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## **Re-generating the Cultural Identity and Social Network Abroad**

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### **Abstract:**

It is overlooked by many researchers in China that the Cultural Identity and Social Network were Re-generated overseas, not originally from the homeland, such as Chinese networks from Indo-China, and the multi-name clan associations outside China. The Chinese Christian networks in North America even surmounted some obstacles to religious belief from homeland. Similar experiences and backgrounds shaped the identity of Chinese immigrant groups. The common origin, common pursuits, interests, and beliefs all play a role in one way or another in forming the mutual trust and setting certain restraints within networks. The mechanism of credibility is strengthened in repeat games inside the business networks or the economic activities of the ethnic Chinese. Actually, almost every ethnic Diaspora forms the social networks of one kind or another based on their new found identities overseas.

**Key Words:** Chinese Christian, Cultural Identity, Social Network, Outside China

More and more immigrants from Mainland China are becoming involved in the Chinese Christian networks in North America. Such Christian networks do not pre-exist in their home country. On the contrary, their cultural identities and social networks were regenerated in Canada and USA by overcoming cultural barriers derived from their homeland. Other social networks such as Indo-Chinese refugees' networks and numerous clan or kinship associations are also originated overseas whereas they are almost non-existent in China. It is certainly not an adequate explanation that the Chinese immigrants rebuild their social networks overseas because they share a common language and cultural background. It is also, as this paper will demonstrate, their common experiences overseas, interests and welfares that give rise to the regeneration of Chinese immigrants' identity and networks in the far-away lands.

## 1. CHINESE CHRISTIAN NETWORKS: OBSTACLES TO RELIGIOUS BELIEF FROM HOMELAND ARE SURMOUNTED

It is very difficult for non-religious Chinese immigrants from Mainland China to become religious believers, and subsequently pay their reverence for a supernatural power or powers, i.e., "god," as their creator and the governor of the universe. It is equally difficult for the Chinese to make transitions from the Confucian influence in their traditional culture to the Christian beliefs that were of Western origin<sup>1</sup>.

However, more and more Chinese from Mainland China in North America are converted into Christians with an increasing number of Chinese Christian churches in U.S. and Canada. Christianity has become the most practiced religion among Chinese immigrants in America. However, there are very few scholarly researches on the Chinese Christians and their churches in North America<sup>2</sup>. This paper will reveal the underlying reasons how the Chinese immigrants reconstruct their identity and social/religious networks abroad.

Chinese Christians congregate in big metropolis with a sizable Chinese population. Most of Chinese immigrants' churches are located in the five biggest metropolises with the largest Chinese population in North America. They are Toronto, Vancouver, New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. There are also a great number of Chinese churches in other metropolitan areas. While the Chinese population in Canada is 1.5 million, their churches are numbered at

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<sup>1</sup> Many Chinese people associate Christianity with "western religion". Actually, Christianity originated from the Middle East, not from Europe. It is not a religion of Western origin, although many Chinese people think that is the case. According to some Chinese Christians, Christianity reached China and took root there much earlier than in North America (at least as early as 9th century). However, Christians were persecuted. The news about Jesus Christ and the Bible could only be spread quietly and privately throughout most of China's history. In Europe and later in North America, the news about Jesus Christ and the Bible could be spread more freely. That is the reason why Christianity has had stronger influence in the west, according to Ms Eva, a Chinese Christian in MA.

<sup>2</sup> Fenggang Yang, *Chinese Christians in America, Conversion, Assimilation, and Adhesive Identities* (Penn State University Press, 1999).

276, 78% of which are located in only two provinces, Ontario and British Columbia. 25% and 16% of the churches are located in the cities of Toronto and Vancouver respectively.

