

Chapter 9

Provincializing Perth? Satellite Television and the Chinese in Perth

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Introduction

Relocated people habitually seek the familiar within their new social milieus as a means of easing their transition into ways strange and alien. However, from networks and food to everyday customs, efforts to hold on to such home comforts are often viewed with a measure of hostile disdain and regarded as preludes to the formation of ethnic enclaves. Through a pilot study on the access of satellite television by mainland Chinese migrants in Perth, Western Australia, this chapter seeks to shed some light on how migrants understand and employ these comforting strategies and how Chinese-Australians are using technology to achieve a sense of sanctuary from the views and habits of Australians while (re)constructing and articulating multiple belongings in their new homes.

Currently in Australia access to free-to-air satellite programming is highly visible because of the easily visible two- to three-metre satellite dishes required for proper reception. Their increasing presence in suburban backyards can, on the surface, be (mis)read as attempts to turn Perth into China's next province. We argue that there are tensions between the sense of security and relevance that access to satellite television programming from mainland China lends these 'new migrants' and the vulnerability that the visible consumption of 'foreign' media subjects them to.

Further, we contend these migrants' efforts to live multiple belongings are better understood within a complex of conditions. We discuss five of these conditions here: Perth's geographical and metaphoric distance from the metropolitan centres of Sydney and Melbourne;

the intense media scrutiny of China in recent times; the rapid closeness and synchronicity between China and Perth for reasons of trade; the dynamics of China's media environment and the mainland Chinese' care and regard for themselves as mobile, global citizens of contemporary society.

Thus reframed, the consumption of foreign media through technology becomes a strategy vital to the new migrants' successful envisioning of themselves within the imagined community of Australia that simultaneously allows them to retain socio-cultural relevance to China. Rather than provincializing Perth, satellite television viewing serves to entrench Chinese new migrants in the Western Australian capital by anchoring them within a broader, enriched and more global framework.

Technology-Afforded Multiple Belongings

There were four of us eager to catch China's Sixtieth Anniversary of Communism parade on 1 October 2009; three originating from mainland China and one from Singapore. In the end, only two of the four had opportunity to view the program as it happened (Perth shares the same time zone as China) via satellite television,¹ the third viewed it online while the last has only since caught snatches of it on YouTube and its Chinese counterpart, Yukou.² Though keen to catch the broadcast, the remaining two, who came to write this paper, were not deeply inconvenienced by the missed opportunity to view the entire event live. The subtle distinctions between our levels of anticipation, manner of access and reactions to this event and its broadcast are, nonetheless, eloquent with the varying sense of emotional and cultural attachment and/or detachment from mainland China. The train of thought they initiated acts as the departure point for this paper, which is, broadly speaking, a discussion on the issues surrounding the access of

¹ That same day, news programs in Australia showed a few seconds of footage and none covered the event in detail though China had long announced its intentions to stage a mass celebration.

² Youku.com styles itself 'China's leading Internet video website and premier online video brand' (<http://www.youku.com>). According to them, there are more than 150 million daily video views on Youku and user time spent exceeds 30 billion minutes per month.

satellite programming from Chinese provincial satellite television stations by mainland Chinese who live in Australia.³

This manner of access is different from that obtained via pay TV services such as Austar, SelecTV and TVB Australia, though some of the content may be the same. There are two points of differences: hardware and continuing costs. Unlike the more modest dishes required to receive content from pay TV operators, hulking dishes of two to three metres in diameter have to be installed to receive satellite content from mainland China (see Figure 1).⁴ However, once installed, these larger dishes allow the reception of content beamed from Asia without need of subscriptions. With appropriate adjustments they can also be used to receive content from Africa, the Middle East, Europe, America and the Atlantic.

[Insert Figure 9.1 here – portrait]

Figure 9.1 Two satellite dishes in a suburban Perth backyard (the larger dish is the one used to access free-to-air content)

Source: Gong Qian 2010.

Such a diverse selection is par for the course in pro-choice, consumer societies. Indeed, for middle-class Chinese, spoilt for choice with over '400 regional television stations and nearly 3,000 television channels' in mainland China, such access would merit no more consideration than the choice of a brand of soap (Lan and Xu 2005: 1). However, at the everyday and lived level within Australia, the large metal dish is an indicator to neighbours, as well as all and sundry passing by, of the preference of a home's occupants for foreign media over, or at least in addition to, the standard array.⁵ The dish looming conspicuously in the corner of residential backyards bespeaks a new dimension of suburban existence in the context of globalization: on

³ Mainland Chinese, in this instance, does not include the Chinese who emigrated from the Special Administrative Regions of Hong Kong and Macau as well as those from Southeast Asia and Taiwan. They shall, henceforth, be referred to as 'new migrants' (*xin yimin*).

