

〔研究ノート〕

## **Building Houses and Graves for Their Ancestors in Their Hometowns:**

Homecoming Practices of Papua New Guinean Chinese  
in Their Ancestral Villages in China

**Tetsu ICHIKAWA**

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### Abstract

This paper reconsiders the multiple nature of the homeland for overseas Chinese who have migrated and settled abroad. The relationship between migrants and their homelands is a central research topic in migration studies. In studies of overseas Chinese, the homeland is often termed *qiaoxiang* (侨乡). *Qiaoxiang*, which is Mandarin for “mother village of overseas Chinese,” refers to the particular area in China from where Chinese emigrants have left to go overseas. Many scholars have studied *qiaoxiang*.

It is necessary to understand the dynamic relationship between overseas Chinese and their ancestors' homelands in China to understand the meaning of homeland for a Chinese living overseas. As overseas Chinese have become localized to their place of residence, they no longer have a simple affiliation with their *qiaoxiang* in China. If a Chinese migrates to and settles in one country and then emigrates again to another country, the notion of homeland will become more complicated. To understand the significance of the homeland for localized Chinese, it is necessary to study how overseas Chinese regard their homelands and how they establish and maintain relationships with them. This paper considers the meaning of homeland for Papua New Guinean Chinese as a case study. During the colonial period, there were about 3000 Chinese in New Guinea and Papua. Since the eve of the independence of Papua New Guinea in 1975, many Chinese have emigrated again, from Papua New Guinea to Australia. Today it is estimated that about 90% of the former Papua New Guinean Chinese population reside in Australian cities, in particular Sydney and Brisbane. Papua New Guinean Chinese have experienced migration over several generations: from China via Papua New Guinea to Australia. As a result of this migration, Papua New Guinean Chinese have two homelands: one is

China and the other is Papua New Guinea. The multiple migration and resettlement of Papua New Guinean Chinese provides us an exemplary case study for the dynamic nature of the homeland for localized Chinese overseas. This paper shows how overseas Chinese build their ancestors' houses and graves in their homelands and discusses the dynamic nature of the homeland for localized Chinese overseas.

Keywords: Chinese Overseas, Papua New Guinea, Ancestral Villages, Homecoming

## 1. Introduction

This paper reconsiders the multiple nature of the homeland for overseas Chinese who have migrated and settled in several countries. The relationship between migrants and their homelands are a central research topic in migration studies. For overseas Chinese studies, the homeland of Chinese migrants is often termed the *qiaoxiang* (侨乡). *Qiaoxiang*, which means “mother village of overseas Chinese” in Mandarin, is the particular area in China from where Chinese emigrants have left to go overseas. Many scholars have studied *qiaoxiang* in China, such as particular villages in Guangdong, Fujian, Guangxi, and Hainan provinces (e.g. Douw et al. 1999).

However, it is necessary to examine the dynamic relationship between overseas Chinese and their ancestors' homelands in China to understand the meaning of the homeland. As Chinese overseas have become localized to their place of residence, they no longer attach a simple affiliation to their *qiaoxiang* in China. The acclimation of overseas Chinese has been termed going from *luoyeguijen* (落叶归根) to *luodishenggen* (落地生根). *Luoyeguijen* literally means “falling leaves will return to their roots,” and this phrase signifies that Chinese emigrants consider China to be where their roots are and they will return to China in the future. However, *luodishenggen* means “putting down roots in foreign soil,” and it represents that the Chinese overseas gradually acclimate in their new place of residence. The meaning and relationship of homeland or *qiaoxiang* in China for localized Chinese overseas are different from that of their ancestors who were born in China. If a Chinese migrates to and settles in a particular country and then emigrates to another country, the notion of homeland for him or her will become even more complicated. To understand the significance of the homeland for localized Chinese, it is necessary to research how overseas Chinese regard their homelands and how they establish and maintain relationships with them. This paper considers the meaning of homeland for Papua New Guinean Chinese, as a case study.