**Table 1 Top 5 metropolis with Chinese churches in North America**

New York	Toronto and Scarborough	San Francisco	Vancouver	Los Angeles and Monterey Park
76	59	55	46	34

Resource: www.immanuel.net

**Table 2 Number of Chinese churches in Canada**

Province, churches, %	Churches of metropolis	
British Columbia, 81, 29.3	Vancouver, 44	Victoria, 3
Alberta, 37, 13.4	Calgary, 18	Edmonton, 11
Saskatchewan, 5, 1.8	Regina, 3	Saskatoon, 2
Manitoba, 8, 3.0	Winnipeg, 7	
Ontario, 134, 48.6	Toronto, 69	Ottawa, 6 Windsor, 3
Quebec, 11, 4.0	Montreal, 5	Halifax, 2
Total, 276, 100.0		

**Table 3 Number of Chinese churches in Greater Boston**

Language	Mandarin/Chinese	Cantonese	English	Taiwanese
Churches	15	12	8	3
Originate	Mainland, Taiwan	Hong Kong, Canton, Southeast Asia	Native	Taiwan

There are 27 Chinese churches in Massachusetts. Among them 22 are in the Greater Boston Area where over 100,000 Chinese live. 15 churches conduct their services in Mandarin or Chinese, 12 in Cantonese, 8 in English and 3 in Taiwanese. 13 churches conduct their services in two or three different local dialects or languages mentioned above. The first Chinese immigrant church in Boston was established in 1940s, followed by the second and the third in 1960s. The core members of the early churches are from Taiwan and Hong Kong. Most of them are pre-1980s immigrants to the Boston area. Since early 1990s, the majority of church members are recent professional immigrants from Mainland China.

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Chinese churches have expanded over the years with the influx of newly-arrived immigrants, especially those from mainland China. Boston Chinese Evangelical Church (BCEC) is the second oldest Chinese church in Massachusetts. It was established in Chinatown in 1961 with only 18 members. Now BCEC has become the largest congregation with almost 1000 worshippers every Sunday. The Mandarin and Cantonese services take place in the main church building while the English service takes place at an elementary school right behind it. The BCEC launched a new campus in 2003 in Newton, about 15 minutes by car from downtown Boston. It is BCEC's vision to branching out its services and locations closer to the expanding Chinese population in the Boston suburbs as their Christian outreach. The Newton campus is located in a newly purchased 100-plus-year-old former church. Most fellowship groups are combined with the Chinatown campus in order to share resources.

Chinese Bible Church in Greater Boston (CBCGB), established in the 1970s, is the third oldest Chinese church in Massachusetts. CBCGB now has almost 1000 parishioners. Many of its members are the Chinese or Chinese-American professionals with newly-mint U.S. university degrees. In October 2006, CBCGB launched its offshoot site Metro-west Church in the western part of Greater Boston area.

Chinese immigrants are attracted to the Christian church for a number of reasons. First, the church provides a welcoming and warm social environment with interesting and appealing activities to the immigrants who, far away from their homeland, often feel socially isolated. Most of them need help to acclimatize themselves to the new country. Churches such as CBCGB provide many community programs designed for promoting socialization and friendship among Chinese immigrants. They also offer training and services for young children, junior, and senior high school students through a variety of educational, inspirational, recreational and community service programs. For many college students, young couples and professionals, the Chinese church represents a warm, friendly and caring community. Church activities and congregations such as women's fellowship are popular among young couples, families and especially women who share the same life stages in an environment of different language, culture and custom.

Second, Chinese immigrant churches are also engaged its missionary works as part of the global Christian forces. The development of the Chinese churches in North America testifies to the glory of Christ, in Chinese Christians' mind. In their early existence, the Chinese churches had difficulties in supporting themselves financially and had hardly involved in missionary outreach works. By the late 1960s, with the increase of the Chinese professionals in North America, the financial status of the Chinese churches has been greatly improved. The Chinese churches operating with "three-self principles"<sup>3</sup> began to appear in North America.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Self-government, self-support, and self-propagation.

<sup>4</sup> Zhongxin Wang, 'The Chinese Church Experience in North America', [www.cwts.edu](http://www.cwts.edu), last accessed 15 Feb, 2006.

Gospel Carrier International Inc. (GCI) is an evangelical organization established solely for spreading Christian faith. Its source of financial support comes from churches and individuals in North America and other parts of the world. GCI, established in 1993, is based in Maryland to promote preaching and provide discipleship assistance to distant areas. The organization support includes a ministry staff, aircraft operations and maintenance, office building and equipments, evangelical outreach, general funding, and other most-needed areas. GCI acquired its first gospel aircraft in 1995, and another eight seat gospel plane in 1998. They use aircraft as a convenient means of transportation for missionary workers to reach out to distant towns, cities, and counties.<sup>5</sup> GCI in its mission statement indicates that “We use literature, multi-media, and modern transportation to overcome geographical barriers for advancing the Lord's Great Commission to bring the gospel of the salvation of Jesus Christ and his love to the needy in distant towns, cities, and counties”.<sup>6</sup> GCI also helps the Chinese Christians maintain close ties with one another in various North American cities, especially among those in Toronto, Chicago and Cleveland in the Greater Lakes area, as well as New England.

