁶ and all.”

And if most respondents expressed similar views (except for INT07; INT14; INT20; INT46; INT47; INT49; INT52), many were also aware of their lacunae with regards to their own definitions of Chineseness. Indeed, acknowledging that she is still a beginner learning the basics of Chinese language, INT39 nuances:

“But I can’t deny that I am Chinese either. I am Chinese, even though I can’t speak Chinese or don’t understand much about China and Chinese culture and I don’t have many Chinese friends. I just sort of fail at being a real Chinese because of that!”

On the other hand, circumstantialist (or instrumentalist, or constructivist) understandings of ethnic identity stress that ethnic attachments are not limited to fixed elements, but instead, are shaped by social and political circumstances (Hong et al., 2012). Consequently, from a circumstantialist point of view, ethnic identity “is a fluid and dynamic understanding of self and ethnic background” and can be “constructed and modified as individuals become more aware of their ethnicity” (Phinney, 2003:63). Both theoretical perspectives could be detected in the respondents’ narratives in which they explained what they thought being Chinese entailed. Surely, the fluidity of second generation ethnic remigrants’ Chinese identity contrasts with that of their local coethnics in China who tend to conflate Chineseness with fixed, ascribed characteristics. Although many respondents assumed similar beliefs, they nonetheless acknowledged failing their own definitions, explained because by their growing up in a different dominant society and culture. This idea of identity being fluid and circumstantial will be further developed in the last section of this chapter.

Being “Chinese”, in Chinese

As the interviews progressed, another specificity to Chinese ethnic remigrants emerged. As raised in [Section 4.2.2.](#), the multiple translations for “Chinese” in Mandarin opens the

⁶ Xiàoshùn Fùmǔ (孝顺父母) – filial piety, referring to a traditional value emphasized in Confucian teachings.

gates to broader options for ethnic “returnees” to identify to China and as Chinese people. The moment I enquired about “being Chinese”, some respondents expressed confusion as they were not sure about how to translate the word “Chinese” in Mandarin. Therefore, some respondents identified to some translations, but categorically refuted and detached themselves from others. For example, when asked if she “felt Chinese”, INT47, an Australian-Chinese journalist living in Beijing, answers:

“I am Chinese, yes, and I feel Chinese, that’s for sure. But it depends on what you mean by *Chinese*. If you mean *zhongguo ren*, then no, definitely not, [...] there’s too much political weight behind and I don’t want to insinuate anything. If you mean *huaren* or *huayi*, then yes, I am Chinese.”

If the ambiguity is limited in colloquial exchanges in English language, ethnic remigrants aware of the differences between the existing translations reflected more about their ethnic attachments, pondering the implications of labelling themselves as Chinese. Respondents who introduced themselves in their native language labelled themselves as “Chinese”, or being “of Chinese origin”, or “Chinese ancestry”, without providing any further details unless requested (INT03; INT14; INT26; INT33; INT34; INT36; INT38; INT42; INT51; INT52; INT55; INT56; INT57; INT59). However, when translated into Mandarin, respondents were more careful. Indeed, while *zhongguo ren* generally refers to ethnic Chinese individuals, it can also imply that the person in question is a Chinese national. Respondents shared that their understanding of being a “*Zhongguo ren*” also indicated some form of allegiance to the Chinese nation, and agreement with the current political system. Similarly to INT47 above, INT40, a French-Chinese in Beijing, shares how her lack of accurate knowledge of the terminology and implications of such terms made her call herself Chinese (*Zhongguo ren*) when introducing herself, until she gradually understood that being a *zhongguo ren* involved different aspects which she does not want to be associated with. Instead, she chose to call herself *huayi*, a term she learned after relocating to China, behind which she can justify her lack of proficiency:

“Now I just avoid saying *zhongguo ren*, because I don’t have Chinese citizenship and I don’t agree with the Chinese government and I just want to get away from that, so now I just say *huayi*. When I say I’m a *huayi*, people understand right away, and they have much less expectations from me. If my Chinese is bad, I just say I’m a *huayi*.”

INT40's testimony was shared by multiple respondents who discovered the colloquial use of the term *huayi* after they remigrated to China (INT02; INT05; INT07; INT11; INT16; INT17; INT20; INT22; INT27; INT36; INT38; INT41; INT42; INT55; INT58).

7.2.4. Summary

This section showed how Western-born Chinese ethnic remigrants' socio-cultural integration experiences caused them to reevaluate their ethno-cultural identity. Most often, realizing their linguistic and cultural inadequacies vis-à-vis their local coethnics in the new host society was enough to be subject to ethno-cultural marginalization, which itself often triggered identity reconsiderations on the remigrants' part. Indeed, since ethnic identity is socially constructed, it is thus highly dependent on the interactions remigrants' have in the ancestral homeland. In view of the primordialist/circumstantialist dichotomy, it can also be said that Chinese remigrants' understandings of Chineseness were still very much conflated with primary ascribed characteristics, even after their relocation to China. However, it was also found that remigrants were not willing to be bound by the same primordialist definitions of Chineseness they had come up with.

7.3. Post-migration ethnic identities

Largely based on Tsuda's work (2009a; 2009b) and on the studies stemming from his edited anthology (e.g. Yamashiro, 2011; Hong et al., 2012; Varjonen et al., 2013; Barwick, 2016), this section looks at some of the different types of ethnic identities that Chinese remigrants developed as a result of their socio-cultural integration process. Two main categories emerged from the analysis of the interviews conducted. While some "returnees" developed nation-state-based identities, either reinforcing their Chineseness or Westernness, some others developed transnational or de-territorialized identities, taking on diasporic or cosmopolitan identities.

7.3.1. Nation-state-based identities

After remigrating to the ancestral homeland, a number of respondents developed an identity rooted in ideas of nation-states, ethnicity, and culture. In the first case, some of the migrants interviewed reinforced their affinities to China, sometimes at the expense of their emotional attachments to their country before migration. Conversely, in the second case, other migrants have reinforced their allegiance to their country of emigration, often at the expense of their appreciation for their ancestral homeland and their local peers. In all, their integration experiences forged these new ethno-cultural identities, developed following the socio-cultural encounters between Chinese remigrants and their local co-ethnics. Traditionally nation-bound, identities and identification, with similar ethnicity and culture being the two main differentiators demarcating the boundary for respondents to reinforce the other side.

Reinforcement of Chineseness

The literature reports few instances where, after relocating to their ancestral country, ethnic remigrants begin appropriating the local cultural norms, strengthening their attachment to the country and its people, even though that implies rejecting the norms by which they have been socialized to during their youth growing up in the West before remigrating. Although these cases are rarely found in existing scholarship, a few authors have observed them in their studies on ethnic "return" migration to Italy (Wessendorf, 2008), to Finland (Hedberg, 2009), or to South Korea (Hong et al., 2012). In the latter study on *Chosŏnjok* migrant brides from China in South Korea for example, the authors observed that some of the interviewees that had an overall positive experience in the ancestral homeland would reinforce emotional attachments and rootedness to South Korea, their parental land. At the same time, as they compared their newfound happiness and comfortable lives in South Korea, they gradually rejected their lives in China.

With regards to Chinese ethnic remigrants, even though a number of respondents claimed to have strengthened their Chinese ethnic identity and attachments to the homeland, it did not systematically occur at the expense of their expressed attachments

to their native homeland (see [Section 7.3.2.](#) below), and it was rather rare to encounter categorical cases. In line with the existing cases paucity, the analysis of the interviews conducted among the respondents only revealed one instance of a second-generation Western-born remigrant reinforcing their Chineseness at the expense of their foreignness –or Westernness.

Born in Beijing, INT46's family immigrated to the United States when she was just a few months old. Seven years ago, INT46 found a job in a publishing house in Beijing, and has been living and working there ever since. Accustomed to the Beijing rhythm of life, she feels impatient whenever she visits her family who chose to stay in America, and experiences a "reverse culture shock" every single time (see Presbitero, 2016). Praising how much more advanced many aspects of life in China are compared to life in the United States, she concludes:

"Technology is much better incorporated in people's daily lives here and it is so much more convenient. Not only for shopping, here you can get pretty much anything at a good price, pretty much anywhere, at any moment, and quick. You don't have to drive to go to places, everything is right there".

Having return migrated to China in her early twenties, not only did she developed into an independent adult in Beijing, she also believes that she became part and parcel of the new society she lives in. In the process of acculturating to Chinese societal and cultural norms, INT46 not only adapted her ways for communicating (verbally, body language and other tacit rules), she also adapted her models of behaving and ways of thinking. This ultimately led to the weakening of her social circles in the U.S. Having more difficulties communicating with Americans, she expresses overall feelings of uneasiness whenever she visited her parents:

"When I'm in the U.S., I only stay with my family. Nobody knows that I'm in there. [...] and when I say that I prefer Beijing over California, I get some rude comments too, maybe because Americans are so wary of China, I always feel like I have to battle for China, it gets tiring."

Furthermore, when in Beijing, local coethnics referring to her as a "Chinese" also further challenged her claims to be "American". Indeed, when she had just moved to Beijing in

2008, the financial crisis had generated a heavy toll worldwide, with the U.S. markets being on the frontline. Hoping to avoid “foreseeable misfortune [sic.]”, INT46 thus decided to seek better opportunities in the ancestral homeland. Noticing the parallel with her parents’ decision to immigrate to America to escape misery in China and find a better life in the U.S., she realized:

“This way, the circle is complete. They left, and I came back. [...] It’s because back in the days⁷, the U.S. were ‘all that’, you know [sic.], but now, it’s the other way around, it’s all about China.”

INT46 further added that she noticed how the people whom she came across in China, were “very conscious of the tables turning”, which parallels INT44’s above testimony, to a lesser extent. This was reinforced by the fact that when she relocated to Beijing after the summer, the city was still living in the euphoria of the success of the Olympic Games that had just taken place. Therefore, China’s economic performance as well as the success of the Olympic Games at the time both strengthened her pride in China’s achievements, which facilitated her identification with the parental land. While upon arrival, she used to unthinkingly tell her local coethnics that she was “American⁸”, she now grew accustomed to referring to herself as a “Beijinger who grew up in America⁹”. Indeed, local coethnics would often challenge her claims of being American because of her Chinese ethnic appearance. What largely contributed to these responses were her flawless and accent-free Mandarin, her good understanding of China’s cultural codes, as well as predominantly Chinese social circles in which she is now firmly anchored. Very well integrated economically, socially and culturally in China and in Chinese society, INT46 developed a strong emotional attachment to Beijing and now thinks of the city as her home. In contrast, she calls the times when she visits her parents in America “moments when [she is] home, away from home” instead.

Nevertheless, when discussing future plans to stay in China, and whether she considered applying for Chinese citizenship, INT46 expressed having reserves with regards to these

⁷ Four decades ago, when her parents immigrated to the United States.

⁸ “我是美国人 / wo shi meiguo ren”, “I am American” (INT46).

⁹ “我是北京人但是我在美国长大 / wo shi beijing ren dan shi zai mei guo zhang da” , “I’m from Beijing (a Beijinger), but I grew up in America” (INT46).

issues. And although she does plan to stay in Beijing indefinitely, she is aware of how difficult it is to apply for Chinese citizenship, but more importantly, she is not ready to give up on the freedom of movement that the American passport allows her, and the sense of security it gives her:

“If anything happens here, I still have a place to go back to. It wouldn’t be wise to switch to a Chinese passport. [...] And it’s not like a foreign passport really deprives you of anything necessary to live comfortably here either, I’ve been more than okay so far.”

In all instances, the idea of applying for Chinese citizenship (which therefore would have them automatically forsake their other nationality, since China does not acknowledge dual citizenship) was never considered simply because it was a default choice driven by reason. Indeed, not only INT46, but for all respondents, ethnonational identity and citizenship were separated by pragmatism: their foreign passport was far too valuable to forsake for a Chinese passport, as it would be needed to travel more easily to most countries, but most essentially in case they needed to visit their family who stayed in their birth country. Therefore, even though INT46’s post-migration identity has shifted as she now strongly identifies to China more than to America, she remains a little hesitant when it comes to fully commit to the country. She is, however, looking into the permanent residency application, though she thinks it is still too early for her application to go through successfully. Nonetheless, she keeps a close eye on new alternatives, such as the then-recent *Huayi* Card announcement, which is meant to function as an identity card for foreign nationals of Chinese descent (*waiji huaren*). As mentioned above, INT46’s example is rare, and no other respondents reinforced their Chineseness at the price of their Westernness.

Reinforcement of foreignness¹⁰

Oppositely, several respondents expressed having reinforced their Western identity –or foreignness– at the expense of their ethnic identity as those interviewed remigrants reject their Chineseness. Usually, this would be the result of damaging relational experiences in the ancestral homeland, weak socio-cultural integration with the host society, or negative impressions subsequent to encounters with local coethnics.

Existing studies demonstrated that in most instances, in response to socio-economic and ethnic marginalization in the parental homeland, ethnic “return” migrants reinforce their nationalist attachments to their country of emigration, or more generally to the country they grew up in (Tsuda, 2009a:334-5). Many Chinese ethnic remigrants interviewed expressed being in similar circumstances as well, with the exception of economic struggles which dominates the literature. Indeed, Western-born second-generation ethnic “returnees” tend to be highly-educated, highly-skilled migrants economically comfortable when living in China. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, overwhelming socio-cultural dissimilarities hindered many respondents’ socio-cultural integration. Repeated wrong impressions resulted in negative experiences, and eventually triggered a more or less active identity questioning. Therefore, as explained in the previous section, based on primordialist understandings of Chinese identity and what it infers to be Chinese, several respondents grew more increasingly aware of their own perceptions of Chineseness and what it entails to be Chinese, realizing that their former understandings constructed in the West, socialized in their families, are mismatched with the common understanding in China (INT20, INT22; INT24; INT26; INT43; INT28; INT29; INT39).