There are several types of ethnic Chinese in contemporary Papua New Guinea. From the 1980s, many Chinese arrived in Papua New Guinea from East and Southeast Asian countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and some areas of the People's Republic of China. Although all of these migrants are ethnically Chinese, they have different natures and show peculiarities of language, religion, way

of life, and cultural and national identity. Among these Chinese with different backgrounds, this paper takes Papua New Guinea-born Chinese as a case study and analyzes the multiple meanings of their homelands. During the colonial period, the number of Chinese in Papua New Guinea was estimated to be about 3000 (Wu 1982). However, since the eve of the independence of Papua New Guinea in 1975, many Chinese in this area have emigrated again, to Australia. Today it is estimated that about 90% of the former Papua New Guinean Chinese population reside in Australian cities, in particular in Sydney and Brisbane. Papua New Guinean Chinese have established their own communities in these cities. They have experienced a double emigration over several generations. Due to this double migration, Papua New Guinean Chinese have two homelands, namely China and Papua New Guinea. The multiple migrations and settlements of Papua New Guinean Chinese provides us a notable case study for study of the dynamic nature of homeland for localized Chinese. In this paper, I focus on how Papua New Guinean Chinese build houses and graves for their ancestors in their homelands to discuss the dynamic nature of homeland for localized Chinese.

## 2. Papua New Guinean Chinese in Historical Perspective

Chinese arrival in New Guinea started with the Western colonization of this area. Germany occupied the northeast part of New Guinea in 1884 and introduced Chinese laborers to develop the colonial economy. Most Chinese immigrants at this time were Cantonese and Hakka, in particular coming from the area of Siyi (四邑), known as Seeyap in Cantonese, from villages such as such as Kaiping, Taishan, Xinhui, and Enping. The lingua franca were the Siyi dialect and the Hakka dialect in Canton. After the outbreak of World War I, Australia acquired German New Guinea and combined it with Australian Papua. Under German and Australian rule Chinese localized to New Guinea and altered their lifestyles. Most early Chinese pioneers were single males, and some of them married local Melanesian women. Some Chinese males brought spouses from China. The number of local-born Papua New Guinea Chinese gradually increased. One of the most significant features of Chinese acclimation in New Guinea was their religion and language. At first, the Chinese confessed Buddhism and Taoism, but they gradually converted to Christianity. Before the Pacific War began, a sizable proportion of Chinese were Catholic or Methodist. Their language usage also changed under the colonial setting. Before the Sino-Japanese war began, Papua New Guinean Chinese sent their children to China or Hong Kong for higher education. Those Chinese students brought back traditional aspects of Chinese culture such as the Chinese language, calligraphy, martial arts, and traditional Chinese religion. They played a crucial role in maintaining the Chinese ethnicity in New Guinea. However, the Papua New Guinean Chinese came to learn English and *tok pisin*, the lingua franca of New Guinea. As English was used in colonial offices and churches, Chinese in Papua New Guinea had to learn it. Chinese communities in New Guinea maintained their Chineseness but at the same time were influenced by New Guinean society and Australian colonial rule.

The acclimation of the Chinese in New Guinea showed new features after the Pacific War. During the war, the Chinese could not visit China or bring their relatives from China to New Guinea. Even after the war, it was difficult for the Chinese to visit China because of the political and social disorder in mainland China. Australia did not establish a diplomatic relationship with People's Republic of China until 1972. After the war, the Chinese in Papua New Guinea were not able to visit China freely and did not send their children to China for higher education. Instead, the Chinese in post-war New Guinea sent them to study in Australia. The Australian government took a step to ease the education of Papua New Guinean Chinese. In the late 1950s, the Australian government decided to allow the Chinese in Papua New Guinea to acquire Australian nationality. After this policy change, most Chinese in New Guinea adopted Australian citizenship. After this there were no longer any restrictions for Papua New Guinean Chinese to visit and study in Australia. The numbers of those who took advantage of this and studied in Australia increased. Those who were able to take this opportunity had an English education and lived in Australian cities for several years. Papua New Guinean Chinese began to use English as a lingua franca. Their lifestyles were strongly influenced by Australian society. They spoke English among themselves and lived an Australian lifestyle even after they graduated and returned to Papua New Guinea. They became Australia oriented and not China oriented.