It is no surprise that North America has become the center of the Chinese Christian world. From there the Chinese Christian churches dispatch mission groups to the other parts of the world to spread the Christian faith. They do that by providing the areas they had reached with educational, medical, and other services.

CBCGB, or Chinese Bible Church in Greater Boston, supports over 30 missionaries working in five Continents, including North America, South America, Europe, Africa, and Asia. U.S. ministries include working with college students and immigrants. Overseas ministries include Bible translation, church building friendship outreach, evangelism, and pastoral training. In BCEC or Boston Chinese Evangelical Church, 19 evangelists are working in the different parts of the world, including 7 in China, 3 in Hong Kong, 1 in Philippines, 1 in Mongolia, plus several others in America, Africa, Middle East, and Central Asia.

The Short-Term Missions subcommittee at CBCGB is created primarily to promote partnership with and provide training to those potential short-term missionaries who intend to participate in either domestic or international cross-cultural ministries, or both. The churches strive to provide resources, mentoring, and prayer support for those individuals participating in short-term missions. From BCEC, 22 Short-Term Missions were sent all over the world between 1987 and 2005. Individual members/missionaries were supported in 25 countries and some US cities.

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<sup>5</sup> Light aircraft operates efficiently for remote outreach rather than long-distance driving. Flight schedule is flexible and the aircraft may be utilized on an as-needed basis. There is no check-in and boarding procedure for aircraft passengers. This saves time and it is a convenient tool for advancing a series of outreach meetings in various distant areas. 国际福音飞行事工。

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.gci-gospel.org/eng\\_mission.html](http://www.gci-gospel.org/eng_mission.html).

Some Chinese evangelists from North America traveled to Europe where they found more and more Chinese and new immigrants as their Gospel preaching audience<sup>7</sup>. Most of the evangelists are returning to Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Mainland China, the Chinese Christian's homeland, where the early Chinese Christian ministers once left and emigrated overseas.

These newly-established Chinese social networks are built upon Christianity. They do not pre-exist in the Chinese Christians' homeland. Once settled in their adopted countries, some Chinese immigrants gradually broke away from their homeland's ideological/ psychological /cultural baggage, and reconstructed their cultural identities and social networks through Christianity in Canada and the United States.

There are two major obstacles for the immigrants from Mainland China in their transformation to Christianity. The first are atheism and the theory of evolution, which are deeply rooted in the socialist ideology and education among the Chinese people since 1949. It is a thorough transformation when the Chinese immigrants turn to a Christian God for their life's guidance.

The second is the unique traditional Chinese culture which, inclusive of Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism, is quite different from Christianity in both form and content. The transformation to Christians also means for many Chinese an evolution in their system of thinking and expression. The Chinese version of the Bible is not easy reading; the translation is stiff and rough. In many cases, there are no proper Chinese terms that correspond to the concepts in the Bible. A lack of familiarity on Christian background and stories among the Chinese readers also makes the Bible foreign, confusing, and difficult to comprehend. In one example, when the term "sin" is translated into Chinese as zui (罪), it is equal to the meaning of "crime" (罪) in Chinese. There is no specialized term in Chinese contains the meaning of "sin" as in the Bible. In another example, the God in Chinese means Shang Di (上帝), which is also different from the meaning of the God in the Christian world. On the contrary, Buddhism has a long history in China and its scripture has become part of the Chinese culture and even vocabulary.

Many Chinese immigrants are intellectuals with advanced degrees such as PhDs in sciences and engineering. Some of them have previously argued with the ministers and their Christian friends and resisted the religion for years due to their prior education in the theory of evolution and sciences. It took many of them long time to finally become Christians. It is even more difficult for the intellectuals with background in humanities and social sciences to embrace Christianity as their religion. They bear stronger Chinese cultural influences. When they read the Bible in Chinese, they found it hard to understand due to different ways of thinking and language expressions. In addition, the meaning of the terms and concepts in the Bible are foreign to the traditional Chinese culture. Unlike Buddhism which has become part of Chinese history and culture for many centuries, there are no Bible stories and characters pre-existing in the Chinese culture.