⁴ According to Lyngemark Satellite, the larger dishes are needed because of the relatively weaker signal strength of the two satellites, AsiaSat and ChinaSat, used to beam content from China. Satellite television content from many other countries like India, Africa and Europe is also available via the same means. For more details, see <http://www.lyngsat.com>.

⁵ Even more modestly sized dishes of slightly over half a metre can be used to receive content that uploads within Australia that is provided by operators like OptusTV and Foxtel. The kind of content they offer, though, is predominantly English.

the one hand, it foregrounds the multiple choices afforded by the media technology but, on the other, it gives rise to new modes of inclusion and exclusion that invite theorizing.

To start with, does satellite television's appeal, at the risk of alienating one's neighbours, for diasporic audiences signify a kind of cosmopolitan identity, wherein people pledge to 'issues, people, places, and traditions that lie beyond the boundaries of their resident nation-state' (Vertovec and Cohen 2002: 2)? Or does the continued recourse to and responses to its presence go to prove the futility and predicament of multiculturalism; that parochialism and ethnic exclusion are still part of everyday reality and have been even more strengthened because of the affordability of technology? For those who bravely attempt to straddle several cultural spheres, laying claim to multiple belongings even while settling into a new country, the questions that confront them inevitably run towards the following: to which culture, medium and language do they cleave hardest? How do they reconcile the need to sustain contact with their origins with the need to fit in and co-exist with others of different creeds and ways? What might be the consequences of these semi-public gestures and/or display of self-exclusion? More specifically in this instance, does the spread of satellite installations and presence in the suburbs effectively make a Chinese province out of Perth?

It is our argument that these seemingly contrary set of actions and the reception to them are better understood in the context of efforts by mainland Chinese migrants to sustain multiple belongings and security within a complex of developing conditions. These include Perth's geographical and metaphoric distance from the metropolitan centres of Sydney and Melbourne; the rapid closeness and synchronicity between China and Perth; the intense media scrutiny of China in recent times; the dynamics of China's media environment and the mainland Chinese' care and regard for themselves as mobile, global citizens of contemporary society. More broadly, it is our conclusion that only in conjunction with the above can the contradictions of the role that free, continued and easy access to familiar media from the home country has for a migrant's sense of security be properly made sense of. Ultimately, this paper reaffirms the

importance of technology and locality to the enactment of (trans)national migrant identities via media selection and consumption.

Western Australia and China

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, '[t]he number of Chinese born Australians increased nearly six-fold in two decades to be over 310,000 in 2008', with the greatest increase, three-fifths, taking place since the 2006 census (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2009: 1).⁶ In 2006, of those originating from mainland China, 186,000 or 60 per cent speak Mandarin⁷, while 89,990 or 29 per cent speak Cantonese (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2009: 1). Ten years earlier, in 1996, the proportions were reversed, with the total number of Cantonese speakers in Australia amounting to 190,100, compared with 87,300 Mandarin speakers (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1999: 2).

This difference is best explained by the different generations of Chinese migration to Australia. With a few exceptions, earlier Australian–Chinese migrants were either eighteenth and nineteenth century sojourners or descendants of those who arrived in Australia via Southeast Asia nations like Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore.⁸ Thus, they were much more conversant with dialects like Cantonese, Hokkien and Teochew than the Mandarin favoured by China's contemporary 'new migrants' (Sinclair et al. 2001: 36–8). It is no surprise, then, that many later generations of Australian-Chinese read little to no Mandarin or write in the notoriously difficult-to-master language. These shifts in linguistic affinities are significant here because the bulk, if not all, of the content beamed via satellite from China is in Mandarin rather than Chinese dialects. That being the case, satellite television content from China would, therefore, have limited appeal for the more established Australian-Chinese audiences.

⁶ The Australian Bureau of Statistics defines China as excluding the Special Administrative Regions (SARs) of Hong Kong and Macau, as well as Taiwan.

⁷ Mandarin is used here to denote the official language of China sometimes known as *Guoyu* or *Putonghua*. The intention is to differentiate it from Chinese dialects like Cantonese and Hakka.

