

“Away” at “Home”: The “Returnee” Experience and Self Identity of Children of Taiwanese Entrepreneurs and Expatriates in Malaysia

Shiuan (Christine) Pan

With the rapid growth of globalization come the diversifying and complexing patterns, frequencies, trajectories, motivations, and participants of human migration. This has not only contributed to an expansion of migration categories, but also challenges our notions of “home,” “roots,” “place of belonging,” as well as the concept of identity itself. One aspect of the increasing globalization of the world economy is the development of regional economies, which led to the migration of Taiwanese entrepreneurs and corporate staff to Southeast Asian countries such as Malaysia since the 1980s, many of whom brought their families with them. The children of these Taiwanese entrepreneurs and corporate staff then grow up in one or more “foreign” countries, becoming “third culture kids.” Some of them “return” to Taiwan as adults for tertiary education or employment, becoming hidden immigrants in their own “homeland.” The “reverse” cultural shock they experience upon “return” migration and the social placing by their “home” society generate confusion as well as invoke reflection about their original conception of their self identity and sense of self.

This study conducted semi-structured in-depth interviewing and participant observation in Malaysia and Taiwan to collect data. It found that like typical third culture kids, the children of Taiwanese entrepreneurs and expatriates who grew up in Malaysia also experienced “reverse” cultural shock upon “return” migration to Taiwan and faced the need to employ passing strategies in order to negotiate social placing and identity. However, their migratory journey also manifest some differences from that of most typical migrant children and third culture kids. These Taiwanese children grew up in an enclave-like environment where their social networks were composed of mainly other Taiwanese; upon “return” migration, they were also labelled “overseas Chinese,” which added to the complexity of the adaptation and negotiation process. The results of this study illustrates the cross-cultural migration trajectory of the children of Taiwanese entrepreneurs and corporate staff who grew up in Malaysia, taking into account the process of social adaptation after “return”

migration and the psychological experience of their migratory life. Through an analysis of the influences of migration on the formation of one's identity, this study not only provides an understanding of the connotations of identity beyond its traditional classifications in the context of the highly mobile global society of this age, but also shed light on the unique place of Taiwan's third culture kids on the global map of human migration.

Keywords: Return migration, Third Culture Kids, Malaysia, Children of Taiwanese entrepreneurs and expatriates, Migrant children, Identity