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<sup>7</sup> Chinese Overseas Christian Mission, Headquarters in UK.

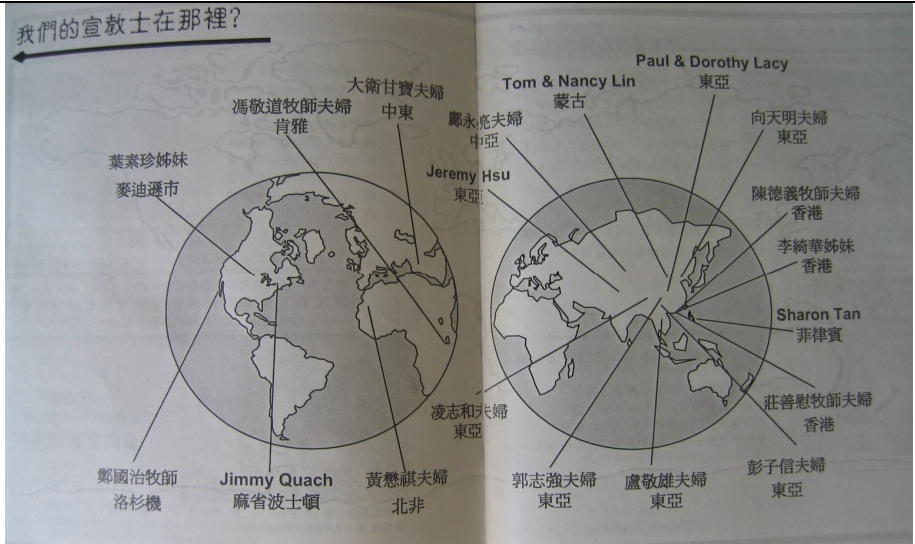


Figure 1 Boston, MA, Chinese Evangelical Church, Missions supported by Boston Chinese Evangelical Church

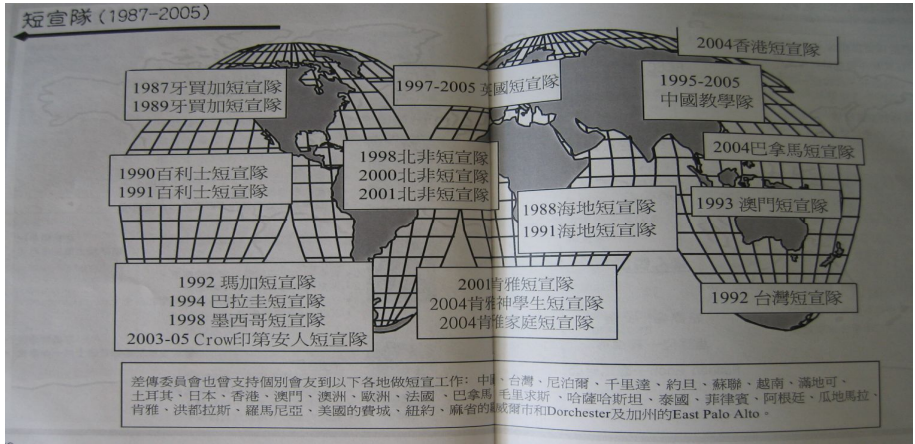


Figure 2 Boston, MA, Chinese Evangelical Church, Short-term Missions sent by Boston Chinese Evangelical Church



**Figure 3 The church in Chinese building in Chicago Chinatown (August, 2006)**

When the Chinese immigrants become Christians, a social network is formed with religion as the conduit. God, Christ and the Bible become the guiding faith and the governor for those who joined the Christian community. The tenet, church, famous minister, and popular readings become their symbols to identify the denomination.

The social networks of the Chinese Christians formed in North America also strive to extend their social impacts all over the world, especially their homeland including mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong. They also reached the rising Chinese population in Europe where Christianity was first established and later spread out. The basis of their new identity and social networks does not originate from their homeland. On the contrary, their newfound religion affiliations tie them together after overcoming the ideological/psychological/cultural barriers brought with them from their homeland.