INT29, for example, is a French-Chinese engineer living and working in Shanghai. Although she first stayed in Beijing for a year to polish her Chinese language skills, she then moved southward to work in a large international firm that employs both foreign

¹⁰ Here, “foreignness”, “Westernness” or “foreign identity”, “Western identity” are used to simplify writing, as opposed to “Chineseness” and “Chinese identity”. In fact, it refers to the “reinforcement of attachments to [country of emigration]”, which is specified only in examples.

and local personnel. When discussing questions of identity, INT29 firmly stressed that after living in China for three years, she now strongly and unmistakably identifies to France and French culture more than to China's. To be sure, INT29 shared that when she was in France, whether it be with her French or Chinese friends¹¹, she would call herself Chinese, and identify more strongly with Chinese culture. When people asked, she would proudly reply that she was "Chinese who just happened to be born in France". At the time of the interview however, her introspection revealed the opposite as INT29 seemed to have developed some bitterness and resentment towards her local coethnics. Having become very critical of her Chinese peers, INT29 added:

"I'm really starting to hate the *mentality* here. [...] I hate to admit it, but most of the time, I make sure that people know that I'm *not* Chinese, that I'm not from here, [...] *so they shouldn't expect anything from me just because I look Chinese*. [...] There were times I even pretended not to understand what locals were telling me so that they wouldn't think I'm Chinese."

INT29 now describes herself as a "French who just happens to be of Chinese descent". Her shift in ways of thinking and in behavior, as well as her attempt to distance herself from her ethnic roots and people resulted from an accumulated number of negative encounters with local Chinese people, which damaged her perceptions of Chinese cultural standards as well as the people who put her against such norms, simply for being of Chinese ancestry herself. Over the years, INT29 shared having received passive-aggressive crude comments from strangers and relatives regarding her lack of literacy in Chinese language or culture, to more offending sneering and criticism, INT29 would thus emphasize on her being a foreigner, or simply "not Chinese" when expressing disappointment nay grudge towards her Chinese peers. Trying to draw a line between herself and her local coethnics, she shared that for instance, on multiple occasions, soon after when she arrived in China, she was told off for failing to be "a real Chinese": her Mandarin never seemed to be good enough however hard she worked on her pronunciation, her style of dress always too revealing, or her professional ambitions too high for a woman. INT29 also faced situations at work where different working cultures and ways to assume responsibility for mistakes almost cost her her employment.

¹¹ In this case, "French friends" refers to non-Chinese ethnic frequentations, and "Chinese friends" refers to other second generation Chinese individuals, born and raised in France.

Furthermore, when she walked around with her Arabic-French fiancé, she regularly caught strangers making racist comments aimed at her partner, and other insults geared at her for being in an intimate relationship with an Arabic man. Upset, she added:

“I know very well that not all Chinese people are like that, but that’s what I went through, and that was enough for me. [...] At my worst point, I even thought that if THAT is what means to be Chinese [...], *then I don’t want to be Chinese*, and I don’t want people to mistaken me as one of them¹². *I’m French*, and there’s no doubt about it. *It’s not because I look Chinese that I should identify as one either* [emphasis added].”

INT29’s negative experiences thus led her to reject her Chineseness and those whom she associated her difficult times in China with –Chinese people. She responded by reinforcing her foreign identity, or Frenchness, in a way to prove herself amidst adverse circumstances (Verkuyten, 2016). In this respect, INT29 reinforcing her French identity can be said to a “reactionary identity” (Hong et al., 2012:38, discussed further). Moreover, calling herself French was not only her way to distinguish herself from “the Chinese mass [sic.]”, INT29 also realized that her way of thinking -or “mentality”- had been socialized to French cultural norms to a much greater extent than she had thought or even acknowledged before she returned¹³ to China. The cultural gaps in the ways of thinking and models of behaving between France and China were too big a hurdle for her to overcome, which is why she chose to fall back on what she was most familiar with –Frenchness:

“I stopped being stubborn and finally realized that I’m French. So French. [...] Somehow we look the same here but our *mentalities* are so different that the ‘end product’ is not even comparable. [...] The *culture* and the *mentality* are too different here, and I thought that was MY culture. [...] My entire life I said that I was Chinese, and that Chinese culture was my culture but after coming I just realize that I’m French. [...] So I don’t have to try so hard to be rejected by them [Chinese people] in the end. I never had to try hard in France, and I’ve never felt so insulted before I came here.”

¹² Here, INT29 was referring to “local Chinese”.

¹³ INT29 was born in Wenzhou, China, but her parents immigrated to France when she was a toddler, hence the absence of quotation marks.

Here, INT29's words highlight the parallel between ethnic similarity and cultural differences triggering identity questioning. INT29's testimony is also in line with Wessendorf's observations regarding second generation who tend to refer back to issues about mentality and culture when emphasizing their feelings of disconnection from their local coethnics due to diverging sets of cultural practices and values (Wessendorf, 2008:8). While mentality generally refers to the distinctive ways of thinking of a group or an individual, culture broadly refers to a set of values, norms, and social behavior of a society or a group pertaining to this society. However, Vermeulen (2000) further differentiates between "culture as a way of life", and "culture as a lifestyle". On the one hand, "culture as a way of life" is similar to concept of acculturation (see [Section 3.2.1](#)), and refers to the value system and practices that a person learns and internalizes as they grow up in a socio-cultural context. In this respect, although INT29 thought she had internalized Chinese values when she grew up in France, she actually internalized French values predominantly, which she only realized after remigrating to China, and coming in contact with Chinese people. On the other hand, "culture as a lifestyle" relates more to the notion of ethnicity, and ties altogether the sense of belonging with common ancestry, which can be used as conscious ways to differentiate one ethnic group from another (Ibid.). In this regard, INT29 outgrows this primordialist understanding as her sense of belonging that used to be tied to her ethnic heritage, shifts over to her foreign cultural baggage acquired when she was socialized growing up in France.

Even though INT29 may seem to be an isolated example of Western-born Chinese ethnic "return" migrant reinforcing foreign identity at the expense of Chineseness, her experiences were in fact shared by a number of other interviewees (INT08; INT14; INT17; INT26; INT27; INT28), though with varying circumstances. For instance, INT08, an Australian-Chinese student in Beijing, has been living in China for two years, and clearly expressed that after he moved to China, he developed strong feelings of nostalgia for Australia. Unable to find anchorage in Chinese society due to his inability to connect with his local coethnics, he shares his disappointment after "returning" to the country he used to romanticize as "home" (see also Kim (2009)):

"I'm not even sure whether it really is worth coming to China to study and work. [...] I don't feel welcomed here, [...] I feel like just any other foreigner out there, it's kind of *disappointing* in a way since *I thought I'd finally be home when I came here*, but I was negated so often that I kind of gave up [...]. Now I miss my real home like I never did before, and I just want to finish my assignment here and go back."

INT08's lack of embeddedness increased his feelings of isolation, which in turn made him more aware of the cultural differences with the local population. A few other interviewees also expressed developing stronger emotional attachments to their natal homeland in the West after they failed establishing strong ties among their local counterparts. Instead, they repeatedly faced upsetting encounters that impacted their socio-cultural experiences in China, as well as their appreciation for the ancestral homeland. Moreover, the realization of "insurmountable cultural differences" (INT20) further made them aware that they were in fact not as Chinese as they thought they were prior to relocating to China, but that they had romanticized their ancestral homeland. Furthermore, constant ethnic marginalization based on primordialist understandings of Chineseness –and being told off for being "Westernized" while not being "real Westerners" (INT29), some ethnic remigrants responded by rejecting their Chineseness, and embrace their native homeland instead. As such, similarly to Tsuda's case on Brazilian *nikkeijin* remigrants in Japan who would for example dance the samba during festivals in Japan while they never did so in Brazil (Tsuda, 2004; 2009c); Chinese ethnic remigrants would purposefully perform foreignness by increasing transnational behaviors and make a point to distinguish themselves from their local coethnics by speaking their foreign language in public (INT20; INT26; INT27; INT29), participate in events tailored for foreigners in embassies and consulates (INT27; INT28; INT29), or take part in cultural events to publicize their native country. For instance, INT25 joined the UFE¹⁴ in Shanghai and organizes events tailored for French people, while in France, he used to organize events tailored for Asians¹⁵ in Paris. It can therefore be said that remigrants whose consciousness as members of diaspora based on ancestry shifted to stricter ethno-cultural identifications because of cultural differences.

Reactionary identity

¹⁴ UFE – Union des Français de l'Étranger (Association of Overseas French Citizens).

¹⁵ These parties and social events were mostly targeted at second generation Asians.

INT29 and INT08's cases above are examples of ethnic "return" migrants developing a reactionary identity (Hong et al., 2012:38) *in response* to negative experiences in the ancestral homeland, and disappointment in their encounters with their local coethnics. Chinese ethnic returnees' response is similar to Wessendorf's remarks on second generation Italian-Swiss who reacted to negative experiences of social exclusion and discrimination found in schools, and who developed a counter-position against the majority society. In her study, respondents who underwent negative experiences thus expressed having reified Italianness against the Swiss majority (Wessendorf, 2008:11). This process is also called "reactive ethnicity" in earlier studies in the North American context (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001).

Among the respondents who took on reactionary identities are those who fell back on their native country, not because they identify with it, but rather by default, because they rejected their own Chineseness, Chinese people, or China altogether. In order to distinguish themselves from their local counterparts, they would thus reassert their foreignness. For instance, INT10, a restaurant owner in Beijing who has been living in China for six years, explains that growing up in Spain, her ways of interacting with others was considerably different from the ways Chinese people communicate with one another, which resulted in multiple misunderstandings and severe heated arguments with her local peers. Now, INT10 keeps her relations with Chinese people purely professional, stays within the vicinity of her neighborhood, and only frequents her few close friends –other Chinese ethnic "returnees". When asked whether she felt Chinese or Spanish (or both, or none), she replied:

"Oh, I'm not Chinese! No, no, no, no! I just have yellow skin and I speak Cantonese with my parents, but that's it! [...] *Then* I'm Spanish? I don't want to say that I'm not Spanish, because everything that I am is Spanish, only my skin color isn't. [...] But growing up outside of Madrid, at the time, it was very difficult to be Chinese¹⁶, I suffered a lot there too. [...] I don't know. *But I don't feel Chinese for sure! I'll just say I'm Spanish, but that's because I only know Spain and Spanish culture.*"

¹⁶ INT10 means that although the Chinese diaspora has now settled well in Madrid, in the early 1980s, there were much less Chinese families living in the outskirts of Madrid (as opposed to the city center) and she frequently experienced racism "as the only Chinese kid at school [sic.]" for most of her education.

Similarly, INT58 expressed:

“Well, yes, I’m French because I don’t feel Chinese here. But well. I’m not really French. I just know that I’m a foreigner. I don’t really feel super French [sic.], but *what else can I be otherwise?*”

INT10 and INT58’s testimonies thus show that Westernness (here respectively, Spanishness and Frenchness) were reactionary identities adopted by default, as though their identities had to be linked to nation-states.

Factors reinforcing Western identity

Western-born second generation overseas Chinese ethnic remigrants who reinforced their foreignness did so because of a number of factors both in China and in their native country. Similarly to Korean-American ethnic “returnees” in South Korea (Kim, 2009), not only did Chinese ethnic remigrants become aware that they were cultural foreigners who did not pertain to their ancestral homeland, they also developed negative impressions of the country because of their negative socio-cultural integration in the host society, caused by unexpected and overwhelming cultural distance. Moreover, some Chinese ethnic remigrants reinforced their foreignness at the expense of their Chineseness due to negative experiences with their local coethnics who marginalized them ethnically and put them against standards befitting to local Chinese understanding of Chineseness. This stemmed from a strict primordialist idea of Chinese identity characterized not only by shared racial ancestry, but also comprehensive linguistic and cultural proficiency and practice, as well as allegiance to China (Kibria, 2002; Skrentny et al., 2009). Failing to do so occasionally resulted in criticism from their peers, which, depending on the “returnee’s” receptivity and sensitivity, would produce a negative response and rejection of Chineseness altogether.

On the other hand, nostalgia for the native homeland was materialized through transnational ways of living reproduced in China at home or at the office. This includes the use of decorative items and habits reminding the familiarity of the native country (Forero and Smith, 2010): national flags hanging out the windows, sticker flags on the

laptop, miniature replicas of the country's most famous landmarks to decorate the office desk, etc. Bruneau refers to this reactionary behavior when discussing diasporic family homes, typical diasporic micro-territories where objects representing memories and familiarity of a prior cultural context are placed in a new environment to reproduce the familiarity of home away from home (Bruneau, 2004:49). Time spent with other co-nationals would also increase, and social circles gradually overtaken by them. Places of meetings and gatherings would also be chosen specifically to enjoy and feed the nostalgia for the native homeland –for example, a themed café serving a specific dish that reminds the remigrant memories of 'home'. Moreover, family ties in the West enhance feelings of home being where their family is¹⁷. Given their stage in the life course and with ageing parents to care for, many remigrants contemplated settling down and purchase a housing in the West, back in their native homeland. This was reinforced by the near impossibility for the majority to access the exorbitant housing market in Beijing or Shanghai. These thus contributed to many Chinese remigrants to consider re-returning to their native country, and terminate their "China experience" after their assignments. As such, prospective re-returns and future plans to settle down contributed to curb remigrants' commitments in the ancestral homeland, and to reinforce their foreign identity.

7.3.2. De-territorialized and transnational identities

In comparison, after relocating to the ancestral homeland, many more Western-born second-generation ethnic remigrants shared having developed new forms of self-awareness with regards to their ethnic identity and attachments to both the native and ancestral homelands. The majority of the respondents expressed taking on in-between identities wherein remigrants developed a diasporic or a cosmopolitan identity.

Diasporic identity

According to Tsuda, diasporic identities stem from ethnic "return" migrants' reluctance to identify with either the natal homeland or the ancestral homeland (Tsuda, 2009a:337).

¹⁷ Although when asked where they thought 'home' was, most respondents answered that in view of their mobile lifestyle, 'home is where [their] family [was]'.