⁸ According to the Chung Wah Association, for example, the first Chinese immigrant, Moon Chow, was joined by 51 men from Singapore rather than China (Chung Wah Association 2010).

Compared with Victoria and New South Wales, Western Australia (WA) has a much smaller Chinese population. In 2006, within the mix of the overseas-born population resident in Australia, just 0.5 per cent of those born in China settled in WA, whereas New South Wales and Victoria saw the arrival of 2.1 and 1.4 per cent respectively (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2009). One needs only to compare the sprawling, busy and colourful Chinatowns established in Sydney, Chadstone, Melbourne and Box Hill with the two-street affair that passes for Chinatown in Perth to realize how the tiny numbers of Chinese (rather than China-born) have hampered the development and expansion of Chinese networks and facilities in Western Australia. For example, even the largest and longest running ethnic group organization in Perth established since 1909, the Chung Wah Association, has a meagre 2,000 members (Chung Wah Association 2010).

Yet, three factors conspire to place Western Australia in a central position when it comes to Australia–China relations. The first and probably most important factor is the continued, strong demand for Western Australian mineral and gas resources necessitated by China’s push towards infrastructural modernization. The second is Perth’s relative geographical proximity to China. That is to say, while it takes a good thirteen hours to make the journey by air from Beijing to Sydney and almost fifteen hours to do the same from Melbourne, Perth is only eight hours away. This is no small advantage since material resources such as minerals and gases have to be hauled to China. That Perth and China share a time zone is the third factor and, while seemingly no more than convenient for commerce, co-temporality, as this paper argues, has considerable import when it comes to media consumption and migrant security.

Media from the Middle (Kingdom): Chinese Satellite Television

China’s media sphere is currently among the most dynamic in Asia. On top of the Chinese Central Television (CCTV)’s 18 channels, each of China’s 31 provincial TV stations and a whole range of local stations all have its own satellite channel (Li and Jin 2006; Hong, Lü and

Zou, 2009). In addition to targeting provincial audiences, these satellite stations also broadcast to areas outside of provincial terrestrial bounds, with an aim to reach nationwide audiences. As a result of their position as commercial and, hence, nominally semi-autonomous concerns, these Chinese provincial satellite television stations function not so much as the political ‘tongue and throat’⁹, but as sources of revenue for provincial administrations.

Turning a profit is no simple matter and competition for audience numbers among Chinese provincial satellite channels is fierce (Lan and Xu 2005: 8). To date the most successful satellite channel is Hunan Satellite Channel (<http://world.hunantv.com/>). The initial motivation for rolling out satellite television in China was to provide media content and reach to remote and often rural areas (Brady 2009: 443). However, despite strong satellite signal coverage, residents of Chinese cities are only entitled to legal access via local cable television systems for a fee of RMB 20 per month¹⁰ (Lan and Xu 2005: 4). Without a subscription, access to satellite television content within China is deemed illegal. Yet, where they reckon they can get away with it, many people install satellite dishes on the sly. It would not be an exaggeration to say illegally-installed *shanzhai* or pirated satellite dishes, sprouting like mushrooms from the eaves of innumerable homes, are a common sight in urban and rural China. Though authorities try to eliminate unlicensed access, their efforts are viewed as part of the cat-and-mouse game of life in China. An access point and equipment impounded one day can easily be installed elsewhere the next. There is, in short, a vast discrepancy between real and permitted access to satellite television content within China (Lan and Xu 2005: 5).

At present, the diasporic Chinese markets do not seem to register as target audiences for any of these Chinese satellite stations. The most immediate and apparent reason is the immense size and potential of the more profitable and less problematic domestic audience that has still to be wooed. Another likely reason why none of the Chinese satellite stations have ventured to

⁹ This term is commonly used in China and can be understood as somewhat equivalent to the English expression ‘official mouth-piece’.

¹⁰ Equivalent to A\$3.51, in a nation where the average monthly wage was USD\$208 or A\$238.50 in 2009 (*China Economic Review* 2009).

address the diasporic audience is the lack of a viable revenue model. While the Chinese diaspora might comprise a sizeable, pre-qualified audience of Chinese media content, it is hard to envision how local, mainland Chinese businesses might benefit from advertising, still the main source of revenue in television, to these distantly located audiences. At the same time, global brands that want to reach non-China based audiences are better off advertising within their locale of operation, not least because these efforts would be much less politically and commercially fraught.