## 2. RECONSTRUCT THE IDENTITY ABROAD: OTHER CHINESE NETWORKS

The Chinese Christian network is not an isolated phenomenon of immigrants from Mainland China or Taiwan. In this paper there will be a brief survey of other overseas Chinese networks as well.

The first example is the networks of those ethnic Chinese migrated from Indo-China. They immigrated from several countries in that region, including Vietnam (both South and North), Cambodia, and Laos. Their Chinese ancestors were originally emigrated from Teochew, Canton, Hakka, Fukien and Hainan of China. They were scattered around in various countries and subdivided into different dialectical groups. Most of them had little contact with one



another when they were in Indo-China. While in Europe and America, they came together and formed their own unique Indo-Chinese networks based on their common life experiences nonetheless. These ethnic Chinese were persecuted in the socialist revolution of Indo-China during 1970s. They had to escape as refugees and settled in strange cities. Many of them finally established their new lives in western countries. They are Chinese and Vietnamese/Cambodian/Laotian in identity. Being both Chinese descendants and Indo-China immigrants, they formed their own social networks as a subgroup of ethnic Chinese in America rather than being amalgamated into other subgroups of Chinese-Americans<sup>8</sup>. Meanwhile, they have maintained their identity as a subgroup of Vietnamese, Cambodian, or Laotian-Americans.

Some of them settled in Chinatown or in other Chinese communities in America. Many Vietnamese immigrants of ethnic Chinese origin also tend to own their own businesses as other Chinese immigrants usually do. There are many Chinese-Vietnamese owned supermarkets, restaurants, beauty parlors, and auto repair shops in the mainly general mixed-Chinese commercial thoroughfares in Chinatown as in the case of Monterey Park, California. The cases studied by Chan, meanwhile, include the various volunteer associations of Chinese-Vietnamese, Chinese-Cambodian, and Chinese-Laotians in Montreal, Canada.<sup>9</sup>

Some Chinese-Vietnamese mixed together with other Vietnamese refugees in the well-known Vietnamese-American communities called "Little Saigon". Ethnic Vietnamese are predominant population in Little Saigon where, in many cases, a large number of Chinese-Vietnamese from Indo-China also choose to live. Many of the Chinese-Vietnamese arrived in North America during the second refugee wave in 1980. They own a large share of businesses in Little Saigon today.<sup>10</sup> Viet Wah Supermarket, a business on 1035 S. Jackson St., Seattle, was first established in 1988 by Duc Tran, a Chinese refugee from Vietnam. It is now the largest Southeast Asian owned supermarket in Seattle, Washington. Situated in "Little Saigon," the supermarket is a thriving cluster of shops and restaurants that make up the heaviest single concentration of Vietnamese businesses in that state.<sup>11</sup>

The world-wide associations established by the Chinese from Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia span North America, Europe, Australia and Southeast Asia. They hold world-wide conferences in different locations across the globe once a year.

The second example is the Chinese immigrants' clan or kinship associations. Clan Associations (宗亲会) are formed by the Chinese immigrants on the basis of same family names among their members. Early Chinese immigrants were used to band together with those who share the same

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<sup>8</sup> Liang Maochun, 'The Adaptation of Ethnic Vietnamese Chinese in America', *Huaqiao Huaren Lishi Yanjiu* 华侨华人历史研究, 1 (2007), 32-43.

<sup>9</sup> Chan Kwok-bun, *Migration, Ethnic relations and Chinese Business* (Routledge: London and New York, 2005), p. 100.

<sup>10</sup> 'Little Saigon', '<http://www.answers.com/topic/little-saigon>', last accessed 2 March. 2014.

<sup>11</sup> <http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/neighbors/id/todo.html>

surnames to form mutual help associations. The clan associations are still wide-spread among overseas Chinese. It is mainly for the clan to look after its fellow members. It is very interesting that there are multi-name clan associations outside China.