This Australia orientation among Papua New Guinean Chinese only increased with the independence of Papua New Guinea. Once independence was assured, the Chinese living there were forced to make a choice: become naturalized as Papua New Guinean or remain in the newly independent country as foreigners. Most Chinese preferred to keep their Australian nationality and left Papua New Guinea. However, they did not return to China as they had no citizenship in the People's Republic of China. They emigrated to Australia and established communities in cities such as Sydney and Brisbane.

It is obvious that the meaning of Papua New Guinea has changed for the Chinese. Papua New Guinea was once the destination for Chinese migrants and they established a community there. However, after they localized in New Guinea and migrated again to Australia, they tended to regard Papua New Guinea as their homeland. Even now, some local-born Chinese remain in Papua New Guinea. They live in cities and towns in Papua New Guinea. However, most Chinese have maintained their Australian nationality and have property in Australia. Most Chinese in Papua New Guinea expect to leave for Australia in the near future. An Australian orientation is still strong among them.

### 3. Visiting Papua New Guinea

Some Chinese have left Australia and returned to Papua New Guinea. They are not many but their return to Papua New Guinea show us the nature of their acclimation. It is quite common for these Chinese to have family members and property in both Papua New Guinea and Australia. The dispersion of family and property enables them to travel frequently between these countries. For example, Mr. RW was born in Rabaul, which

is a city in Papua New Guinea, and grew up in Port Moresby, the capital city of this country. After he finished his primary education in Port Moresby, he went to a boarding school in Brisbane. He returned to Rabaul with his wife and started working when he graduated from university in Brisbane. A few years later he started a business in Rabaul and had children. However, he bought a house in Brisbane, hoping to live in Australia in the future. In 1994, he sent his wife and children to Brisbane to live in this house. He frequently visits Brisbane to see his family and goes back to Rabaul to maintain his business there. This case shows us a typical pattern of the transnational lifestyle of the Papua New Guinean Chinese. There is another pattern of return to Papua New Guinea. Mr. PW was born in Hong Kong and immigrated to Papua New Guinea with his mother when he was very young. He was educated in primary school in Rabaul and went to Brisbane to have higher education. After his graduation he worked in Brisbane for a few years. However, he looked for work in Papua New Guinea in the late 1990s and began working for a Chinese company in Rabaul. After working for few years, he opened a trade store. Mr. PW's mother, wife, and children are living in Brisbane and he frequently visits them in Brisbane and returns to Papua New Guinea to maintain his business. Once he told me that it was difficult to keep up business in Australia because of the severe competition and strict business regulation practiced by Australian government. However, it is easy to start a business in Papua New Guinea. As we can see by these cases, economic purposes is a central reason for Chinese to return to Papua New Guinea. While some Chinese return to Papua New Guinea for economic purposes, the majority prefer to reside in Australia and do not visit Papua New Guinea often. They consider Australia to be their home and that their future will be in this country. They do not intend to leave Australia, even if they frequently visit Papua New Guinea.

However, they recognize that Papua New Guinea is their birthplace, because they and their parents were born there and some of their parents or grandparents were buried there. They still maintain sentimental ties to Papua New Guinea. Their attitudes toward the Chinese cemeteries in Papua New Guinea demonstrate their notion of homeland and the nature of their acclimation. The Chinese have built and maintained their own cemeteries in Papua New Guinean cities, such as Rabaul and Kavieng, since the colonial period. As most Chinese converted to Christianity in the colonial period, their cemeteries are done in a Christian style, not the traditional Chinese style. Today the Chinese cemeteries there are not often used, because many Chinese have already moved to Australia. The decrease in the number of Chinese in Papua New Guinea also means that fewer Chinese die in Papua New Guinea. As these Chinese have established their lives in Australia, they seldom visit the cemeteries. However, the cemeteries still tie the Chinese in Australia to Papua New Guinea emotionally. In 1994, two volcanoes near Rabaul erupted. Rabaul suffered great destruction and the Chinese cemetery was covered by volcanic ash. Following on the disaster, Chinese both in Papua New Guinea and Australia donated money to recover the cemetery. They hired local workers to dig out tombs and clear the cemetery. Even if they do not use the cemetery now and expect to live in Australia in the future, they want to preserve the Chinese cemetery in Papua New Guinea. Their donations to recover this cemetery suggest that the Chinese cemeteries in Papua New Guinea still have a significant meaning for the Papua New Guinean

