Making Guam One’s Home: The Story of Taiwanese-Chinese “Old Timers” on Guam

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ABSTRACT
This research utilizes the island of Guam as a case study to demonstrate ways in which Taiwanese have successfully established themselves in businesses and applied their entrepreneurship within the last three decades of their settlement on Guam. Apart from being astute business people, their attachment to the island of Guam is asserted in various ways, and their sense of home grows stronger, with reference to the time they live in Guam, where their children attend elementary and secondary schools. For many of the second generation of Taiwanese on Guam, having pursued tertiary education, or having married afterwards in the U.S. Mainland, their sense of home with reference to Guam still remains. This research is based on participant observation and in-depth interviews in Summer 2008 with 25 Taiwanese immigrants residing in Guam.

The Taiwanese “old-timers” on Guam are people in between — neither have they totally abandoned their Taiwanese homeland as a result of their long stay abroad, nor have they become transnationals who live in two entirely different social fields. The Taiwanese on Guam have become ‘permanent settlers’ in Guam. Well-adapted to the Hafa adai lifestyle, they enjoy Guam’s multi-cultural non-racialized environment. The Taiwanese on Guam seem to wear a separate identity from 19th century Chinese sojourners on one hand, and New Asian transnational migrants on the other.

Keywords
Taiwanese-Chinese immigrants, Guam, lived experiences, sense of belonging, place identity, qualitative study.
1. INTRODUCTION

Extant literature concerning the diaspora of Taiwanese to overseas locations often highlights their high unemployment rates in countries such as Canada and Australia. This is particularly true of recent Taiwanese immigrants who have gone abroad with financial assets, under business migration programs. In spite of the entrepreneurial skills acquired in their home countries, however, overseas Taiwanese often have not applied these skills well in the welcoming host countries. Because their children’s education formulates an important reason for them to immigrate overseas, ‘astronaut families’, split households and dan chi ma ma are common outcomes.

This research endeavor on Guam demonstrates ways in which Taiwanese on Guam have successfully established themselves in businesses and utilized entrepreneurship skills within the last three decades. Apart from being astute business people, their attachment to Guam is asserted in various ways. Taiwanese on Guam indicate their sense of home grows stronger with reference to the length of time they have lived on Guam, and whether their children have attended elementary and secondary schools on Guam. For many of the second generation of Taiwanese residents on Guam, having pursued tertiary education in the USA, and/or having married in the U.S. Mainland, most of them are unlikely to return to Guam for employment, since job opportunities would be better on the U.S. Mainland, even though their sense of home with reference to Guam remains strong.

The island of Guam is an Unincorporated Territory of the United States of America, located in the western Pacific region. Guam is the largest and southernmost island of the Mariana Archipelago, with a land area of 209 square miles. Geographically, Guam is situated 1474 miles southeast of Taiwan. Currently, the population of Guam is estimated to be approximately 175,000. The indigenous people of Guam are the Chamorros, who comprise about 57% of the current population. Guam is a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural community that encompasses people from other Pacific islands, Asia, the U.S. Mainland, and elsewhere. The stereotyped ‘outside view’ of Guam is that of an island with a number of American military bases, an economy heavily supported by the U.S. Military and tourists from Japan (cf. Kurashina et al. 1999), a place of grass huts, barefoot happy islanders, and palm trees swaying in the tropical breezes (cf. Stephenson et al. 1999). These stereotypes belie a complex, cosmopolitan island community, with roots in the “islander” past, but with a dynamic contemporary life very much situated in the present and in the future.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Theoretical concepts explored in this study include diaspora (Tung 2004), migration (Portes 2008), globalization (Chiang et al. 2004), transnationalism (Margolis 2008), cosmopolitanism (Leonard 2007), the meaning of place (Carr 2008), and the meaning of home (Stephenson 1999). In our field study, we posed research inquiries such as the following: Who were the earliest Taiwanese-Chinese who came to Guam to stay? For what reason(s) did they come to Guam? Was it difficult to gain entry into Guam for them at that time? Why did they stay on Guam? What did they do, especially in terms of gainful employment, at the outset? Why do Taiwanese-Chinese people continue to reside on Guam? What do they do now, especially in terms of gainful employment? Has living on Guam been a positive experience for them? If so, how and why? Where do they define “home” to be? Do they expect to return to Taiwan to stay in the future? Why or why not? Among the twenty-five Taiwanese people interviewed for this study, the longest term resident among them had lived on Guam since 1967. The most recent Taiwanese resident interviewed, in terms of time lived on Guam, came to Guam in 1997. The methodology for the fieldwork on Guam included classic field methods of the humanistic and social sciences, e.g., interview with semi-structured questionnaires, informal interviews, and participant-observation, especially with reference to the collection of qualitative data (cf. Bernard 2002), utilizing an availability sample. As long-term residents of Guam, the second and third authors helped with introductions to interviewees whom they have known through various organizations, such as the Chinese Chamber of Commerce of Guam (CCCG), the United Chinese Association of Guam and Guam Women’s Club. Twenty-five Taiwanese-Chinese of Guam who are, for the most part, ‘old-timers’ on Guam were formally interviewed in the course of this research study, with the time spent to conduct each interview varying in length from one hour to three hours.