For instance, Lung Kong Tin Yee Association (龙冈亲义公所) is composed of 4 clans: Liu, Guan, Zhang, and Zhao. Its origin may be traced back to a legendary story of friendship almost two thousand years ago. Long-gang temple, an ancient temple set up in 1662, is located in Kaiping, Guangdong, a famous qiaoxiang (homeland of overseas Chinese) of southern China. The first overseas Long-gang temple was set up at San Francisco in 1876. Thereafter, Lung Kong Tin Yee Association was formed one after another in countries around the world like Canada, Mexico, Cuba, Peru, Australia, Thailand, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, and Singapore. The Global Lung Kong Tin Yee Association came into existence in 1963. The total number of its member associations in the world reaches 143 with only one temple in the homeland.

Traditionally in China, the clan associations not only limit their members to the same surname, but also the same or a single ancestry. That same surname or common ancestry usually is shared by only a small portion of the Chinese population at different locations overseas, however. It is therefore helpful and beneficial for several surname clans to come together to form one large association. In a number of cases, some clans can even find a historical story to connect one another and justify the formation of a multi-clan association. The global organizations of multi-clan associations first appeared in 1960s. They have been spread widely since 1970s.

Chew Lun Association (Chau Luen Towe 昭伦公所) is composed of 4 surnames (谈、谭、许、谢). Toronto Chew Lun Association added one more surname Ruan (阮) and became an association with 5 surnames. (Note: Chew Lun Assoc was established in SF in 1896; therefore, multi-surname clan association have a long history in North America—US, Canada.)

Liu Kwee Tang (六桂堂) is composed of 6 clans, Hong, Jiang, Wen, Fang, Gong, Wang (洪、江、翁、方、龚、汪). It is believed by the clan members that the six surnames in Fukien of Southern China were from the same Wen family. The historical story is that Mr. Wen's six sons fled from North to Fukien in Song Dynasty. Later on, they all became office holders by passing the imperial examinations together.

Gee De clan association (至德宗亲会) includes five surnames: Wu, Zhou, Cai, Wen, Cao (吴、周、蔡、翁、曹). It is believed by the clan members that they were all originated from one common ancestry. Its global clan association was established in 1974.

Gee How Oak Tin Association (至孝笃亲公所) includes Chan, Woo & Yuen (陳、胡、袁). Some of its branch associations even include six surnames, adding Tian, Sun, and Lu (田、孙、陆) three more surnames. With 27 branch associations in the U.S, Canada, and Mexico, Gee How Oak Tin Family Association is the largest Chinese family association in Washington State. Individuals with the surnames of Chin, Woo and Yuen belong to this organization. It

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provides housing, cultural activities and other services to its members. The Oak Tin Association was first formed in Seattle in 1900.<sup>12</sup>

The association with the most surnames is the one with ten surnames, all believed to be descended from Shun (舜), the second great emperor in ancient China. The 10 surnames are Chan, Woo, Yuen, Yao, Yu, Tian, Sun, Lu, Wang, and Che (陈、胡、袁、姚、虞、田、孙、陆、王、车) with a total population around 150 million all over the world. There are more than 100 associates of ten Shun' descendants in the world. The international sodality has been held in different cities around the world since 1982.

Some other clan associations have also merged together. The Zhuang clan association and Yan clan association at Singapore were combined in 1990. The two surnames of Zhuang (庄) and Yan (严) were said to be originally from the same clan centuries ago. A global clan association of Zhuang and Yan came into existence afterwards. Lai (赖), Luo (罗), and Fu (傅) clan association joined together too.

Most observers ignore that these networks are formed overseas, not brought from the homeland. The historical stories and legends have had little influence at home. Nonetheless, they exerted profound influences upon the ethnic Chinese after their emigration overseas. The Chinese immigrants saw the need of a ligament of common surnames or common ancestors, or even common locality of origins, to connect them into closer groups to help one another while overseas. The need in their lives and businesses is the driving force for the Chinese immigrants to seek some common links by forming clan societies. The historical stories, legends that provided a shared family roots are usually serving as a convenient and useful conduit to establish clan-based organizations overseas.

In fact, the associations of those dialectal groups are not transplanted overseas by the Chinese immigrants from their homeland. While in the home country, the conflicts of interests in various dialectal areas were frequent. While abroad, common dialects become easily the helpful ligaments that can tie the Chinese immigrants into clan groups or networks. (These paragraph is not needed because it begins without connecting to the prior topic and ends without making an independent conclusion.)