Chinese, even in Australia.

#### 4. Visiting China

While Papua New Guinean Chinese consider Papua New Guinea to be their natal homeland, they also have emotional ties to China. However, their idea and practice of return to China is different from that to Papua New Guinea. Before the Pacific War, Chinese in New Guinea maintained a relationship with their home villages in China. In addition to sending their children to China and Hong Kong for education, some Chinese visited their home villages in China to bring relatives or other villagers to New Guinea. However visits to China stopped from the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war. Even after the war ended, they could not visit China because of the socio-political disorder there. Only in the 1970s could Papua New Guinean Chinese begin to visit China again. After China instituted its policies of opening up to the outside world from the late 1970s, Papua New Guinean Chinese could visit their ancestors' villages in Canton. In the 1970s and 1980s, they would first arrive in Hong Kong and enter the People's Republic of China by land. From the 1990s, Papua New Guinean Chinese have visited China directly from Papua New Guinea or Australia. The number of trips Papua New Guinean Chinese have taken to China has increased since this time. It is now quite common to meet young Papua New Guinean Chinese in Australia who have visited China. However, when I asked them where they traveled in China, many young Chinese said they have been to such touristic places as Beijing, Shanghai, Guilin, and Yunnan; they have not visited their ancestors' villages. Their purpose in visiting China is not only to make contact with their roots but also to see tourist spots.

While many Papua New Guinean Chinese visit China as tourists, some of them visit their ancestral villages in Canton. To understand the characteristics of their notion of homeland, I would like to examine their visits to their ancestral villages. The visit to the ancestral villages in Canton is characterized by features of acclimation, especially in language. Today most Papua New Guinean Chinese cannot understand Chinese characters due to their education. Some older Chinese can speak the Siyi dialect of Cantonese, but because of their lack of Chinese education, they cannot speak Mandarin. It is not easy for them to visit villages in China. As they have lived in Papua New Guinea and Australia for several generations, most of them have long lost contact with their relatives in China. Such individuals must first find their relatives and ancestral villages before visiting China. One method to find their ancestral villages is to utilize networks of surname associations in China and Hong Kong. One Papua New Guinean Chinese visited an association of his surname in Hong Kong before visiting China. He contacted another association of his surname in Canton and found his ancestor's village in the Siyi area through the network of surname associations. Another Papua New Guinean Chinese found his ancestor's village by joining an international meeting of associations of his surname. He became acquainted with a kinsman from Canton. He was able to find his ancestor's village in Canton with the assistance of this kinsman. The utilization of the surname association exemplifies the barriers in language use.

Papua New Guinean Chinese speak English and the Siyi dialect of Cantonese and do not understand Mandarin or Chinese characters. It is not easy for them to communicate with Mainland Chinese; some need interpreters to communicate. The utilization of surname associations does not necessarily imply the ability to directly contact a clan member in China. They may still rely on clan members with whom they can communicate in English or Siyi.