Tsuda takes the example of Peruvian *nikkeijin* ethnic remigrants in Japan, whose negative experiences in the ancestral homeland combined with the low status and negative perception of Peru in the global hierarchy of nations altogether (see Tsuda, 2001; 2004; and Takenaka, 2009), made them unwilling to identify to either Japan or Peru, which is why they developed diasporic identities, a state of de-territorialized in-betweenness where they showed aversion to the association to either of the nations. Following Tsuda's concept, Hong later stated that among the *Chosonjok* migrant brides she interviewed, those who developed diasporic identities tended to lead the most unsuccessful lives working long hours shifts in degrading manual jobs, and had pessimistic attitudes about their life in South Korea (Hong et al., 2012: 42).

However, in the case of Chinese ethnic remigrants, the circumstances differ insofar as their economic situation is far more stable and advantageous than the groups studied in the works cited above. Chinese ethnic remigrants living and working in Beijing and Shanghai tend to hold highly-skilled job positions with a high salary. Moreover, growing up in Western developed countries, they benefit from a higher position with regards to the global hierarchy of nations, and local Chinese people's perception of their native country is likely to be more positive than ethnic "returnees" from less developed nations. It is argued that in the eyes of the local population, ethnic remigrants are put against their emigration country's reputation and stereotypes in the global hierarchy of nations. Migrants from developed countries thus benefit from a better image linked to wealth and success while on the other hand, migrants from less developed countries are penalized by their country's image, and suffer from the stigmas of poverty and other negative stereotypes that may ensue (Tsuda, 2001; 2004; 2009c). In this respect, Western-born second-generation Chinese ethnic remigrants are in favorable position, and do not follow the standards in the existing literature. Therefore, among the Chinese ethnic "returnees" interviewed in Beijing and Shanghai, a number of respondents developed diasporic identities (INT01; INT12; INT22; INT39; INT56), though with different characteristics. These respondents showed similar inability or reluctance to identify with China due to too large a cultural gap which, as discussed in previous chapters was caused by and/or resulted in a lack of social anchoring with local coethnics and various other negative encounters that impacted on their appreciation of the ancestral homeland. In parallel, having grown up as visible racial minorities in the West and been

subject to various unfair treatments nay discriminations and racism, many were unwilling to fully identify with the native country.

If based on previous studies, the standard diasporic discourse tends to include testimonies expressing lostness, homelessness and lack of belonging¹⁸ with pessimistic undertones (Hong et al., 2012: 42), Chinese ethnic “returnees” economic comfort and higher statuses in China balanced out the pessimism remigrants developing diasporic identities tend to bring forth. First, INT01, for example, is Canadian-Chinese living in Beijing, working as an English teacher. INT01 expressed how growing up in Québec, she always felt uncomfortable being an ethnic minority, and thought her place was somewhere else. When in Québec, she knew she would eventually leave for China, so she viewed Canada like a temporary place to live in (until she became an adult), and thus could not fully anchor herself and call Canada home, a place where she belongs. INT01 expressed discomfort for feeling trapped in-between places after she started living in China, because unexpected cultural differences made her once again, unable to be part of the majority. She shares her disappointment of being caught in between spaces she cannot fully embrace as her own:

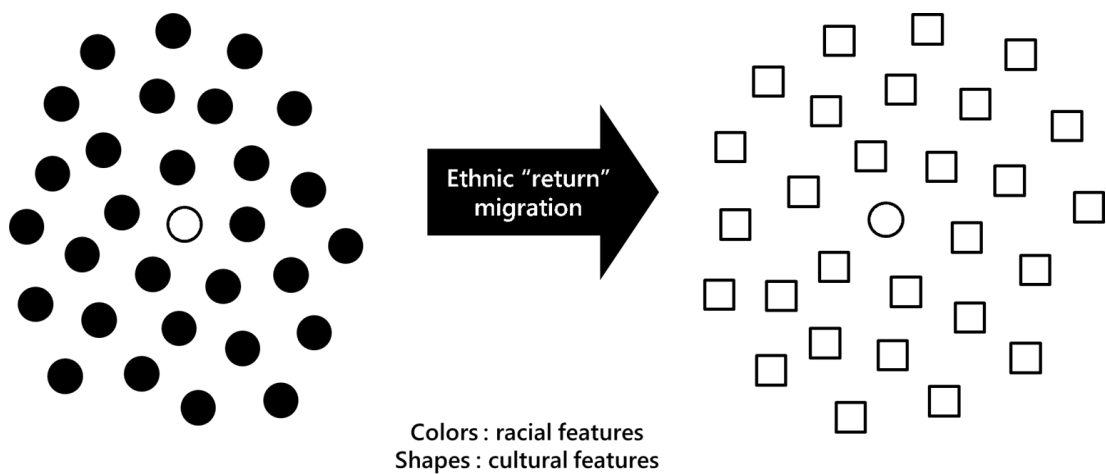
“I always knew that I was going to live in China and I always thought that this was the place I belonged to. But now that I’m here, I’m not so sure anymore. [...] It’s been years, my family is here and yet, I still don’t feel like my place is here. [...] I used to feel like an outsider in Québec, and I kind of had high hopes for China, for my entire life! But now I feel like an outsider here too.”

INT01’s testimony above reveals that prior to relocating to China, she already had some form of expectations and hopes of ethnic belonging to the ancestral homeland. As a diasporic remigrant with anticipation of belonging, social exclusion and ethnic rejection was thus unexpected, which disrupted her previous imaginary and romanticized “return” (see also Kim, 2009). Tsuda refers to this phenomenon as ethnic remigrants becoming “culturally alienated immigrant minorities who are strangers in their ethnic homeland” (Tsuda, 2009a:329). For most, even though in the West, prior remigrating, they were

¹⁸ Typically: “I do not know who I really am” / “I feel like I belong nowhere” / “People like us can’t call anywhere home”

minorities because of racial differences, after remigrating to China, they once again become minorities, this time because of their cultural differences with the host majority (Figure 1 below). As such, diasporic “return” cannot be regarded as a form of ethnic un-mixing, consolidation, or regrouping (Clifford, 1994; Brubaker, 1998; Van Hear, 1998). On the contrary, it generates new subgroups that increasingly grow aware of the cultural heterogeneity among people of shared ancestry.

Figure 1: From racial foreignness and cultural similarity in the native homeland to cultural foreignness and racial similarity in the ancestral homeland



Secondly, INT12, is a French-Chinese restaurant owner in a highly frequented touristy neighborhood in Shanghai. Being a case of paradoxical integration (Verkuyten, 2016, see [Section 6.5.](#)), INT12 realized that she could identify with neither France nor China. When asked where she felt she belonged, she started a long monologue, trying to figure out whether she felt closer to China, or to France:

[First, about China being “home”]

“No, not really. I am Chinese, there’s no doubt about it. But I can’t really say that I identify with China. Or with Chinese people. Or even with Chinese culture [...]. I understand how things work here, and how people think, but I can’t fully adhere to it, I don’t feel Chinese. I really can’t say that I belong here.”

[Then, about France being “home” instead, after a long silence]

“No, that doesn’t sound right either. I think my way of thinking is more like French people, but not completely. I’m not really French. I have a French

passport though, so maybe yes, I'm French? But I don't really feel French. I never really felt like I belonged to France either, because... I'm Chinese you know."

In the end, INT12 chose neither country to identify with. Similarly to INT01, INT12 pondered the question of belonging exhaustively, and eventually concluded that she felt like she "belonged nowhere". The key difference here lies in the shift between their racial differences with the Western majority in the emigration country, and cultural differences with the new majority when they relocated to China. In both countries, the differences were considered to be too big a hurdle for them to fully call a place their home. Traditionally, studies have often implied that sense of belonging increased along with successful socio-economic integration in the host society (Gordon, 1964; Diaz, 1993; Alba and Nee, 2003; Collet, 2006). However, INT12 was very well integrated structurally, both in France and China, but because she could not completely connect with the majority of the society and claim that she, too, was "one of them" (a French, or a Chinese), she started detaching herself from the society, limiting the spaces of interactions to spaces she had under control: her home space, her family, her restaurant.

Hence, both INT01 and INT12 developed diasporic identities as a post-migration identity. On the one hand, INT01 was always aware of the question, and constantly sought after a place to call home, a place she would belong to. She shared that when in Canada, her Chinese phenotype and way of living the Chinese culture reproduced by her immigrant parents at home, were enough to vouch for her Chineseness, and made her believe strongly that she was Chinese, since she performed Chineseness on a regular basis. However, the reproduced cultural elements were not enough to prepare her for contemporary Chinese society and culture, so when INT01 finally relocated to the ancestral homeland, and despite finally being part of the ethnic majority, the cultural differences made her question her place of belonging. Unable to identify with Canada or with China, INT01 thus took on a diasporic identity, and feels as though she belonged nowhere. On the other hand, INT12 never actively thought about questions of identity before, and only realized during the interview that she could not identify to either country, respectively because of her ethnic difference with the majority in France and cultural mismatches with the majority in China. As a result, INT12 also developed a diasporic identity, neither identifying to her ancestral country or to her country of

emigration, but feels stuck in-between instead. These testimonies were shared by other respondents who took on diasporic identities, and who could not identify to either place of emigration and immigration (INT04; INT05; INT09; INT13; INT22; INT39; INT56).

Unlike the existing statements in the literature, Chinese ethnic remigrants taking on diasporic identities does not necessarily imply that they have had negative experiences in the ancestral homeland, or that they are leading unsuccessful lives, having pessimistic attitudes about their lives in China (Hong et al., 2012). On the contrary, as mentioned above, Chinese ethnic remigrants tend to be economically successful in China.

New spaces of belonging and de-territorialized identities

To cope with the discomfort of “feeling like belonging nowhere” (INT22), individuals who took on diasporic identities shared having to rely on other spaces to call home, even though such spaces are no longer nation-bound or even restricted to physical or geographical spaces. Characteristic of highly-mobile individuals, Chinese ethnic “return” migrants with diasporic identities thus developed ties of belonging in non-national transient spaces and among communities they are frequenting instead (see also Calhoun, 2003; De Bree, 2007; Butcher, 2010b; Colic-Peisker, 2010). As such, they gradually build new spaces to call home where they “currently are”. For instance, INT56, a British-Chinese journalist and writer working in Beijing, is married to a Chinese wife. During the interview, he realized that without even noticing it, he had taken on a diasporic identity. Despite the important cultural gaps that make him unable to fully identify with China, he shared:

“I am here now, so I’ll call it my home, I have to make it my home, even if it still doesn’t feel... right. But my wife is here, my job is here, my life is here now. [...] I could be at home anywhere, I just have to build it. Even in China. It’s not really because I’m Chinese, it’s just because I’m here now.”

While in the West, some ethnic returnees found it “unnatural” (INT39) to say they belonged to their native homeland, again because of racial differences with the majority, the fact that their family (parents, mostly) lived in the West enable them to call home the

place their family was. Similarly, in China, despite not identifying with other Chinese or with the ancestral homeland, the routinely daily life, and the social groups within which they have anchored themselves into, have all become their new transient home. The comfort found in the familiarity of their surroundings and their new routines in China made them able to root themselves in the ancestral homeland, while feeling detached, and not fully associating with it. Home and belonging thus gradually shifts to “familiarity” and “comfort”.

INT22, is a Chinese-Canadian who has been living and working in Beijing for a few years. INT22 also acknowledges that she is culturally more Canadian, but cannot deny that she is ethnically Chinese –her ancestry shows in her physical traits. However, being a racial minority in Canada and a cultural minority in China, she cannot identify to either and feels like she belongs nowhere and has thus developed new spaces of belonging to keep her “sane [sic.]” and anchored. Her church community and friends, as well as her friends and colleagues at work, have now become the people and spaces she finds she belongs to. INT22’s example hence shows that “home” and “place of belonging” in the context of international migration are no longer nation-bound notions. Instead, they gradually evolve into more fluid notions to adapt to the transient lifestyle of ethnic remigrants taking on diasporic identities after they relocated to China (discussed further below in [Section 7.4.](#)). This was also shared, to some extent, by INT40, who identified far more to the international communities of expatriates and diplomats who are used to living transiently, rather than binding herself to a country in particular. It can therefore be said that individuals taking on diasporic identities develop in fact a stronger diasporic awareness as members of the Chinese diasporic community and to the *huayi* communities worldwide.

Cosmopolitan identity

According to the global hierarchy of nations (Tsuda, 2001; 2004; 2009b), ethnic “returnees” from developed countries are more likely to experience a better “homecoming” in the ancestral homeland compared to their counterparts from less developed countries, due to the images and stereotypes, both positive and negative,

that their respective countries are known for abroad. Relatively, these more positive experiences are argued to increase the remigrants' identification with the parental homeland, as well as generate an overall more ethnically inclusive transnational awareness for them as members of a diasporic community, which result can be referred to as cosmopolitan identity. Indeed, comparatively, Western-born Chinese remigrants did seem to have a more positive reception than their counterparts from Southeast Asian countries for instance, as shared by multiple respondents, and based on observations during fieldwork (data acquired through observation). INT55, for example, is a Chinese-American working in Beijing. In his circle of friends, he counts a few other second-generation Chinese ethnic remigrants from different emigration countries – some from Western countries, and others from less developed ones. INT55 noticed that compared to his counterparts from Vietnam, Malaysia, and Venezuela, local coethnics tended to be kinder, and more curious about him and about America, and often looked down on his friends instead. Overall very satisfied with his life in China and with the quality of his interactions with Chinese people, he perceived that his friends would show more reserve in comparison, and be more critical towards the ethnic homeland and local coethnics. Hong et al. also suggest that cosmopolitan identities tend to be taken on by ethnic "returnees" with high socio-economic status and educational background in both countries (Hong et al., 2012:37), which initially is one of the characteristics that define Western-born second-generation overseas Chinese ethnic remigrants who for the most, relocated to China because of economic incentives, and possibilities to hold a position with higher status.