3. FINDINGS

The following table shows the socio-economic profile of the interviewees.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Age/Sex</th>
<th>Place of birth</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Year of migration to Guam</th>
<th>Return to Taiwan or not</th>
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<tr>
<td>#1</td>
<td>48/F</td>
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<tr>
<td>#3</td>
<td>62/F</td>
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<td>University (Taiwan)</td>
<td>Furniture Store Owner</td>
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<td>#4</td>
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<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>UOG (Un-finished)</td>
<td>Car Dealer</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5</td>
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<td>BA (US)</td>
<td>Real Estate</td>
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<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>#6</td>
<td>65/M</td>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>BA (Taiwan)</td>
<td>Accountant/Enroll Agent (Retired)</td>
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<td>Undecided</td>
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<tr>
<td>#7</td>
<td>65/M</td>
<td>Taipei</td>
<td>Vocational school (Taiwan)</td>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Undecided</td>
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<tr>
<td>#8</td>
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<td>PhD (US)</td>
<td>Investment</td>
<td>1972</td>
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<tr>
<td>#9</td>
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<td>Chungking, China</td>
<td>MA (US)</td>
<td>Insurance</td>
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<td>#10</td>
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<td>Auto Company Owner</td>
<td>1979</td>
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<td>60/F</td>
<td>Taiwan</td>
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<td>Bakery Owner</td>
<td>1967</td>
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<td>#12</td>
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<td>School Principal</td>
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<td>#13</td>
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<td>MA (US)</td>
<td>Auto Parts Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>#14</td>
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<tr>
<td>#15</td>
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<td>#16</td>
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<td>University (Un-finished)</td>
<td>Real Estate</td>
<td>1975</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>#17</td>
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<td>MA (US)</td>
<td>Librarian</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>#18</td>
<td>55/F</td>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>High school (Taiwan)</td>
<td>Sales Person</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Undecided</td>
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<tr>
<td>#19</td>
<td>61/M</td>
<td>Xian, China</td>
<td>PhD (US)</td>
<td>University Professor</td>
<td>1985</td>
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<tr>
<td>#20</td>
<td>53/F</td>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>Home Economics College (Taiwan)</td>
<td>Tour Company president</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>#21</td>
<td>56/F</td>
<td>Taiwan</td>
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<td>Guam Chinese School teacher</td>
<td>1991</td>
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<tr>
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<td>57/M</td>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>High school (Taiwan)</td>
<td>Shop Owner (Retired)</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>#23</td>
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<tr>
<td>#24</td>
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<td>Shop Owner</td>
<td>1978</td>
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<td>#25</td>
<td>45/M</td>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>College (US)</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
In a careful review of our data collected in this study, life appears to be lived rather differently for Taiwanese-Chinese residing on Guam, when compared with Taiwanese-Chinese residing in Australia, in New Zealand, in the USA, and in Canada (cf. Chiang 2006, Chiang and Hsu 2001, Ip and Inglis 1999, and others).