Generally, the Chinese state's attitude towards media can be summed up as thus: 'the more popular a medium is, the better it can serve as a vehicle for mass propaganda' (Brady 2009: 442). Within the bounds of its capitalist socialist agenda, the Chinese state makes no pretence to liberalism but continues to emphasize the media's role and obligation in nation-building. Inside its domestic territory, the Chinese state jealously guards the permission to transmit content over satellites and is equally stringent as to who is allowed to receive these transmissions and at what cost. Content is also heavily scrutinized and controversial material denied airtime by the State Administration of Film, Radio and Television (SAFRT) before it reaches the television sets of China's billion plus population (Brady 2009). Failure to comply with these strict guidelines could result in the suspension of broadcasting licences. Foreign operators of satellite television within China, such as Rupert Murdoch's StarTV and Phoenix television, have to tread carefully between the potential the Chinese market holds for affluent and eager advertisers and the commercial viability firmly framed in the Chinese government's terms.

Yet, outside of China, when, where and what is broadcast through China's satellite stations is not regulated in any form. It is difficult to discern if this is an unintentional spill-over or benign neglect. However, since 2005, what is abundantly clear is that China's rise as a superpower in the economy, politics and military has resolved Beijing to invest heavily in the management of its international image. The turn towards the exercise of soft power acknowledges the importance of creating a 'new, extended electronic frontier, whereby the

entire world, not just the domestic space of the PRC and the diasporic Chinese space, is brought under the purview of Chinese media's ideological or cultural dissemination' (Sun 2010: 2). This is, in turn, backed up by a generous six-billion US dollar budget with the agenda to bolster Chinese media services to the world, improving its magnitude, volume and technology as well as the appeal of its communication (Sun 2010). Hence, while the diasporic Chinese communities are one source of investment, they also play a pivotal role in improving the image of the Chinese government (Sun 2009).

However, the way this trans-border flow of media is used by the Chinese diaspora in Australia is not simply confined to generating a sense of national belongings for those living here. Media technology such as the satellite dish is used in diverse ways in the everyday life of the diasporic Chinese communities. It performs the mundane role of providing daily entertainment to the old and the young who stay at home. The multiple channels available greatly enrich the media environment of the migrants. The language, format and cultural symbols of the TV program are more familiar to new migrants. For migrants with better education, consuming TV services from home and the host country grants them a sense of cosmopolitanism. This assertion of cosmopolitanism is especially wanting in Perth, a place renowned for its isolation from other cosmopolitan urban centres. This affiliation with the culture of the sending society and host society is not necessarily a zero-sum game.

The Dish in Perth

Granted that the Chinese state does not interfere with the reception of satellite television content outside its borders, what happens when Chinese programs are received in Perth, Western Australia? Indeed, what are the conditions that facilitate the reception of such media? The material and economic conditions that surround the presence of these media are, in themselves, complex situated phenomena born of Australia's federal constitution, Perth's geographical location and municipal administrations.

Officially, there are no providers of free-to-air satellite television content from China to Australia. Despite the telling presence of extra large satellite dishes, no local or international media company claims to be the provider of these transmissions into Perth. Instead, a motley crew of unofficial operators ensures access to satellite media content from China. Each plays a separate, modular role and makes its own contribution to the final assembly. Satellite dishes are, for example, typically installed by backyard operators for prices ranging from a modest A\$700 for the rigid, fixed dishes to A\$1,500 for the adjustable ones. Their services are advertised by word-of-mouth and through 'ethnic media' such as community newspapers.

Up-to-date, know-all websites maintained by satellite dish manufacturers and suppliers like Lyngsat and Satsig¹¹ list the channels available and even supply specific information on the directions satellites sited in Australia should face for optimum reception. Details of the individual programs broadcast by each station are similarly available via web sites updated by the individual stations. As a result of Perth's temporal synchronicity with China, Western Australian audiences also get to enjoy Chinese media content via satellite without temporal disruption.

Finally, apart from the necessity of applying for a permit from the relevant town council that runs one's neighbourhood and the consent of neighbours, there is no obstacle to installing the hefty two- to three-metre wide mesh satellite dish outdoors. The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) is the federal body charged with the overall responsibility for the production and broadcast of media content within Australia. Its remit covers the whole gamut from content classification and airwave spectrum to broadcasting licences.¹² Yet the ACMA has no national policy or guidelines that govern how satellite dish

¹¹ See <http://www.satsig.net/maps/satellite-tv-dish-pointing-australia-new-zealand.htm> for Satsig and <http://www.lyngsat.com/freetv/China.html> for Lyngsat.