INT55 is one of the many Western-born second-generation Chinese ethnic "returnees" who developed a post-migration transnational identity as a result of an overall positive socio-cultural integration experience in China. Respondents who took on cosmopolitan identities felt both like they belonged to their native homeland in the West and to China, without necessarily being bound by either (INT03; INT32; INT41; INT42; INT48; INT57). Remigrants with cosmopolitan identities were also more likely to hold more positive discourses regarding their overall socio-cultural integration experiences in China, and would embrace both their Chineseness and Westernness and be more optimistic about their duality. INT48, a Swedish-Chinese in Beijing, explains how his "double heritage" –Chineseness he *inherited* from his parents, and Swedishness, which

he *acquired* and constructed growing up in Sweden— represented an asset his entire life, but revealed to be his trump card after he remigrated to China for work. Very confident about his duality, INT48 both identifies with China and Sweden, and embraces both cultures. His discourse is as follows:

“China is my motherland, and Sweden is my fatherland. Having two... parentlands is like having a double heritage, and I think it’s a great advantage. I basically have twice as much capital as others, I can tap into these two incredible resources, and I’m naturally bicultural and bilingual.”

INT48’s view is commonly shared by remigrants who developed cosmopolitan identities (INT17; INT35; INT37; INT41; INT52; INT55), which points out to Barwick’s study on second-generation Turkish-Germans’ transnational ways of being and belonging across the life course (Barwick, 2016). And while a number of them somehow considered their relocation to China as a homecoming (INT35; INT40; INT41; INT47; INT52; INT55; INT57), some others were delighted by the eye-opening discoveries made during their remigration journey in the ethnic homeland. INT03, for example, another Swedish-Chinese ethnic “returnee” in Beijing, shared that after spending more time with Chinese people, developing friendships with coethnics brought up in Asia, he realized that he was “much more Swedish” than he had previously thought, but “never felt as comfortable being surrounded by other Chinese people” nevertheless. Now well-anchored in China and with more hindsight since his arrival, he realizes:

“In Sweden, I was just a Chinese guy behaving like a Swedish guy. Here I can be me, I don’t feel like I have to pretend to be part of a group. [...] I feel so much more Swedish now, but I behave more like a Chinese guy. [...] *Sweden is my home but I think I belong to China.*”

INT48 and INT03 hint at another characteristic Chinese ethnic remigrants with cosmopolitan identities tend to share: they lead transnational lifestyles and are active practitioners of code-switching as they take advantage of their duality to freely juggle between their two identities. Interviews with respondents with cosmopolitan identities revealed that they had more than a single, linear identity, and strategic code-switching not only facilitated their socio-cultural integration in the ethnic homeland, it also contributed to their appreciation for the homeland. This is due to the fluidity and

dynamism of identities, but mostly because their being comfortable with both their Chineseness and Westernness.

Hyphenated identities and hybridity

Overall, diasporic and cosmopolitan identities also relate to Verkuyten's concept of hyphenated identities, which suggest that in spite of the literature traditionally making clear distinctions between in and out groups, in reality, in-between identities with blurred boundaries are more accurate descriptions of the processes of social identity construction, and even more so in the context of migration (Verkuyten, 2005:149-153). INT01 for example, shows that ethnicity is not static, but is an identity in constant negotiation, and that Chinese ethnic remigrants living transnational lives in the ancestral homeland may be challenged to rethink their identities. She shared:

"Before coming to China I've always called myself Chinese because I've always strongly felt Chinese. But now that I'm here [in China], I don't feel Chinese at all. I *know* I am Chinese, but I never felt as Canadian. Calling myself either Chinese or Canadian feels like forsaking an entire part of myself so I like to call myself a Chinese-Canadian (or Canadian-Chinese) because in the end, I'm stuck in-between."

Finding it difficult to abandon one of her identities, INT01 here hints on the notion of hybridity, which rejects the idea of "homogeneous, uniformly defined identities and subscribes instead to notions of heterogeneity and multiple identities" (Verkuyten, 2005:149-181). INT01 refuses to deny either of her identities (Chinese or Canadian) and therefore copes with in-betweenness by resorting to hyphenating her identity as a Chinese-Canadian, or Canadian-Chinese. On the other hand, respondents who embraced nay instrumentalized their duality, naturally described themselves as being hyphenated-Chinese benefitting from their dual heritages (INT32; INT35; INT37; INT47; INT55). Selecting aspects from both cultural heritages, some Chinese ethnic remigrants syncretized their own identity. For instance, INT37, a Chinese-French engineer working in Beijing, shared that growing up with two cultural standards to learn from, he picked elements from both to form a new hybrid cultural standard that suited his lifestyle:

"I feel lucky to be both [Chinese and French], because I can pick what I believe is best from both cultures. [...] For example, I prefer Chinese people's way of thinking when it comes to family, but I much prefer French people's way of thinking when it comes to well-being in general. [...] It's all about choosing what's best for you from what you have [cultural heritage]."

INT37's opinion was shared by the majority of the respondents, and more particularly strongly by those who had taken on cosmopolitan identities (such as INT03; INT32; INT47; INT48; INT55).

7.3.3. Summary

Although the existing literature on ethnic "return" migration suggests that socio-economic marginalization plays a major role in alienating remigrants, Chinese ethnic "returnees" characteristics (as highly-skilled, highly-educated individuals from the 'coveted developed West') allowed them a comfortable economic status. However, Chinese ethnic remigrants were not spared by social, cultural, and ethnic marginalization. A strong social anchoring in China, or the absence of it therefore influenced the experience in the ethnic homeland. Stemming from those experiences were new ethnic identities, and new anchor points for the remigrants to identify with. While some respondents reinforced their Chineseness or Westernness at the expense of the respective other, others took on hyphenated identities, which were de-territorialized diasporic identities, or more transnational cosmopolitan identities. Either way, remigrants' definitions of home and belonging were impacted by their newfound post-migration identities, as they started looking beyond nation-bound points of identification, but fall closer back to non-national transient communities instead. In all cases, ethnic identities are not linear, but more fluid in that they evolve based on the migrants' circumstances.

7.4. Fluid and circumstantial ethnic identities

Although it is argued that Chinese ethnic remigrants in the ancestral homeland have taken on new ethnic identities as a result of their socio-cultural integration experiences in China, it is nonetheless essential to specify that these identities are by no means final,

linear nor definite (Phinney, 2003). On the contrary, they are fluid and circumstantial, and are part of the remigrant's growing process in the life course instead (Jain, 2012). According to Phinney, "ethnic identity is a dynamic and fluid understanding of self and ethnic background, and in the process, it can be shaped and adapted as individuals grow more aware of their own ethnicity" (2003:63). Moreover, "feelings of being ethnic vary depending on the situation they are in, and the people they are with" (Phinney, 1990:510). Indeed, ethnic identity largely depends on circumstances, situations, and relations between, and within the *groups* that are socially categorized under those circumstances. Social groups are thus especially important in its construction process in addition to its flexible characteristic. Lastly, ethnicity is best defined as "a dynamic, constantly evolving property of both individual identity and group organization" (Nagel, 1994:2). Hence, depending on the social context, an identity may be brought forward and become more relevant and advantageous while the others may fall back into the background to reemerge timely (Verkuyten, 2005:53).

With regards to Chinese ethnic "return" migration, this comes into play when ethnic remigrants are faced with situations, people, and other events that may influence the ways in which they perceive themselves as Chinese, Western, none, or both, and also the way they present themselves in front of their peers surrounding them. Some ethnic "returnees" have thus shown to flexibly navigate between their multiple identities thanks to code-switching (as discussed above), and strategically switch from one identity to another, either by verbally stating it, or demonstrating their allegiance by supporting their peers. In this section, I look more closely at five different instances illustrating the fluidity of ethnic identity and the way it may be affected by (1) space, (2) place, (3) current events, (4) people, and (5) time.

7.4.1. Space (geography)

The analysis of the interviews revealed that depending on whether they are –physically– in the natal homeland or the ancestral homeland, many research participants were likely to have different ways to identify themselves compared to the majority around them. In most such cases, respondents expressed identifying more closely to China, as a Chinese person, or to Chinese culture before relocating to the parental homeland (INT01; INT02;

INT05; INT11; INT13; INT17; INT18; INT36; INT41; INT53; INT57). However, after they “return” migrated and accumulated firsthand experiences of China, or, as INT53 expressed, after they learn about “what the country, the people, and the culture *really* are, beyond all the wrong ideas [they] had before”, ethnic “return” migrants begin repositioning themselves, based on where they are. As it was illustrated in Figure 1 above, remigrants’ ethnic identity and attachments to their homelands may be affected as they shift from racial foreignness and cultural similarity in the West to cultural foreignness and racial similarity after they remigrated to China. Nevertheless, even though such a change impacts on the way remigrants view themselves, it does not necessarily do so linearly. INT13, an American-Chinese working in Beijing, shares how after he remigrated to China, he began identifying much more to American culture and to America in general, mostly due to sheer cultural gaps he experienced as he interacted more and more with local coethnics. Hence, when in China, INT13 calls himself American but specifies nonetheless:

“I’m American, there’s no doubt about it. But that’s here [China] only. In the U.S. I’m Chinese, oh-soo Chinese [sic.], [...] *it just depends on where I am.*”

Similarly, INT41’s case below also supports the idea that ethnic identity is fluid and circumstantial, even when it is being challenged by said circumstances, namely socio-cultural integration challenges within transnational ethnic remigration. INT41, French-Chinese working in Beijing is also married to a Chinese woman. Born in China, he immigrated to France as an infant and does not have a French forename, but only a Chinese forename and surname. Both proficient in French and Chinese language and culture, he still works on perfecting his Chinese skills by practicing Chinese slangs with his wife (see [Section 6.2.2](#)). In France, INT41 was always referred to as “the Chinese guy” by his peers because of his phenotype, which led him to call himself Chinese as well. However, INT41 shared that when in China, whenever he called himself “Chinese”, as he was used to in France, his local peers would point out his Frenchness because of cultural differences and ways of behaving that seemed to betray his Chinese authenticity (see INT32’s testimony above in [Section 7.2.1](#) and Tuan, 1999). As such, with his Chinese peers referred to him as “the French guy” instead resulting in INT41 calling himself “French” when in China.

In the same way that INT13 and INT41's identities were shaped by their environments, first because of racial differences with the majority in the West, and then because of cultural differences in China, INT16, an Italian-Chinese from Milan living in Beijing, expresses the reasons why in Italy, he calls himself Chinese, but in China, he tends to call himself Italian (emphases were added to highlight the ambivalence):

INT16: "In Milan, I'm always around Chinese people, and I behave very Chinese-ly [sic]. I say very proudly that *I'm Chinese*, because for sure, I'm not a *normal* Milanese."

Nathalie: "A *normal* Milanese?"

INT16: "I'm Chinese, I'm not White"

Nathalie: "What about here?"

INT16: "Here it's the opposite. I'm more with other foreigners [...] because it's not the same here. It's like we are too different, we think differently, we even speak differently... like my hands you see? *I'm Italian* and we speak like that all the time!"

On the one hand, INT41 is mostly being othered, as his racial difference is pointed out when in France, but his cultural differences stand out in China, which eventually made him act and think the way his peers identified him: as a Chinese in a country, as a French in another, both because his identity was considered to be lacking to fully belong to either of the in-groups (Staszak, 2009). On the other hand, even though INT16 views himself as a Chinese in Italy and Italian in China for the same reasons as INT41 (racial and cultural differences respectively in the West and in China), INT16 says it out of his own, and faces the dissimilarities without having people pointing them out for him first. INT41 and INT16's examples thus show that depending on the country they are in, ethnic "returnees" may adapt their identities and attachments to either the West or China. It can thus be said that ethno-cultural identifications are not developed on the basis of similarities with the host majority but on differences instead.

7.4.2. Place: public and private identities

The analysis also revealed other instances wherein following their relocation to China, ethnic "returnees" displayed fluidity in the way they juggled between identities,

depending on what Verkuyten calls “the concrete sites of everyday interaction where identities are flexibly managed and negotiated in relation to different people and groups” (Verkuyten, 2005:91-122). More precisely, respondents shared testimonies of their likeliness to juggle between their identities based on the places there were. As such, they switched modes of identification, ways of behaving, speaking, and thinking as they navigated between public and private spaces. In her study on Finnish-Swedes ethnic “returnees”, Hedberg found how overtime, through assimilation, subjects were likely to adopt different ethnic identities depending on the places they were in: in public, they would behave more like the host majority (Swedish), but in private, they would retain a more Finnish identity and ways of behaving and speaking (Hedberg, 2009). Similarly, some respondents also affirmed adopting different identities depending on whether they were at their workplace (INT06; INT13; INT18; INT22; INT29; INT58) or at the University (INT03; INT08; INT16; INT18; INT39), while they would revert to their “natural selves” in private once at home, or in the presence of kin and other strong ties (INT14; INT33; INT36; INT51; INT53). In her study, Wessendorf refers to the “performance of Italianness” when she wrote about second generation Italian-Swiss reifying and performing ethnicity as a differentiating factor in Switzerland (Wessendorf, 2008:8). Here, for some Chinese remigrants in Beijing and Shanghai, it was reflected in the behaviors and language spoken to interact with their interlocutors, as well as in the ways they chose to perform Chineseness or reproduce characteristic cultural elements from the West, wherefrom they have been socialized prior to their relocation.

INT27 is a Chinese-Spanish remigrant living in Shanghai. Linguistically and culturally proficient in both Spanish and Chinese (Mandarin and Shanghainese), she identifies much more to China because she feels more at ease living in a safer society where her outlook does not make her stand out. Moreover, her family and closest friends are also living in Shanghai and nearby regions. During the focus group interview with her husband INT26, a Belgian-Chinese, she recognized that whenever she steps outside of her home, she instantly becomes “a real Shanghainese”, and conducts her daily activities thinking and behaving like a local Shanghainese resident, whether it be at her workplace with her colleagues and clients, or when spending time with her other Chinese friends. Involved in the wine business, she makes use of her vast network of Shanghainese wholesalers and retailers and establishes connections (*la guanxi*) with them when

negotiating prices in their local dialect. In parallel, she ensures to instrumentalize her Spanishness to enhance the value of her produce:

“I tell them I’m Spanish, it increases the value of the stuff I sell and they trust me more when it comes to quality, to avoid fake produce. But I have to speak to them like a Shanghainese to access their network. It’s important to speak to them with the same mentality.”