Certain patterns begin to emerge in our Guam field data. Almost all of our Taiwanese-Chinese informants identified the extended family as the most meaningful socio-cultural unit in which they readily engage. Requirements with regard to social capital ensure that all public events involving the Taiwanese-Chinese on Guam will be well attended, especially by other Taiwanese-Chinese. Almost all of our interviewees indicated that, in order to be successful, Taiwanese-Chinese on Guam need to own land or property. They must live in a “good” house, and drive a “good” car. Their children must be well educated. Family members must work industriously for financial gain. A 60-plus year old Taiwanese-Chinese woman summarized: “For us Taiwanese-Chinese, there are no Sundays. No holidays. We don’t go to the beach on Guam to swim, bar-b-q, and relax. That doesn’t accomplish anything. We Taiwanese-Chinese work all the time.”

The following remarks show the “difficulties” encountered by some of the Taiwanese-Chinese immigrants:

“Weather is too hot.”
“High cost of food; not getting used to frozen food; not much vegetables, seafood nor fruits.”
“Language problems; cultural differences.”
“Stores close at 6 o’clock.”
“Cannot find housekeeper or any type of helper.”

On the other hand, some of the “old-timers” who have decided to make Guam their home are happy to point out that in spite of the small population, they can conduct their businesses profitably in real estates, sales, insurance, travel, trade, etc.

The advantages of staying Guam are expressed by some as follows:

“We have so many friends here; people here on Guam are so nice.”
“We are involved in so many charity activities.”
“There are no mobs or gangsters here, no movie businesses here, no gambling, nor public transportation, so that children could not wander around after school.”

Taiwanese-Chinese people on Guam we interviewed stated that they feel integrated into the Guam community. Something about the cosmopolitan and welcoming atmosphere of Guam as place and people resonates well with Taiwanese-Chinese who have chosen to reside on Guam. On the other hand, the new Taiwanese-Chinese immigrants in Canada, Australia and New Zealand are transnationals, whereby the bread-earners, usually the husbands, continue to make their living in Taiwan, and the mothers and children stay in the destination of migration (Chiang, 2005, 2008). With regard to the Taiwanese-Chinese of Guam, many of our interviewees spoke of Guam as a place that provides a valued way of living for them. Our interviewees typically highlighted Guam both as a place and a collectivity of people that they could readily identify with. Both Taiwan and Guam are insular communities located in the western Pacific-Asia Region. The two islands share some similarities, when compared with larger continental frames of reference.

4. CONCLUSIONS

At present, the Taiwanese-Chinese on Guam may be best identified as people who are “in between.” They have not totally abandoned their Taiwanese homeland as a result of their long stay abroad. But, neither have they become transnationals, living in two entirely different social fields at the same time. The Taiwanese-Chinese of Guam have become ‘permanent settlers’ in Guam. Well-adapted to the Hafa Adai lifestyle, they appreciate and enjoy Guam’s multicultural non-racialized social environment. The Taiwanese-Chinese on Guam seem to have acquired a separate and unique identity. They appear to differ significantly from 19th Century Chinese sojourners on the one hand, and from New Asian transnational migrants on the other.

In sum, the worldwide Taiwanese-Chinese diaspora includes Guam in the western Pacific region as a chosen overseas homeland. Migrating to Guam, but not becoming transnationals, the Taiwanese-Chinese on Guam have made and are continuing to make meaningful contributions to Guam’s cosmopolitan character, and to the island’s socio-economic development. Taiwanese-Chinese residing on Guam identify the island’s residents as friendly and accommodating. Taiwanese-Chinese on Guam interviewed for this research endeavor have been very successful by choice in making
Guam their home. They are also active in social activities of various kinds, and contribute to the multi-cultural community of Guam. Crocombe (2007: 381) offers the following thoughtful synthesis: “Chinese are relatively few and recent on Guam, but their focus on saving, investment, learning and achievement has given them a rapidly increasing share of Guam’s economy. Some observers there believe they will be the dominant force in [Guam’s] economy within ten years.”

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
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6. REFERENCES
Figure 1  Interviewing at the CCCG Office, 2008

Figure 2  Interviewing an “old-timer” Taiwanese-Chinese

Figure 3  Interviewing a re-migrant from the U.S. Mainland

Figure 4  Interviewer meeting an “Old-timer” at the CCCG

Figure 5  Visiting the beautiful home of a Taiwanese-Chinese couple

Figure 6  Visiting an auto shop owned by a Taiwanese-Chinese family