Associations based on shared dialectal background also exist Chinese immigrants. These association, too, are formed outside of China, not imported from the immigrant's homeland. While inside China, disputes among groups speaking the same dialect often led to severe regional conflicts, it is not evident among the share-dialect group overseas. In fact, the common dialect become the catalyst that bind these immigrants together in a manner no different from the clan-base associations.

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<sup>12</sup> <http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/neighbors/id/todo.html>

### 3. WHY ARE THE CULTURAL IDENTITY AND NETWORK FORMED ABROAD?

Why did legends and historical stories become the identities of immigrants abroad while they had no influence in the homeland? What functions do these identities serve in the formation of overseas Chinese social networks while such identities were not part of their lives back in China?

1) Similar experiences and shared backgrounds shape the identity of Chinese immigrant groups.

Before emigration, some immigrants were young college students in China. Others may simply come from the same regions sharing similar a local dialect. When the immigrants try to make a living in a different and foreign environment of their adopted country, they often harbor certain similar interests and pursuits. Numerous young Chinese college students have come to North America to pursue advanced studies and remained there after graduation. When those Chinese immigrants forsake their upbringing in atheism, communism, or even Confucianism, and turned to Christianity, they transformed themselves thoroughly after enduring a painful spiritual realignment. As newly-converted Christians, they show happiness in learning the teachings of the Bible and are not shy of sharing their life's testimonials about the God's grace with one another.

2) Social networks and personal trust

The common origin, similar experience, common pursuits, interests, and beliefs all play a role in one way or another in forming the mutual trust and setting certain boundaries within networks. The mechanism of credibility and trust is strengthened in repeat games inside the business networks or the economic activities of the ethnic Chinese. It is not a formal institutional credit system and not to be substituted with any other institutional arrangements. The religious networks are based on faith, which is rooted in the Christianity. When a member fails in his or her true religious belief, it is believed that the divine judgment from the God will befall upon the person and fellow parishioners will assist him or her in the spiritual healing from the misdeeds. Religious networks with large number of followers can provide an appealing and inspirational environment, which, in turn, re-enforces the parishioners' common belief and faith. Even for the Zen Buddhism, its followers still like to gather together even though the Zen-practioners need only to show or practice their beliefs according to the Zen tenet without frequent congregating. Once away from the environment or the net, however, the belief may gradually diminish, as told to me by a famous scholar's wife. She was once a Christian in Australia. After moving to Singapore and away from her Christian network, she is not an active church-goer any more. The followers of a religion need either formal or informal networks to connect with one another. The church communities are the basis of such social networks which further provide support to and supervision of their members.

Inside the language-dialect associations, the restraints for trust or credibility are invisible and ubiquity. If a member's credibility or reputation were in doubt, the negative image will not be

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limited inside the overseas networks. It will spread all the way back to the member's local communities in their homeland. The negative feelings will be lingering well into the future. It also means huge losses for the offenders of valuable information shared within the network as well as opportunities inside and outside. Perhaps we could say that he may gain some instant cash or benefits, but lost the trust and credibility for longer term. Being a good member in the network, he will not only feel proud, safe, mentally and spiritually satisfactory, but also enjoy potential benefits in business and life. No one can afford to lose his credibility within his own network. Once that happened, the loss of current benefits and future opportunities will surely follow.

The common origins and experiences make the Chinese immigrants closer to one another. The common pursuits and interests make the network to take shape. The credibility and associated benefits make the network a potent force and last long. The common language, custom and culture are also parts of the background influences that help form the networks in a different environment. However, they are not the determining factors<sup>13</sup>. It is not the clan's common dialect and shared historical story that serve as the primary bonds to tie the Chinese immigrants together. It is due to their interests in spiritual needs and satisfactions, as well as the realities of life in foreign lands. The common pursuits and similar experiences can also serve as such bonding factor. The phenomenon of social networking is not particular for the Chinese immigrants. Almost all ethnic emigrant groups form the social networks of one kind or another based on their new found identities overseas.

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<sup>13</sup> Denggao Long and Qiming Han, 'Beyond Culture: Economic Analysis of the Characteristics of Overseas Chinese Business', in Raymond Sin-Kwok Wong (ed.), *The Chinese Entrepreneurship in a Global Era*, Asian Studies series (Routledge, 2008).