Nevertheless, INT27 also realized that as soon as she crosses the threshold to her apartment located in the expatriate district of Shanghai, she drops her Chineseness altogether to adopt a much more international, Western way of living. To be sure, her husband INT26 fully identifies with Belgium and overall Western mentality, and tends to distance himself from Chinese cultural and behavioral mannerisms. Not perfectly articulate in Mandarin, he mainly speaks French to their son who attends an international kindergarten with courses taught in English. As a result, within the confines of her home, INT27 switches to her Spanish-European self, evidenced not only by the languages spoken, but also by adjusting her habitual behaviors and generally her ways of being. For instance, their home is arranged to suit the household’s Europeanized lifestyle and includes decoration items that reminds them of Spain and Belgium, such as a large photography collage of Madrilenian neighborhoods, a reproduction of the Manneken Pis used as bookends, a weekly meal-preparation board with European meals planned for the week to come, and a list of groceries to buy at their local Carrefour.

7.4.3. Current events

As indicated in [Section 4.2.2](#), fieldwork data was gathered mainly during the second half of 2015 in Beijing and Shanghai. During this period, international events took place in the respondents’ respective emigration countries, some of which significantly influenced them at multiple levels: economic or professional on the one hand, but most often affecting more personal and emotional spheres on the other hand. Such events occurring in their native country where for many, family and close friends are remaining, revealed to have high impacts on respondents who begin reshaping the boundaries of their social circles, growing more aware of their identities and place of belonging that schism away from their ethnicity –even if temporarily only. The most striking example

was that of INT20 as well as a few other French national remigrants interviewed in the wake of the terrorist attacks that occurred in Paris in November 2015 (and January 2016). I interviewed INT20 on November 14, 2015, one day after the triple terrorist attacks in Paris. INT20 is a French-Chinese ethnic remigrant living and working in Beijing. When meeting her, dangling down of her bag were a handful of French flags she had brought for a gathering with other French nationals living in Beijing, for after the interview. INT20 shared her thoughts on how she and other co-nationals reacted after hearing the news:

“It’s good to be together and talk about it, share the emotions, especially when you’re abroad. When it happened, I was added to seven WeChat groups with French people living in Beijing, and everyone was asking about everyone else’s families, we needed to check on each other, and very quickly we organized meetings.”

Later on, when addressing questions related to identity and belonging, she readily expressed her belonging to France, claiming that she felt French, even more so after she heard about the terrorist attacks. Displayed through a strengthened sense of community with other French nationals, her longing for France, and to be with other co-nationals are emphasized:

Nathalie: “Doesn’t that make you want to stay in China instead? Don’t you appreciate more the sense of security here?”

INT20: “No, on the contrary, it makes me want to go back even more. It’s in times like these that I want to be in France with my relatives, we need to support one another. [...] I’m grieving for *my* country. I think anybody would, but it’s *MY* country, it’s normal that I feel more concerned, it’s *my* country.”

The literature also shows that in the face of adversity and in difficult times, or in times triggering strong emotional responses, defense mechanism, sense of solidarity and belonging. Remigrants thus react by strengthening or weakening parts of their identity based on the circumstances (Verkuyten, 2005; Remennick, 2009). In this case, ethno-cultural and ethno-national attachments were strengthened along with a reinforced sense of belonging to France, French people, and French values. Indeed, the terrorist

attacks in Paris caused INT20 to boost her sense of nationalism and allegiance to France on a personal and communal level, and increase the consumption of French goods, as well as practice French cultural traditions and ways of living:

“We meet, we eat French food, we put on flags. I never put flags before, but now I feel so French, I have a giant flag in my living room, stickers on my laptop, a hoodie too. I’d never wear that before, never. [...] We celebrate and talk about ‘*liberté, égalité, fraternité*’¹⁹, it’s important to reassert our values now, more than ever.”

To be sure, the events not only shook France and its citizens, but also the international community whose solidarity and togetherness manifested instantly. INT20 shared how within minutes after the news had broken out, she had received compassionate messages from other foreigners living in China. This, along with the above elements all contributed to her standing firmly on her grounds as a French citizen whose adoptive patria brought her up in a value system condemning such actions. As the interview with INT20 progressed, the more her Chineseness and expressions of belonging to China began fading into the background as her Frenchness took over. Verkuyten (2005:50) views this phenomenon as a defining characteristic of ethnic identities in the context of migration insofar as ethnic identities are partial identities that remain among other socially defined identities. Verkuyten further argues that “depending on the context, a specific social identity becomes more relevant and others recede into the background” (Ibid., 53.). Here, because of the current international events, INT20’s ethnic identity – among other partial identities– receded while her cultural identity was boosted by her emotions. INT20’s case, however peculiar, shows how current events impacted on her identity after she remigrated to China, which was enhanced by defense mechanisms triggered by such events, by the geographical distance with her close ones and patria, and by being shown compassion to precisely because of her French citizenship and cultural belonging to France.

¹⁹ French motto translating into ‘freedom, equality, fraternity’. Used by the revolutionists of the French Revolution in 1798, it was institutionalized later. Children growing up and educated in France are taught under these values decorating their schools’ entrances.

7.4.4. People

The majority of the individuals interviewed noticed variations in the way they expressed themselves through behaviors and discourses depending on the people they were surrounded by, as well as the interlocutors they were speaking to. Phinney argues that ethnic identity, which is in constant motion and is highly circumstantial, is also dependent on “peoples” (Phinney, 2003:63). To be sure, with regards to ethnic “return” migration, this not only includes remigrants’ networks of strong and meso-level ties, but also weaker ties of regular or single-time interlocutors. For example, regardless of the context, when conversing with newly encountered individuals, ethnic remigrants were often asked *where they came from*²⁰, a seemingly factual, banal, yet repetitive question to which, depending on the interlocutor, remigrants’ answers varied. INT07, a Chinese ethnic “returnee” emigrating from New-Zealand, shares the reflection and processes he personally goes through each time he is asked “*Where are you from?*” in a conversation, whether it be in English, or in Mandarin (emphases added):

“Every time, I check first who they are and then I answer based on what I think they want to know and why [...]. Are they foreigners too or Chinese? Why is that person asking? Did they hear me speak English? Is it because I have a weird [Chinese] accent? Did I miss out on something obvious that gave me away? What do they want to know? My passport? My ethnicity? The [Chinese] province my parents are from? [...] If I answer that I’m from New-Zealand, are they going ask me where I’m... really from? [INT07’s own emphasis] If I answer this or that, does it mean that I commit to anything? What do they expect from me? Is it just small talk, curiosity, or is it to check on me and judge me?”

Although this quasi-automatic subconscious assessment takes an instant for INT07 to come up with an answer he guesses will meet the expectations of his interlocutors, it shows nonetheless that his responses are bound to vary, depending on the people he is conversing with. However, the versatility of his answers also implies that they are by no means synonymous with belonging. Similar reactions were shared by almost all respondents who acknowledged that they were likely to answer to such a question based on a quick assessment of their interlocutors and their intentions. INT07

²⁰ Question with variations, as reported by the respondents, depending on their interlocutors and the languages spoken, with varying intensities.

nonetheless assumes that most of the time, it is simply because his interlocutors noticed that “something [was] off”, which is why they are curious to know why he is that bit different. Nevertheless, some further admitted that constantly being confronted to the “where are you from” question helped shape the way they perceived themselves, even more so after they relocated to China. For instance, INT24, a British-Chinese remigrant living in Beijing found that even though he became used to being asked such a question before relocating to China, because after all, he was a visible minority, looking different from the residents living in the outskirts of northern England, he was all the more surprised to be repeatedly asked the same question by his local coethnics even after he moved to Beijing. To be sure, although INT24 is married to a Chinese wife, they communicate primarily in English as his Mandarin speaking skills remain limited to basic conversations. Thus, when asked where he comes from, he perceives not only curiosity from his interlocutors, but also feels pressured by his own shortcomings.

“I think they ask because my Chinese is bad despite being Chinese myself, [...] and I can get pretty conscious of it *when I’m with real Chinese people*. [...] I feel like I fail at being Chinese, and it’s so frustrating that I go around making sure people know I’m British [...] as if I needed to justify my lack of fluency.”

INT24’s sentiment stems from his understanding of Chinese identity being very primordialist, which tends to strengthen in the presence of coethnics. To him, being Chinese requires language proficiency, and his inability to measure up to his local peers in their presence led him to emphasize on his foreignness instead.

On the other hand, as mentioned above, some respondents expressed practicing code-switching whenever it benefited them in public at their workplace (e.g. INT21 and INT27 above), or when dealing with merchants to benefit from cheaper prices²¹ while in private, in the presence of stronger ties, they would adopt different cultural identities. Although these interactions occur in different *places* of everyday interactions, another notable difference stems from the interactions with different types of people (co-

²¹ Or more precisely, to benefit from cheaper prices local Chinese can enjoy. Many respondents shared experiences when they were charged for goods or services for higher prices because they were “not local, and too foreign” (INT04; INT16; INT22; INT31; INT36; INT44; INT45; INT52; INT58).

foreigners, co-nationals, co-ethnics), and depending on the stakes involved (discussion with strangers, friends, colleagues, clients, family), emphasizing on being more Chinese or foreign may become an advantage. Finally, INT11, a Canadian-Chinese remigrant working in a large international conglomerate in Beijing, shares about the ambivalence she experiences regularly when dealing with her colleagues. Indeed, depending on who she is interacting with, INT11 finds that she tends to adjust her responses and behaviors:

“They view me this way, and I behave the way they expect me to. I am both, but *I selectively behave like this and that depends on who I’m with* [emphasis added]. There is no hypocrisy, it is very natural to switch from being very Chinese with my Chinese friends, even though they compare me to *laowai* all the time, and with my foreign friends, I behave very extrovertedly, even though they tend to think I’m very Chinese. [...] I also noticed that with my White colleagues, I am Chinese, but with Chinese colleagues, I am Canadian.”

Ethnic other in the West, cultural other in China

INT11’s testimony hints at the notion of “othering”, predominant in socio-anthropological arguments. As Staszak argues, “otherness is produced by discursive practices part of a socio-cultural and linguistic process by which a dominant in-group constructs one or many dominated out-groups by stigmatizing a difference –real or imagined– presented as a negation of identity and thus a motive for potential discrimination” (Staszak, 2009:44). Othering thus implies categorizing individuals into two groups: us and them, with “them” as the outsiders, or the out-group because of the absence of shared identifying characteristics that define the boundaries of the insiders, the in-group. In the case of Chinese ethnic “returnees”, othering occurs both before their relocation to China, as they are being othered by their Western peers, as ethnic others. Othering also occurs in China as their local coethnics point out their cultural Otherness. In both instances, second generation overseas Chinese ethnic remigrants experience othering and are regarded as outsiders of the mainstream society in these respects.

This is reflected in a number of respondents’ testimonies who shared the parallels of their experiences when comparing their interactions with the majority populations in the West and in China (INT03; INT29; INT33; INT58). More precisely, many noticed that in

their country of emigration, if they labelled themselves as Chinese, they would be treated as such, because of their visible phenotype, which comes along with a set of expectations on their par. For instance, INT39 expresses how back in the Sweden, her friends would expect her to “speak Chinese and behave Chinese” simply because of her phenotype, finding it unacceptable that she cannot do “Chinese things”:

“Is it my duty to do any of those? They think that because I’m Chinese, I have to speak Chinese, that I have to eat Chinese food and know everything about Chinese culture and traditions. [...] When I told them that I couldn’t even speak Chinese that well, they were so surprised, and they mocked me, like, come on, I spent my entire life in Sweden, why do I have to speak Chinese? They expect me to know everything about China just because I’m Chinese, like where is best to eat and all, but I spent my entire life in Sweden! They never realized it but when they spoke like that to me they made me feel like an outsider, like I’m not part of their group of Whites.”

INT39’s testimony, shared by multiple other respondents (INT36; INT48; INT57; INT58) hints to primordialist understandings of ethnicity explained in the above section, and to Ang’s argument with regards to the pressure borne by ethnic Chinese people to speak and behave Chinese both in China and in the West (Ang, 2001; 2013), while in reality, their Chineseness is primarily residual.

7.4.5. Time

Finally, as it was hinted throughout the thesis, the temporal dimension also needs to be examined to better understand remigrants’ ethnic identity changes after remigrating to the ancestral homeland. In this particular context, time refers more specifically to length of stay and how this plays as returnees naturally progress through the stages of their life course. Life course is characterized by four main stages: childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age, all of which contain a number of socially defined important roles and events, in which individuals take part (Kobayashi and Preston, 2007; Lauer and Wong, 2010; Kōu et al., 2015). Since the majority of the interviewed ethnic remigrants are adults²², they are likely to experience a multitude of preoccupations and stimuli related to adulthood, and the longer they stay in China, the more likely they are to experience changes as they progress through the stage of their life course. Indeed,

²² INT03; INT04 and INT39 are in their late teens but they can be considered as young adults.

many of them relocated to China as young career-oriented adults with far fewer family burdens and dependent persons to worry about compared to the time they were interviewed. Now that they have grown into independent adults with growing responsibilities and concerns, the priorities of many are reshuffled. INT53, an American-Chinese expatriate living in Shanghai with his spouse and child, disclose some of their shared anxieties:

“We’re both doing very well here, but I don’t think we can stay here indefinitely [...]. My wife’s job here ends in a year or two, and yeah, she could find another job here, so we could stay but we think it’s time for us to settle down too. Our parents are still in the U.S., I’m an only son, so I have to take care of them, and she has a sister, but you know, it’s better to be close to your parents when they get old [...] and there’s Micah²³ too, we have to think about him too. It’s not the same anymore.”