¹² See <http://www.acma.gov.au/WEB/HOME/PAGE/PC=HOME> for more details.

installations and/or overseas satellite content are regarded within Australia's borders.¹³ Nor do the individual states and territories appear to have a uniform approach on the matter.

Within Western Australia, for example, each local council implements its own policy as it deems fit. For some councils, satellite dish installations are regarded no differently from the erection of a garden shed or a 'chook pen' in the suburban backyard. The Metropolitan Town Planning Scheme, for example, states that the aim is to 'minimalise the visual impact of dishes and antennae on residential areas by encouraging discreet development' (City of Canning Council 2004).

In most cases, as above, a permit is only called for when the size of the intended satellite goes beyond one metre. The fact that these dishes are media transmission devices appears to be given little thought. As an informant, a city council employee, reveals, many households do not even seek permits but rely instead on the good-natured assent and discretion of their neighbours. It is possible that the absence of media regulation in Australia with respect to free-to-air satellite media content is simply a reflection of the Chinese media's own inattention to the smaller, though widespread diasporic market. What is equally plausible is to understand such intimate, localized negotiations between neighbours to be the very substance of co-existence in multiculturalism.

Transnationality as Zigzag Practices

In his study of mainland Chinese migrants in Melbourne, Gao (2006: 213) advocates a more sophisticated framework for transnationality. He argues that migrants adopt a dynamic, 'zigzag' tactic that allows them to 'maintain contact with and relevance to both the country of origin and the host country'. This strategy, Gao's findings suggest, takes place even as their sense of belonging develops and changes. Can Gao's claims be applied to 'new migrants' who settle in

¹³ However, the ACMA does have policies in place to govern the upload and beaming of media content via Australian-controlled satellites. See, for example, http://www.acma.gov.au/WEB/STANDARD/pc=PC_560.

Perth, Western Australia? In search of a more contextualized, nuanced study of migrants' multiple allegiances, we conducted a small number of qualitative interviews.

Our preliminary findings show satellite television to be a crucial element of everyday life, though not always for the expected reasons. For example, migrant families with young children tend to send for their parents from China to help with the care of young children, a move that mirrors the multi-generational family structure entrenched in China¹⁴. However, customs do not always translate smoothly to new environments and, as at least one interviewee discovered, media beamed directly from the home country can be both a godsend and the root of tension.

Sun, a Chinese marketing officer working in a Sino-Australia joint-venture, comments that his parents-in-law's opinion of Perth would be significantly less favourable without the satellite dish and the Chinese programs it transmits to his home. Not only does access to Chinese media allow the in-laws to keep in touch with events at home in China, the satellite dish also provides access to Phoenix TV, a channel they could not afford in China. Being able to watch four to five hours of this previously inaccessible channel each day appears to have eased the wrench of the old folks uprooting from China. Another interviewee (HJ) professes to have installed the dish with the same motives but now frets that her children might be watching too much television courtesy of her mother-in-law, who leaves the set tuned to China all day long. Needless to say, this worry is a source of much tension in the family.

With little or no ability to converse in or understand English, older 'new migrants' are largely confined to the home in Australia, with little recourse to companionship outside the family. Their longer-range mobility is also circumscribed by the lack of either a valid driving license and/or sufficient knowledge of Australian road networks. For this subset of 'new migrants', satellite television programs are akin to emotional 'nannies', providing cultural sustenance at a very affordable cost. Their situations echo those of their American-Chinese counterparts, inasmuch as studies there have found 'in multi-generational households where the

¹⁴ Although less common in the Australian context, the multi-generational family structure is common even in contemporary Chinese households, where the preference is for grandparents rather than trained professionals to be the secondary caregiver of children when both parents are at work.

middle generation speaks English, Chinese TV serves their monolingual Chinese parents, acting as a babysitter for the elderly' (Wallack and Ning 2005).

Thompson (1999: 175, original emphasis) writes of the 'symbolic distancing' that allows individuals to separate themselves from the '*spatial-temporal contexts of everyday life*' and this, in a sense, is what this subset attempts when they turn continuously to content beamed from China. As they immerse themselves in and construct imaginaries that are suffused with signs and signifiers of China, they look away from everyday life in Perth. We could regard their actions as a determination to remain culturally and socially current with and relevant in the symbolic world of China. Given their transplantation from familiar surroundings to alien environs, their symbolic distancing makes perfect sense.