The activities they undertake in their ancestral village also show their notion of homeland. When they visit their ancestral villages they usually donate money or build such infrastructure as roads, wells, rest houses, and recreation centers in the villages. Besides donation and building infrastructure, their main activity in their villages is the rebuilding and maintaining of their ancestors' houses. Some Papua New Guinean Chinese rebuild or renovate their ancestors' houses when they visit the villages. There are still houses left where their ancestors lived before emigrating to New Guinea. As their ancestors left China about two or three generations ago, those houses are often unoccupied and have sometimes decayed. When Papua New Guinean Chinese arrive at their ancestral village they renovate such houses or sometimes rebuild them as three- or four-story houses. They ask their relatives in Canton to take care of the houses. Their relatives maintain these houses by periodically visiting or residing in the houses. The villagers explain why Chinese overseas rebuild their ancestors' houses by saying that in rebuilding they praise their ancestors (光宗耀祖). However, the Papua New Guinean Chinese do not stay in the rebuilt houses when they visit their ancestral villages. Although they luxuriously restore their ancestors' houses, they stay in five-star hotels in city areas when they visit Canton. They usually visit their ancestors' villages from the hotel during their stay in China. Papua New Guinean Chinese do not leave Australia to live in China. They consider Australia their home.

## 5. Conclusion

When we examine Papua New Guinean Chinese returning to Papua New Guinea and China, we can see their multiple localities are reflected in their notions of the homeland and practices in visiting these places. For them, Papua New Guinea is their own natal homeland. Because they were born and lived in Papua New Guinea, they have direct experience of it. Papua New Guinean Chinese have lived in Papua New Guinea for several generations and have localized there. The main reason to return to Papua New Guinea is economic activity. The frequent travel of some Chinese between Papua New Guinea and Australia is enabled by their experience in Papua New Guinea. However, Papua New Guinea is not a mere place of economic activity for them. They are emotionally attached to Papua New Guinea and regard it as their natal homeland. As seen in the restoration of the Chinese cemetery, Papua New Guinea has not lost its significance for Papua New Guinean Chinese. However, most of these Chinese do not intend to live in Papua New Guinea permanently. Although they were resident in Papua New Guinea for several generations and regard it as their natal homeland, they consider Australia their home. Even those who are living in Papua New Guinea plan to move

to Australia in the near future.

On the other hand, China, especially the ancestral villages in Canton, is not the natal homeland of Papua New Guinean Chinese. Most of them were born in New Guinea and have not had direct experience of living in China. Visits to China ceased between the Pacific War and the 1980s. Their main purpose of their visits to China is to see their roots or traveling there. They do not intend to live in China. As they are already resident in Papua New Guinea and have acquired Australian lifestyle, it is not easy for them to communicate with mainland Chinese or travel in China by themselves. Papua New Guinean Chinese recognize their roots in China and reaffirm their Chineseness in travel. This purpose is also seen in their renovation or rebuilding of their ancestors' houses. They regard China as their ancestral homeland, not their natal homeland, because they have no direct experience of living there. The nature of their return to China is characterized by their localized identities, present places of residence, and migration experiences.

When we compare their notion and practices in returning to Papua New Guinea on the one hand and China on the other, we can see the multiple nature of homeland. In the late 19th to early 20th centuries their ancestors left China and arrived in Papua and New Guinea. Establishing a community in New Guinea and increasing the locally born, they became localized to New Guinea. However this does not mean assimilation to local society in Papua New Guinea. Maintaining their Chinese ethnicity, they did not become the same as local people. Acquiring Australian citizenship and living experience in Australia also influenced their locality. Although they were born in Papua New Guinea, they show a strong Australian orientation and regard themselves as Australian nationals. However, their acclimation in Papua New Guinea and Australian orientation do not mean that the Chinese identity is lost. Although they do not intend to return to live in China and recognize their differences from mainland Chinese, they recognize China as their ethnic or ancestral homeland. The Papua New Guinean Chinese notion of homeland has a multiple nature. They have put down multiple roots in multiple soils, but the way the roots are put down are different in each soil. Their multiple localities are constructed on the routes of their migration: from China via Papua New Guinea to Australia. Their multiple localizations can be seen in the notions and practices relating to their homelands. Their locality is constructed of multiple homelands: the ancestral homeland, the natal homeland, and the homeland of residence.

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梅偉強・張国雄 (編)

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