Indeed, nine years prior to the interview, INT53 remigrated to China as a fresh graduate when he was in his mid-twenties to work as an engineer in an international firm. At the time, INT53 was still single, career-oriented and had no serious concerns about settling anywhere or purchasing a housing yet. In 2009, he met Carrie²⁴, another American-Chinese expatriate working in Shanghai, who became his spouse a year after. Now they have a two-year-old son. From the time he relocated to China and the time of the interview, his progress in life as an adult and the changes of circumstances were significant. From leading a close to worry-free single bachelor’s life, he now has to think about his family, ageing parents, and is concerned about a place where he needs to settle in order to provide stability for his family. After careful reflection, INT53 and Carrie both decided to return to the United States, close to their parents²⁵ (who in fact, live in different states, which is still closer than China). Similarly, INT56, a British-Chinese journalist living and working in Beijing, expresses how unexpected changes during the various stages in his life affected his plans on the longer run. He expresses concerns he now has, but did not worry about before:

²³ INT53’s son (nickname).

²⁴ Nickname.

²⁵ INT53 is actually from Northern California, and Carrie from Hawaii, where both sets of parents respectively live. At the time of the interview, INT53 said they had decided to move to California after Carrie’s mission would be over (less than two years), though they have not yet specified any plans.

“When I came to China, I only worried about my job, I wanted a bit of challenge you know, but that was it [...]. But now it’s different, I have to think whether I want to be here or not. I have to settle down, buy a house. I can’t do that here, no, that’s for sure.”

As mentioned in [Section 5.2.3](#), INT56 is married to a local Beijinger, and similarly to INT53 above, the perspective of having to settle down and raise a child in China made him reconsider his stay. From the time they remigrated to the ethnic homeland to the present day, their circumstances have changed, which impacted on their intentions to eventually leave China (see also [Section 6.4](#)). When asked how they thought this impacted on their ethno-cultural identities, INT56 replied:

“Well, you know, I like it here. I like China, this is where I come from, where my ancestors are from. Life’s good here, it’s all good. But it’s not who I am, where I think I should be or where I want to be in the future [...] It’s when you think about the future that you realize that it’s impossible because you know, we’re different, we’re too different from the real Chinese.”

7.6. Summary

Overall, this section showed in what instances Chinese remigrants in Beijing and Shanghai reevaluated their ethno-cultural identities. Because identity is argued to be dynamic, fluid and most importantly situational, this section focused more particularly on the most common circumstances that have directly affected the respondents interviewed. It showed how depending on the countries they were in (in the native or ancestral homeland), whether they were in public or in private places, their ethno-national identifications would differ, generally owing to cultural difference. Moreover, current events were examined as a possible instance during which remigrants may strengthen an identity over the other, as it was shown with INT20’s experience as a French national living in China at times when her native patria was undergoing terror. This section also discussed how depending on the peoples and time largely affected remigrants’ ethnonational identification and attachment, but also the way they chose to express an identity over the other.

7.5. Conclusion

This chapter examined the ethno-cultural identities developed by Western-born second generation ethnic “return” migrants after they relocated to the ancestral homeland. Even though multiple other factors are likely to influence ethnic identity development, this chapter was centered on the link between intergroup relations and identity. It looked more specifically into the ways in which their ethno-cultural identifications and ethno-national attachments evolved as a response to their daily experiences of socio-cultural integration in China. It can thus be said with certainty that integration experiences in the parental homeland trigger ethnic identity re-evaluation, caused by ethnic marginalization by local coethnics, or because remigrants have become aware of their cultural differences with the majority, though such questioning and roots-seeking varied in intensity. In the light of the primordialist/circumstantialist dichotomy, it can also be said that Chinese ethnic remigrants’ understanding of Chineseness often amalgamated with primary ascribed characteristics (such as phenotype, ancestry or shared blood, linguistic and cultural proficiency, and consumption of Chinese culture). At the same time, ethnic “returnees” expressed how their identities were neither linear nor definite, but were subject to evolve, depending on the circumstances and their experiences.

Even though ethnicity was determinant in channeling migration to the ancestral homeland, ethnic identity reassessment and changes were nonetheless products of ethnic “return” migration, and occurred after the relocation process rather than before. Post-migration ethnic identities were therefore examined following Tsuda’s work (2009a; 2009b). Respondents were found to have adopted different ethno-cultural identities and attachments. Two broad categories emerged. The first one consisted of nation-state-based ethno-national identities and identifications which, as a consequence of integration experiences in the homeland, caused remigrants to either reinforce their attachments to China or to their native country. Oftentimes, in the latter case especially, the reinforcement of one identity occurred at the expense of the other. Remigrants whose foreignness strengthened as a result of their negative experiences and encounters often did so because of ethno-cultural marginalization pointed out by their local coethnics, sometimes reinforcing their foreignness as a reactionary identity to their experiences. The second broad category included de-territorialized (or diasporic)

identities and transnational (or cosmopolitan, or hyphenated) identities. Diasporic identities were taken on by remigrants who rejected both their Chineseness and foreignness and thought that overall, they belonged to neither, which is why many developed new spaces of belonging and social anchors in which and whom they found stability and familiarity. On the other hand, remigrants who developed a more cosmopolitan identity were more likely to juggle positively between their two identities, finding duality to be an advantage instead. These individuals were also very much more likely to hyphenate their identities.

Finally, it is important to specify that since ethno-cultural identities are considered as dynamic, fluid and circumstantial, remigrants whose testimonies were shared in the chapter were not stuck in any of the categories but could in fact change. It was also found that since identities are not definite, depending on where they are, whether it be in the native or ancestral country, in public or private places, but also depending on current events, people, and over time, their responses had changed, with an identity taking over the other one in view of the circumstances.

Chapter Eight – Conclusions

8.1. Introduction

This thesis focused on a specific group of international migrants living in China: the second (and subsequent) generation of overseas Chinese born, raised, and socialized in Western countries, who performed ethnic “return” migration to their ancestral homeland. More specifically, it examined this group’s socio-cultural integration experiences in China, and the ways in which their ethno-cultural identities as well as their ethno-national attachments were affected by their integration experiences and encounters with their locally-socialized Chinese coethnics. This thesis thus explored research questions that sought to understand: “how this group of Western-born second generation overseas Chinese ethnic remigrants’ experiences of ‘homecoming’ and socio-cultural integration impacted on their identity construction after they ‘returned’ to China.”

The aim of this study was not to evaluate whether ethnic “returnees” are integrated or not into the host society, or whether they experienced identity changes in the ancestral homeland. Rather, this research focused on the relation between these two aspects, and sought to understand the ways in which the former impacted on the latter, which justified the emphasis on social relations in these processes. The main purpose of this research was therefore to improve our understanding of the phenomenon of ethnic “return” migration with Chinese specificities, but also to enhance our understanding of the ways in which integration experiences influenced identity construction. Looking into Chinese ethnic “returnees’” socio-cultural involvement in China and the subsequent issues of integration and identity enabled us to better comprehend the current transformations of contemporary Chinese society in relation to ethnic “return” migration. This thesis used a qualitatively-driven multimethod design with primary data consisting of semi-structured in-depth interviews with a sample of 58 ethnic remigrants in Beijing and Shanghai, which consisted of the main research medium. These were

complemented by a variety of document analyses and fieldwork observations. This last chapter succinctly summarizes the main findings of the thesis, and relates them to the research questions and hypotheses. It then addresses the contributions and limitations of this research, and venues for future projects.

8.2. Main findings

The literature on ethnic “return” migration abounds of studies retelling the stories of remigrants moving from developing economies to more established ones, analyzing the ways in which remigrants are socio-economically marginalized in the ethnic homeland causing further ethnic alienation despite sharing ethnicity. As highly skilled and educated remigrants whose “return” to China was often accompanied with privileges, the subjects of this thesis, however, did not suffer from downward socio-economic integration but did experience social separation and ethnic depreciations in the ancestral homeland in spite of their relatively high educational and economic statuses.

While expanding on the existing literature on second generation ethnic “return” migration, this thesis sought to test hypotheses guided by the concept of social anchoring, an integrative theoretical framework combining elements from the existing theories of integration, social networks, and ethno-cultural identity construction. On top of generating the research questions directing this study, this framework enabled us to assess how Western-born second generation overseas Chinese remigrants’ experiences of “homecoming” were affected by the processes and outcomes of their socio-cultural integration, and how these in turn correlatively impacted on their ethno-cultural identity social construction. Social networks, in particular, were posited to be essential anchors directly influencing ethnic remigrants’ socio-cultural integration and identity construction processes in China. Indeed, since ethno-cultural identities are socially constructed, changes in social contexts, inevitable when relocating to a different society, were assumed to trigger identity changes.

8.2.1. Remigrants' social networks and integration in China

Through the "returnees'" migration journey, this study highlighted two broad types of social ties that played important, yet distinct roles in remigrants' socio-cultural integration in the ancestral homeland, either supporting or hindering their experiences and outcomes.

The first broad category that emerged from the data collected consisted mostly of strong ties, referring more particularly to the role that family played in the remigrants' life-course in relation to their migration experience in China. Kinfolks, significant others, and eventually children were thus found to have different effects on remigrants' experiences at different stages of their life-course. The second broad category pertained to meso-level social groups and networks that consisted primarily of foreigners or other ethnic "returnees" with whom cultural affinities facilitated interactions and communication. Professional networks, expatriate groups, and other foreigners' circles such as associations of co-nationals were the most common groups within which remigrants established social ties and anchors that shaped their integration experiences, but also their ethno-national attachments. In this very case, shared ethnicity had little to do when connecting with others, while foreignness, as a common trait, along with cultural affinities did. One distinctive group of foreigners with whom respondents were found to connect with more personally was the *huayi* community of other ethnic remigrants in Beijing and Shanghai, with whom shared experiences and similar trajectories, as individuals born and raised as Chinese in different Western countries, and then back to China, united them. Oftentimes, all such groups were found to accentuate separation from the host population, representing a major hindrance to furthering their interactions with local peers, as cultural similarities primed over ethnic similarity when establishing ties as a remigrant.

Most of the communities and social groups that remigrants integrated after they relocated in China served as possible social anchors within which they associated with, contributing to their social inclusion within a narrow group. However, these also reinforced the enclave effect and often obstructed their interactions with their local peers. It can thus be said that intergroup interaction required anchoring within local

Chinese communities to further integrate into the wider society. In line with the works of Clopton and Finch (2011) and Grzymala-Kazłowska (2016), social anchors were indeed found to allow remigrants to develop and maintain social networks and capital within meso-level communities, providing them with a foothold and stability that enhances participation and belonging to these communities.

8.2.2. Everyday interactions in the ancestral homeland

The thesis further explored how socio-cultural adaptation was facilitated by various elements, including remigrants' life before they relocated to China. These were important to examine insofar as they shaped the ways in which they faced newness in China, and how they dealt with new socio-cultural norms. This encompassed taking account of remigrants' preparedness for change, proximity with the host population, and personality attributes for example. More specifically, in the light of Kim's (2001) integrative theory of cross-cultural adaptation, this thesis showed how in the case of Chinese ethnic "returnees", linguistic and cultural proficiencies were particularly important for some of them to have better quality interactions and encounters with their local counterparts. These depended on how much they maintained contact with the homeland prior to remigrating, by visiting the parental homeland during summer vacation, consuming and performing reproduced Chinese culture within family circles, or by cultivating personal interests and curiosity linked to China-related topics to improve their understanding of China today. Nevertheless, simply knowing how to communicate in Chinese and traditional knowledge of Chinese culture did not suffice to develop meaningful interactions and social ties with the host population. Socio-cultural integration in the ancestral homeland could be enhanced when ethnic remigrants were better equipped for improved interactions with local coethnics. These took the form of knowledge of Chinese popular culture and trendy references, or the use of slang while interacting with local coethnics enabled largely facilitated inter-group interactions, which eventually increased inclusion. In the case of ethnic remigration to China, it was essential insofar as "returnees" shared ethnicity with Chinese people generated expectations on the locals' part. In most instances, failing to meet these expectations caused returnees to feel frustrated at their coethnics' contempt, which in turn impacted

their subsequent integration experiences –while some continued mingling with Chinese locals, most minimized these interactions. However, the correlation was not systematic.

It was also found that depending on each remigrant, and as a personality trait, willingness to integrate was crucial. Indeed, in the light of Verkuyten's Integration Paradox theory (2016:583), despite 'ticking all the boxes in the list' that classical theorists have developed over the years, these highly skilled and educated immigrants who are structurally integrated in China are more likely to separate themselves psychologically from members of the host society rather than becoming more oriented to it. This was also reflected in the workplace interactions examined in the study. These mattered insofar as most of the returnees' primary migration motives were work-related. Differences in the way they were treated in comparison to their local coworkers affected their interactions with the wider society. In many ways, finally, even though many of the Western Chinese ethnic remigrants' socio-cultural experiences in China are similar to those of other international migrants of non-Chinese descent, their shared ancestry occasionally brought along expectations from both sides that are often not met.

8.3.3. Identity

The thesis finally focused on identity, and examined how remigrants' ethno-cultural identity and ethno-national attachments were impacted by their integration experiences, and more generally how they evolved after they returned to the ancestral homeland. Exposed to a multitude of socio-cultural stimuli that challenge their socio-cultural integration after relocating to China, ethnic remigrants' understanding of what being of Chinese ancestry entails also evolved. This self-reevaluation in relation to this new society also affected their understandings of home and belonging. Certainly, in addition to impeding on socio-cultural integration in the host society, linguistic and cultural gaps highlighted cultural difference that caused remigrants to experience ethno-cultural marginalization which in turn, triggered ethnic identity questioning that impacted on remigrants' affinities to where they thought home really was. For most, simplistic primordialist definitions of Chineseness evolved as they gradually realized that being of Chinese ancestry in China entailed more than shared phenotype and minimal knowledge of contemporary Chinese society.