However, the situation is perhaps more complex than the above analysis shows. For example, the preference the elderly 'new migrants' have for contemporary programs contradict the 'disrupted nostalgia' and need for 'a mythologised imaginary' that Karanfil's (2009) research finds with older, longer established Turkish migrants to Australia. Rather, the distancing that relocated Chinese grandparents indulge in is firmly grounded in the present. This is despite being the counterparts of the Turkish migrants in years. Instead of looking backwards to the China left behind, the Chinese (grand) migrants look towards a China very much in the mainstream of events, as an economic powerhouse. Some part of this agency might be attributed to their families' affluence as, unlike earlier generations of Chinese migrants, most of those now arriving from China are of the middle class (Viviani 2010: 9). The other possible reason for their preference for contemporaneity is the recent nature of the Chinese (grand) migrants' relocation, albeit at a later stage of life.

Yet, while the older generation's reliance on Chinese satellite TV can be partly explained by a lack of linguistic skills, the younger generation, who usually possess sufficient knowledge to enjoy Australian television's mostly English programs, sometimes still prefer to create a pseudo-Chinese cultural bubble by turning to Chinese programs. In fact, all the interviewees confirm that they watch Chinese satellite television just as frequently as their elders. Most

profess to watch this not only for information but also for entertainment. Others will catch the news on Australian channels but follow Chinese soap operas and dramas via satellite.

The above suggests there is a separation of the need for practical knowledge, such as that garnered from local Australian news broadcasts for the immediate material, day-to-day existence, from the materials necessary to sustain a sense of belonging. It might also be reflective of the fact that many Chinese migrants find that, apart from the coverage offered on SBS (Special Broadcasting Services), Australian commercial television stations are sorely lacking in their coverage of international news (Sinclair et al. 2001: 77–88). Satellite news, in a sense, supplements their diet of broader current events outside Australia.

Many of our interviewees profess also to be ambivalent about the prospects of permanent settlement in Australia. Consequently, they are keen to maintain their currency with developments within China. Of the four of us with which this paper began, XH is the one for whom this dilemma is most urgent. Like many Asian nations, including Malaysia and Singapore, China does not allow dual citizenship. XH is, thus, poised on a knife-edge, unable to come to a decision as the possibility of becoming an Australian and forsaking his Chinese nationality approaches. For him, major Chinese events such as the sixtieth anniversary parade are painful reminders of what might be lost as well as gained. In addition, here, they also serve to magnify the merits and perils of distinguishing between cultural and politico-legal allegiances. XH is of the younger, English-speaking generation of ‘new migrants’ of whom it might be said that ‘Chinese-language diasporic media gives ... [them] ... a chance to affirm, on a daily basis, their cultural and social loyalty, thereby carving a diasporic subject position of difference’ (Sun 2005: 9). Their politico-legal allegiance, though, remains an exercise in risk assessment, finely balanced within the equation of social inclusion and exclusion.

The one characteristic common to all the subsets mentioned above, from the older folks and their English-literate offspring to those like XH, is the desire to keep abreast of what is happening in China. For them, the fact that there is no discernible temporal gap between WA and China should be understood as more than just a mere boon. Compared to, say, viewers of

Chinese news programs resident in Melbourne who must either contend with ‘yesterday’s news’ or view them at odd times (Sinclair et al, 2001: 52–3), news and coverage on events in China are received ‘live’ in Western Australia. Coevality means that though nearly 8,000 kilometres away, China is as present to Perth viewers of free-to-air Chinese satellite television content as they are to Beijing residents. As time and space are ontological categories that shape human views of the world, the experience of contemporaneity must lend the new migrants’ quest for balancing currency and symbolic affinity with emotional allegiance and security in the face of spatial distance, significant emphasis as well as disorienting complexity.

Developing Conditions and Broader Contexts

What follows from the above is that two factors are of paramount importance in the establishment of security, belonging and inclusion of the migrant through media choice and consumption. The first is the continued geopolitical and cultural importance of geography. This is especially pertinent in Australia, a continent with many miles between its cities. For the ‘new migrant’ families who settle in Perth, a city distant, both spatially and temporally, from the other capitals of Australia, with a minute mainland Chinese population, free-to-air satellite television is both a necessary and expedient consolation, a means of finding some emotional and cultural security. It must also seem, for many, to make better sense to cleave to what is geographically and symbolically close than what is distant.