Chinese ethnic remigrants took on a variety of identities and developed different ethno-national attachments after experiencing China on a daily basis. Calking Tsuda's model (2009a; 2009b), post-migration ethnic identities were therefore examined to understand the ethno-cultural identities adopted by the Chinese ethnic remigrants who took part in the research. Two broad categories emerged. On the one hand, some developed nation-state-based identities, either reinforcing their Chineseness and attachments to the ancestral homeland, or oppositely, reinforcing their Westernness and attachments to their country of emigration. In either case, the reinforcement of one often occurred at the expense of the other. In both cases, this was respectively because of prior negative experiences in the West (such as discrimination and racial difference, lack of belonging and anchor) and positive experiences in China, or oppositely, negative experiences in China after remigration caused by cultural distance and social separation from the host natives.

On the other hand, some respondents took on de-territorialized or transnational ethno-cultural identities, and developed either diasporic identities or cosmopolitan identities. Remigrants who developed diasporic identities felt that they could no longer anchor themselves to either country of emigration or immigration, ending up feeling "homeless" with nowhere to call home or to belong to, as though they were "stuck in-between" worlds. In this very instance, it can be said that remigrants' identity and attachments to their homelands were affected by their shifting from racial foreignness and cultural similarity in the West to cultural foreignness and racial similarity after they remigrated to China. Nevertheless, even though such a change impacts on the way remigrants view themselves, it does not necessarily do so linearly. One of their response was to turn to transient communities and develop new spaces of belonging that were no longer nation-bound. What used to be ethno-national attachments thus became attachments to fleeting spaces and communities of international migrants who live similar in-between lifestyles. However, remigrants who developed cosmopolitan identities had a far more positive response, usually sharing positive experiences in the ethnic homeland, expressing feelings of pertaining to both worlds, and benefiting from a dual heritage which they could capitalize on in the future. Juggling between both their inherited and acquired socio-cultural capital, these respondents overall enjoyed far more positive experiences after "returning" to China.

Even though this thesis argues that Chinese ethnic remigrants in the ancestral homeland have taken on new ethnic identities as a result of their socio-cultural integration experiences in China, it is nonetheless indispensable to specify that ethno-cultural identities are by no means considered to be final, static, linear nor definite. Rather, they are considered to be dynamic, fluid, circumstantial, and most importantly, a social process that is part of each remigrant's own growth and path in the life-course. Ethnic identity is therefore seen as an evolving process affected by a multitude of internal and external stimuli and circumstances. This idea was explored through recurring threads among the participants who took part in the study, illustrating more particularly how depending on where they are, whether it be in the native or ancestral country, in public or private places, but also depending on current events, people, and over time, their responses had changed, with an identity taking over the other one in view of the circumstances. The case of Chinese ethnic "return" migration in Beijing and Shanghai showed that even when the remigrants' understanding of Chineseness remained essentially primordialist, their ethno-cultural identities were impacted by their experiences in and out of the ethnic homeland.

Weaved together, these findings support the original hypothesis formulated above and through the concept of social anchoring, meet the theoretical concerns raised with regards to social networks, integration, and identity in relation to Chinese ethnic return migration. Chinese ethnic remigrants' social groups and networks were important to identify and to look into, not only because they impacted on their integration experiences and outcomes, but also because they constituted of "life footholds" within which "returnees" were anchored. This in turn influenced their ethno-national identifications and ethno-cultural identities insofar as identity questioning was often triggered and shaped by such anchoring, often based on their perceived socio-cultural experiences and performances.

8.3. Contributions and limitations

The contributions of this thesis are both theoretical and empirical. First, this research attempted to contribute to debates on social networks by looking at the ways in which

they can both facilitate and hinder integration in the new host society, though not from an economic perspective, but mostly from a socio-cultural standpoint. This thesis does not aim to contest the existing theories on socio-cultural integration. Rather, it highlights the limitations of their applicability outside of the contexts within which they were developed. The case of Western-born Chinese ethnic “return” migrants shows how highly skilled ethnic remigrants in China outgrow these very determinist frameworks of integration that determine that a society is integrated if its members tick a number of boxes. It demonstrates that structural integration and ability to integrate do not necessarily result in socio-cultural integration if migrants are unwilling to step out of their marginalized social circles. Some remigrants tick all the boxes established by integration theories, and have the full potential and possibility to integrate (and even pass for native members of) Chinese society, but simply choose not to, for lack incentive and necessity. This also broadens the applicability of Verkuyten’s (2016) Integration Paradox to different socio-cultural contexts and migration types. This thesis further adds to knowledge by adding layers and perspectives to the concept of social anchoring, which is argued to act as the glue bridging social networks, integration, and identity, three conceptual frameworks usually studied disparately. Social anchoring thus represents an integrative theoretical framework that takes into account the importance of social networks in the integration process upon migration, and the effects these have on the migrants’ ethno-cultural identity construction. This thesis advances the concept of social anchoring by looking at applications beyond the European frame within which it was originally developed, and applies the concept onto the dynamics of contemporary China, introducing new contexts and new empirical data to migration research.

Second, by focusing on the case of Western-born second generation overseas Chinese remigrants in China, the empirical investigation enabled improving our general understanding of ethnic “return” migration as one type of migration flow, but more importantly, enhances our theoretical and empirical understandings of integration and identity construction in the context of ethnic “return” migration. Although ethnic “return” migration studies are slowly gaining momentum and reaching academic interest as they provide a new perspective within migration studies, they are still relatively unexplored, and no in-depth research had been conducted so far to cover the experiences of Western-born ethnic “return” migrants in China. Indeed, existing studies

on Chinese international migration normally refer to emigration outflows to Western countries rather than Western inflows of immigrants into China. It does support however, Pieke's (2012) argument that for the time being, China is not yet an immigration country, but a country where migrants live. Finally, the thesis benefitted from an interdisciplinary approach necessary to address all such multi-layered issues, and thus contributed to socio-anthropology, migration studies, area studies, sociology, human geography, and social psychology.

This thesis also has limitations. One of the main drawbacks of the research is in its overlooking regional differences within China as well as the existing differences between Western countries. Instead, this thesis views those as two opposing cultural ensembles by dichotomizing China and the West, or more generally, countries pertaining to the Global North. However, this dichotomy comes with the risk of oversimplification. If most Western countries are considered as "developed" while China can be said to be a developing country, Beijing and Shanghai, where fieldwork was conducted, are incontestably well-developed, served, and connected megacities, despite their respective socio-economic disparities. In this respect, the dichotomy loses its appeal, especially in cases where remigrants relocated from smaller towns in the West. And even though focusing on socio-cultural features and differences could justify the China-West dichotomy, there remains internal differences that need to be taken into account to avoid the dangers of compartmentalization (Pieke, 2016). While the West is a vague concept that fundamentally overlooks the differences between countries within the West by focusing on their loosely common democratic set of values inherited from the legacies of the Iron Curtain, it nonetheless enables us contrasting fundamentally different cultural wholes.

The second point of contention would be in the choice of the cities where fieldwork was conducted. Even though Beijing and Shanghai are the two main Chinese cities that nest the highest concentration of foreigners in China, other economic regions are attracting growing communities of foreigners as well. Shenzhen, for instance, is geographically close to Hong Kong, and is one of such case. The experiences of the remigrants recorded in the study cannot be generalized to all ethnic remigrants in China. The sample size (58 participants) did not allow producing statements generalizable to all

Western countries, nor to all migrants. Furthermore, even though some similarities, and even patterns could be identified when analyzing the respondents' interviews and stories, the primary and main data source relied on personal experiences, journeys and trajectories. It was therefore difficult to apply the same experiences to all, even if these stories seemed to overlap and even repeat across strings of interviews.

Third, with regards to the "return" component of ethnic "return" migration, the inadequacy of the terminology was expressly marked throughout the thesis with quotation marks. As mentioned in the Introduction Chapter, the incorrectness of the term lays in the fact that strictly speaking, Chinese remigrants do not return to China since they never really left in the first place as they were born and raised in a different country. Quotation marks were necessary in order to mark the inaccuracy of the term, and to distinguish the second (and subsequent) generation overseas Chinese from their parents, the first generation who left China and may return to their native homeland, as well as from *haigui*, who are returnees themselves. However, even after years probing the question, I am still searching for a term or expression that captures the phenomenon in the most appropriate and accurate ways.

8.4. Venues for future projects

The limitations noted above do not necessarily invalidate the findings of this thesis. Rather, these observations point out to possibilities for future research related to the understanding of ethnic "return" migration and to the study of overseas Chinese and the Chinese diaspora in relation to the ancestral homeland. Multiple potential projects can emerge from the foundations laid by this research and through the findings of this thesis.

First, in response to the limitation regarding the choice of cities where fieldwork was conducted, it would be interesting to build on the findings of the thesis and further explore Chinese ethnic "return" migration, though to cities in different provinces in China. While Shenzhen, close to Hong Kong, may have more foreigners, other Western, Northern and Central provinces in China have different prominent cultural characteristics

and ways of living, and most importantly, a much smaller international exposure with far less foreigners and international communities for potential remigrants to hide into. Not only would the motives for remigration be interesting to investigate, but also remigrants' integration experiences and encounters with their local coethnics would provide an interesting comparative layer to the findings of this research as the communities within which remigrants would anchor themselves into might differ, which would subsequently influence their integration experiences and identity construction.

Second, the directionality of the migration flow from the West to China leaves a lot of room for future research, giving way to possible studies on cross-generational comparisons for instance. Indeed, it was found in previous studies that first generation Chinese migrants who return to China are likely to settle in their ancestral villages because of emotional attachments to their birthplace and because of the fondness of their childhood memories and the nostalgia it triggers (Chen, 2013; 2017). Their descendants on the other hand, are far less likely to "return" to their ancestral villages, but are incited by economic gain instead, and thus perceive China as a whole country. Depending on the "returnees" and the returnees' purposes, relocation places, and stage in the life-course, different patterns could be drawn and compared. Their experiences upon return would be interesting to compare as well. While it was found in this thesis that "returnees" may be lacking linguistic and cultural competencies, returnees, on the other hand, are assumed to be proficient in both, suggesting little to no cultural shock upon return and when encountering the new host population. However, provided that China has developed and undergone changes during the first generation's time away from the ethnic homeland, their return experiences may involve cultural shock as well, though to varying degrees. In this respect, identity changes and social anchoring would be interesting to further look into to try to understand the generational differences in the ways integration, identity, home and belonging interplay in China.

Third, focusing on developing further studies on Western-born overseas Chinese diasporic groups would be interesting, by drawing on the findings of this research to enquire their patterns of migration, mobility and immobility, in the West, in China and in-between. This would mean investigating those who chose not to migrate at all and who would therefore remain in the West, those who chose to stay after relocating to

China, those who chose to return to their country of emigration, as well as the fleeting groups in-between, considered as onward migrants. Looking into the constituents of their anchors and the roles they play in rooting and uprooting them would apply in these cases too.

Finally, by adopting a different perspective nay different discipline and switch the focus on families and ancestral genealogy, the findings of this thesis could be further developed by looking into the migration histories and patterns of selected families. One of such examples would be that of the Ye family, whose journey was retold through Chinese history (Esherick, 2011). Similar projects could be conducted based on this thesis, though not necessarily spanning over such long periods, but by analyzing the migration patterns and histories of a selected few families whose trajectories began in China and after generations of migration across different continents, eventually "returned" to China. In order to map out their trajectories and to capture their migration stories, it would be possible to take on opportunities of collaboration with partners outside of academia, with genealogists (such as My China Roots, for example, a small enterprise based in Beijing that specializes in tracing Chinese ancestral roots and lineage), or with artists who have dedicated careers or part of their work to expressing and sharing the stories of overseas Chinese and Chinese migration in general.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Support used to structure the interview

Name: _____ Nickname: _____ Interviewee #

Age: _____

Born in _____ / Raised in _____ / Lived in _____

Ethnicity: Father is from _____ and mother is from _____

Where do you live in China? (Surroundings, mates?) _____

Chinese level: Speaking _____ Reading _____ Writing _____

Learned from _____

Language spoken at home _____

When did you arrive in China? _____

Purpose? _____ Affiliation _____

Why China? (Roots/economy/safe) _____

Any attachments (came alone)? _____

How did you come? (Family helped/alone/institution) _____

What kinds of preparations did you do before coming to China? Savings / researched / set before coming? _____

How long do you plan to stay? _____

Social cultural integration

How much do you know and understand about China? (Culture / history / lifestyle / customs / mechanisms) _____

How did you learn about it? (General basic knowledge before / upon arrival with time / still don't know) _____

How often do you interact with Chinese people? _____

Why this much? _____

What kinds of interactions (close friends / basic daily interactions weak ties / see every day but not close) _____

Why like this? Not closer? How come this close? _____

What language do you speak with them? _____

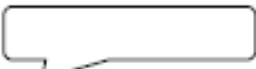

What do they think of you? (curious / positive / negative?) _____

Part of an organization? A group? Association? If yes, what: _____

Do you have/intend/would be alright having a Chinese partner? Why? _____

Overall, would you consider yourself as well-integrated? Why? _____

How would you rate your overall homecoming experience? _____

 Before China "Where are you from?"  Once in China

What does it mean to be Chinese to you? _____

Where would you call home? Why? _____

Where do you feel like you belong to? _____

Do you feel like these definitions have changed over time since you came to China?

Do you feel like you've become less Western, more Chinese, or the opposite? Why? Can you give examples?

Could you please comment on these two pictures and quote?

Appendix 2 – Participant information sheet

Participant Information Sheet

Dear participant,

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

The research project is entitled as follows: *Hyphenated-Chinese in China: Western-born second generation overseas Chinese's 'ethnic return migration' to China.*

I am carrying out this project to complete my PhD in East Asian Studies at the University of Sheffield, UK. My research project explores the ethnic return migration of second generation overseas Chinese born in Western countries to their parental homeland, China. My purpose is to understand how their homecoming experiences and success or failure to integrate into the ancestral homeland society leads to the re-evaluation of their identity. Overall, the research lasts three years, but I am collecting information and data in China during a couple of months, from September 2015 to February 2016.

You were chosen as a participant for this project because you fit into three essential criteria to be eligible:

- (1) You are a second (or subsequent) generation overseas Chinese
- (2) You were born and/or in a Western country (i.e. a country from the 'Global North', e.g. North America, Western Europe, Australia, etc.). You may have migrated at a very young age to a Western country too.
- (3) You have 'returned' to China for at least 3 months.

These criteria were communicated to my acquaintances and you were asked by one of them (or by me) if you may be interested in taking part in this project. You may have been asked by a person who was asked to take part in it as an extended connection as well.

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form) and you can still withdraw at any time, and you do not have to give a reason. If you agree to take part in this project, you will participate in a one-time interview that may last at least 45 minutes and should last no longer unless you agree to extend it a bit and share more information. The interviews will be done in person and will not be extensively formal, but will still have specific questions that need to be answered. I do not intend to have a raw Q/A session only but rather a casual conversation to exchange information. Please note that the information prior to the interview (e.g. information to set the appointment for the actual interview will be exchanged via email)

All you have to do is to converse casually in a directed conversation and reply to a few questions to share your experiences. If you do not wish to reply, you are free not to. If you agree to it, I would like to record the interview (audio) to facilitate the data organization. The recorded audio file will be stored in my personal computer, and only accessible by me for the use of the research only.

If the research stops earlier than expected, you will be informed and given an explanation, and if anything goes wrong or if you need to address any complaints regarding the interview, you may need to contact my research supervisor **Dr. Yu Chen**. However, should you feel that your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction; you can contact the University's 'Registrar and Secretary'.

All the information that will be collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications. However, if you decide to

take part in this project and wonder if it will be kept confidential, you are invited to consult the University's Research Ethics Policy Note on 'Principles of Consent' for advice on what information to provide to prospective participants, available at www.sheffield.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/ethicspolicy/policy-notes/consent3

The result of the research is likely to be published in late 2017. A copy of the completed project will be available on demand. Please note that the data collected during the course of the project might be used for additional or subsequent research.

This project has been ethically approved via the School of East Asian Studies' department's ethics review procedure. The University's Research Ethics Committee monitors the application and delivery of the University's Ethics Review Procedure across the University.

For further information about the project, please contact

Nathalie Mingboupha

Email: nmingboupha1@sheffield.ac.uk or nathalie.mingboupha@outlook.com

And only if not available, please contact the supervisor of this project:

Dr. Yu Chen

Email: yu.chen@sheffield.ac.uk

Shall you take part in this project, you will be given a copy of the information sheet and a signed consent form to keep.

Thank you for reading and for your cooperation in this project,

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Date	Signature
<i>Nathalie Mingboupha</i>	<i>1st August 2016</i>	<i>Nathalie Mingboupha</i>
_____	_____	_____
Name of the person taking consent	Date	Signature

The information sheet was reviewed together and kept by the participant.

Appendix 3 – Consent form

Participant Consent Form

Title of Research Project: Hyphenated-Chinese in China: Western-born second generation overseas Chinese's 'ethnic return migration' to China

Name of Researcher: Nathalie Mingboupka (陳錦莉)

Participant Identification Number for this project: _____

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 1st August 2015, explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.
Contact number of researcher: +86 155 1000 2559
Or via email: nmingboupka1@sheffield.ac.uk
or nathalie.mingboupka@outlook.com
3. I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential (*only if true*). I give permission for the researcher to have access to my anonymized responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.
4. I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research.
5. I agree to take part in the above research project.
6. I agree that the interview be recorded (audio).

Name of Participant (or legal representative)	Date	Signature
<u>Nathalie Mingboupka</u> Name of the person taking consent	<u>1st August 2015</u> Date	<u>Nathalie Mingboupka</u> Signature

NB: Once this has been signed by all parties the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form, the information sheet and any other written information provided to the participants. A copy of the signed and dated consent form should be placed in the project's main record (e.g. a site file), which must be kept in a secure location.

The consent form was signed by the participant, kept by the researcher

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED !

**Are you a “returning”
second generation
overseas Chinese?**

Are you sometimes referred to as a **banana** or **ABC, BBC, CBC, FBC...?**

**IF YES, you are invited to
participate in a research project
that is ALL ABOUT YOU !!!**

PROFILES NEEDED:

1. You are of Chinese ancestry
2. You were born and/or grew up in a “Western country” (e.g. United States, Australia, Canada, Western/Northern Europe, etc.)
3. You have been in China for AT LEAST 3 months

**WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO DO?
JUST MEET ME AND TALK !**

In exchange for your time during an interview, you will be **rewarded** with a small gift !

WHO AM I?

My name is Nathalie (陳錦莉)
I am a Ph.D. researcher from the University of Sheffield,
My research revolves around second (and subsequent) generations of overseas Chinese born in Western countries, and I look into how they adapt and integrate once they “return” to their ancestral land, China. I also investigate the ways identity evolves throughout this migration process.

PLEASE CONTACT ME
if you are interested in taking part in this project (or if you have any questions regarding this topic)

EMAIL
talk_to_nathalie@outlook.com

CALL or TEXT
155 – 1000 – 2559

Wechat ID
normal_boy123

THIS STUDY HAS BEEN REVIEWED AND APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD
SCHOOL OF EAST ASIAN STUDIES’ RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE.

Appendix 5 – List of interviewees and profiles

CODE	NICKNAME	AGE	GENDER	EMIGRATED FROM	LIVING IN	RELATIONSHIP STATUS	PARTNER (actual or preferred)	FAMILY (dependent)	OCCUPATION	TYPE OF CONTRACT
INT01	Emma	34	F	Canada	Beijing	Single	Western-born Chinese	None	English teacher	Local +
INT02	Johnny	32	M	Australia	Shanghai	Single	No preference	None	Marketing	Expatriate
INT03	Kent	19	M	Sweden	Beijing	Dating	Chinese	None	Language student	Student
INT04	Keith	18	M	Netherlands	Beijing	Single	No preference	None	Language student	Student
INT05	Ella	42	F	United States	Beijing	Married	Western-born Chinese	Child	Operations Director	Expatriate
INT06	Philip	31	M	Australia	Beijing	Married	Western-born Chinese	Child	Business Developer	Local +
INT07	Ryan	36	M	New Zealand	Beijing	Dating	Chinese	None	Musician	None
INT08	Patrick	24	M	Australia	Beijing	Dating	Western-born Chinese	None	University Student	Student
INT09	Joanna	28	F	Canada	Beijing	Single	Western-born Chinese	None	Marketing Manager	Local +
INT10	Camila	37	F	Spain	Beijing	Married	Western-born Chinese	Child	Restaurant Owner	Entrepreneur
INT11	Katherine	43	F	Canada	Beijing	Single	Western-born Chinese	None	Area Manager	Local +
INT12	Clara	34	F	France	Shanghai	Married	Western-born Chinese	Child	Restaurant Owner	Entrepreneur
INT13	Arthur	33	M	United States	Beijing	Married	Western-born Chinese	Child	Marketing Operator	Local +
INT14	Angel	32	F	United States	Beijing	Dating	Western-born Chinese	Parents	Lawyer	Expatriate
INT15	Marcia	33	F	Spain	Beijing	Single	No preference	None	Import/Export	Local +
INT16	Matteo	21	M	Italy	Beijing	Single	Western-born Chinese / Chinese	None	University Student	Student

INT17	Clarence	22	M	UK	Beijing	Single	Western-born Chinese / Caucasian	None	Language student	Student
INT18	Valerie	22	F	United States	Beijing	Single	Western-born Chinese / Caucasian	None	Language student	Student
INT19	Darren	35	M	United States	Beijing	Married	Korean	None	Pastor	Local +
INT20	Kim	28	F	France	Beijing	Single	Caucasian	None	Sales Rep	Local +
INT21	Janice	29	F	UK	Beijing	Dating	Western-born Chinese	None	Entrepreneur	Entrepreneur
INT22	Diane	28	F	Canada	Beijing	Single	Western-born Chinese / Caucasian	None	Journalist	Local +
INT23	Stephanie	27	F	United States	Beijing	Dating	Western-born Chinese	None	Finance Officer	Local +
INT24	Joel	33	M	UK	Beijing	Married	Chinese	Child	Finance Officer	Expatriate
INT25	Daniel	30	M	France	Shanghai	Dating	Chinese	None	Manager in Luxury Hotel	Local +
INT26	Say-Tac	36	M	Belgium	Shanghai	Married	Western-born Chinese	Child	Factory Manager	Expatriate
INT27	Lei (Adelina)	35	F	Spain	Shanghai	Married	Western-born Chinese	Child, Parents	Import/Export	Entrepreneur
INT28	Cécile	29	F	France	Shanghai	Dating	Caucasian	None	PhD Student	Student
INT29	Victoire	28	F	France	Shanghai	Dating	Caucasian	None	Engineer	V.I.E.
INT30	Noémie	26	F	France	Shanghai	Single	Western-born Chinese / Caucasian	None	Sales Rep	Local
INT31	Paul	41	M	France	Shanghai	Single	Western-born Chinese / Caucasian	None	Import/Export	Local +
INT32	Lun (Jacques)	28	M	France	Shanghai	Dating	Chinese	None	Scientist	Local +
INT33	Eric	27	M	Canada	Beijing	Dating	Western-born Chinese	None	Import/Export	Entrepreneur
INT34	Alberto	28	M	Italy	Beijing	Single	Chinese	None	Brand Manager	Local +
INT35	Owen	29	M	New Zealand	Beijing	Dating	Chinese	None	Business Developer	Local +
INT36	Mark	47	M	New Zealand	Beijing	Married	Chinese	Child	Entrepreneur	Entrepreneur
INT37	Benjamin	27	M	France	Beijing	Single	No preference	None	Engineer	Local +
INT38	Loïc	27	M	France	Beijing	Dating	Chinese	None	Photographer	Local

INT39	Monica	19	F	Sweden	Beijing	Single	Western-born Chinese	None	Language student	Student
INT40	Valentine	27	F	France	Beijing	Married	Caucasian	None	Engineer	Expatriate
INT41	Jun	27	M	France	Beijing	Married	Chinese	None	Engineer	Local +
INT42	Emilie	29	F	France	Beijing	Dating	Chinese	None	Engineer	Local +
INT43	Sonia	21	F	United States	Beijing	Dating	Caucasian	None	English teacher	Local +
INT44	Joseph	34	M	Canada	Beijing	Single	No preference	None	Import/Export	Local +
INT45	Evelyn	38	F	Germany	Beijing	Dating	Caucasian	None	Admin/Language teacher	Local +
INT46	Miaolin	27	F	United States	Beijing	Single	No preference	None	Publisher	Local +
INT47	Shu-Yin	27	F	Australia	Beijing	Single	Western-born Chinese	None	Journalist	Expatriate
INT48	Eddy	27	M	Sweden	Beijing	Single	Western-born Chinese	None	Engineer	Local +
INT49	Lili	29	F	Australia	Beijing	Dating	Western-born Chinese / Caucasian	None	English teacher	Local +
INT50	Vanessa	25	F	Canada	Shanghai	Single	Western-born Chinese / Caucasian	None	Interior designer	Local
INT51	Chloe	37	F	Canada	Beijing	Married	Western-born Chinese	Child	Entrepreneur	Entrepreneur
INT52	Honghao	36	M	Netherlands	Beijing	Married	Caucasian	Child	Entrepreneur	Entrepreneur
INT53	Parker	36	M	United States	Shanghai	Married	Western-born Chinese	Child	Engineer	Expatriate
INT54	Xiang	34	M	Germany	Shanghai	Dating	Chinese	None	Communications Manager	Local +
INT55	Ray	25	M	United States	Beijing	Single	Western-born Chinese / Chinese	None	Business Developer	Local +
INT56	Evan	29	M	UK	Beijing	Married	Chinese	None	Journalist	Local
INT57	Erin	26	F	France	Beijing	Single	Western-born Chinese	None	Business Analyst	Local +
INT58	Virginie	26	F	France	Shanghai	Single	Western-born Chinese	None	Business Developer	V.I.E.

Notes:

1. Interviewees are listed by order of interview date.
2. INT26 and INT27 were group-interviewed at the same time.
3. INT28, INT29, and INT30 were group-interviewed at the same time.
4. INT12, INT28, INT41 were born in China but their parents immigrated to France when they were respectively 7 years old, a toddler, and an infant, so they were socialized in a France for the most part of their formative years.
5. These are nicknames, although I used coded names throughout the thesis, these are to display their westernized names for most.
6. Very few still had Chinese names; this played a lot in their growing up as Chinese kids in the west. INT32 for example, has a Chinese name on his identity papers but grew up using his non-official Western name. When he reached in early twenties and began accepting his Chineseness more, INT32 started using his Chinese given name as he believes was part of his identity.
7. "Type of contract" roughly refers to the employment terms.
 - **Local** means that the remigrant has the same salary as a local employee
 - **Local +** means that the remigrant has the same salary as local recruits (numerically), but benefit from other advantages that local recruits do not have, ranging from bonus monthly allowance, to prepaid return ticket "home" i.e. to the country of emigration, to more paid holidays, to social benefits, to free rent.
 - **Expatriate** means that the remigrant's work contract was signed with a foreign company that sent them on a temporary short to mid-term mission in the Chinese branch. Salaries are usually far higher than locals', and they are often employed in managerial or leading positions. Expatriate packages are diverse and depend on sending firms' policies and generosity and can include insurance, free flights, free rents, chauffeurs, and sometimes even allowance for partners, or children's international schools' tuition fees covered.
 - **Student** here normally refers to language students, but there can be exceptions.
 - **V.I.E.** is a French type of contract similar to expatriate contracts as indicated above, but with an age limit. Contracts normally last for up to two years and are non-renewable. They include multiple benefits, ranging from free rents to higher salaries, though not as extravagant as expatriates' since responsibilities are usually lesser in comparison.