The second factor of importance is the state of broader conditions and developments surrounding migration. For example, in recent times, media scrutiny of China’s policy and actions on Tibet and the Chinese reaction to the screening of the Uighur leader Rebiya Kadeer’s film, *The 10 Conditions of Love*, in Australia have stirred anti-Chinese sentiment (Mercer 2009, Alford 2009). Though uniting might be too positivist a term, these criticisms of China and, through misguided extrapolation, many things Chinese, have had the unsurprising effect of provoking an urge to defend and speak up for China (Leong 2009). The extent to which these

pro-China sentiments and demonstrations are engineered by the Chinese state is moot but they have, at the very least, served to sharpen the focus on issues of multiple belongings for many Chinese in Australia.

Yet, in enabling the cultural sustenance of the China-born diaspora, satellite television can lead to the deepening of the differences that separate mainland Chinese migrants from those descended from earlier waves of Chinese emigration. Despite having a common written form, Mandarin, Cantonese, Hakka and other Chinese dialects are verbally distinct and monolingual speakers of each are often unintelligible to each other. As McKay and Wong (1996: 585) find, dialect differences 'encoding regional, subcultural, political and socioeconomic differences, could be a source of division and exclusion'.

The divergent ethno-linguistic affinities within Chinese communities mean many of the longer established Australian-Chinese communities are excluded from the contemporary Chinese media sphere that mainland Chinese-Australians draw their socio-cultural references from. Rather, the longer established Chinese migrants' view of the world is informed mostly through the same avenues that the majority of Australians have access to. The disparity between their world-view and those of the 'new migrants' is, hence, considerable even though to all appearances these communities are similar, down to their customs, cuisine and social practices. Such intra-ethnic tensions were evidenced during the contest for the chairmanship of Perth's Chung Wah Association between representatives of the Cantonese-speaking and Mandarin-speaking sectors of the Chinese community (Cui 2007). Within China, protests in Hong Kong protests over Mandarin being substituted for Cantonese on television broadcasts in China's Special Administrative Region have demonstrated the same tensions (Spegele 2010).

Suffice it to say, then, that the cultural-linguistic distinctions are keenly felt and delineate the gaps between the 'new migrants' and the wider Chinese community living in Australia. And they stand to be considerably widened through television content beamed directly from China. This, in turn, impacts on how well groups like that of the 'new migrants' are able to fit in with existent, entrenched migrant communities to find both security and stability. The degree of

separation might be ameliorated as some of the non-Chinese-speaking Chinese seek to reconnect with their roots and others look to parlay their ancestry to advantage in today's China-centric commercial world. It is also possible that, as more mainland Chinese migrants settle permanently in Australia, they may in time come to experience lives closer to that led by the rest of the Australian Chinese community than that lived in China.

Conclusion

It is clear that for migrants to achieve some sense of security, even for those who speak the language of the adopted nation, it is essential to maintain some way of staying relevant to a wider customary imaginary. For most migrants, removal from familial and socio-cultural support and knowledge networks mean that the transition is a difficult one, even for middle-class ones like the contemporary mainland Chinese. Media from home like free-to-air satellite television can ameliorate the lack of mooring that many experience even as they endeavour to establish new networks.

At the beginning of this paper we asked whether the proliferation of satellite dishes in Perth's backyards is cause to believe that the city was being converted into a satellite Chinese province, implicit within the question was the assumption that migrant security resides in a replication of the familiar. While being ensconced within familiar media seems an essential part of the strategy new migrants adopt for smoothing over the transition from old to new homes, our research suggests the issue of achieving security for migrants to be far more replete with contradictions than supposed.

Nonetheless, access to satellite media content is more than a question of maintaining the familiar, because the act of modern migration is a deliberate insertion of the self into an alien environment. As such, it entails an intentional leave-taking of the familiar. A sense of security is the main reason migrants look to media from home. Such surety is a function of knowing where one stands in relation to others. Within contemporary societies the media provides much of that

vital information. Hence, neither new migrants themselves nor their neighbours should be surprised by the necessity for media content from China. What is needed is a better understanding of and research into the conditions and reasons behind migrants seeking access to media from their place of origin, so the sight of satellite dishes and their like might be read as cause to reach out rather than retreat from one's neighbours.

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