1. Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs

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Until the mid-twentieth century, Southeast Asia and North America were the predominant destinations for Chinese emigrants. Amid the Voyage to Nanyang exodus, the California Gold Rush and the Transcontinental Railroad construction, millions of Chinese migrants, overwhelmingly from Guangdong and Fujian provinces in southern China, ventured to Southeast Asia and North America for better opportunities (Godley, 2002).

When these early Chinese immigrants first arrived in the host countries, they were in effect sojourners aiming to remit sums of money to their families in China (Dana, 2014: 259). They also intended to return to China in their old age to enjoy the fruits of their 'arduous labours in exile' (Willmott, 1966: 254). For example, Loewen (1971: 27) argues that the early Chinese people in Mississippi were not true immigrants, but were sojourners and planning to return to China when 'their task was accomplished'. These Chinese immigrants were faced with different levels of hostility from local residents, who saw them as greedy individuals, exploiting their advantageous economic position (for example, Chinese in Thailand; Coughlin, 1960). Members of the Chinese community often were excluded from many formal occupations, which led them to focus on the trade and commerce sectors and act as intermediaries between customers and producers. For example, Willmott's (1966) study found that 84 per cent of Chinese immigrants in Cambodia were engaged in the commercial sector, which is significantly higher than the Cambodian average of 6.5 per cent. Appleton (1960) found that in the Philippines, ethnic Chinese held 23 per cent of the total commercial investment and nearly 30 per cent of the total investment in retail and import-export trade, despite only making up 1 to 2 per cent of the national population. Loewen (1971) found that 97 per cent of the Chinese immigrants in Mississippi, USA, were operating grocery stores.

These Chinese immigrants were distanced from the host country owing to their sojourner orientation and they experienced discrimination from within the host society. However, they managed to maintain and even raise their economic position in society owing to their entrepreneurial ventures. Consequently, they developed a strong sense of in-group solidarity or ethnic identity to distinguish themselves from the host country nationals (Aldrich and Waldinger, 1990). As a result, they were 'essential outsiders' within the host societies (Chiro and Reid, 1997; Nyíri, 2011).

This distinct 'essential outsiders' status was invoked by Blalock (1967) and Bonacich (1973) in the development of the concept of the 'middleman minority', in which they used Chinese immigrants in Southeast Asia and North America as a common prototypical example of a middleman minority group. A number of subsequent middleman minority studies also cited the colonial and early post-colonial Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs as examples (for example, Aldrich and Waldinger, 1990; Cobas, 1987; Nyíri, 2007).

Although the definitions are not identical in these studies, a middleman minority generally refers to a minority population which has taken on a specific economic sector, in particular trade and commerce, and plays the role of middleman, linking producers and customers (Bonacich, 1973). These minority groups often face discrimination and even persecution from the locals (Grosfeld et al., 2020), which can lead to an ambivalent attitude towards the host society and in-group solidarity (Aldrich and Waldinger, 1990). They usually do not hold an extreme subordinate status (O'Brien and Fugita, 1982) in the host society, despite discrimination. They begin as sojourners and many of them originally do not intend to, or have not decided to, settle down permanently in the host country and therefore seek occupations with a higher preference for liquidity (Aldrich and Waldinger, 1990; Cherry, 1990). The original term 'middleman minority' does not encompass only entrepreneurs but can also refer to an entire entrepreneurial-orientated ethnic group. However, more recent immigrant entrepreneurship studies have applied the term exclusively to immigrant entrepreneurs (Aldrich and Waldinger, 1990; Nyíri, 2011; Waldinger, 1986).

The middleman minority theory is not without its critics. Some scholars have questioned its limitations in the modern immigration context. Aldrich and Waldinger (1990), for example, argue that the sojourner orientation did not contribute to the performance of the ventures and they proposed the term 'pseudo-middleman minorities' to distinguish contemporary ethnic groups that specialize in trade and commerce (in the 1990s context) from the classic middleman of earlier periods. Other scholars, nevertheless, continue to adopt the original term as they see the generalizability of the theory as well as its extension into more modern contexts (for example, Grosfeld et al., 2020; Masry-Herzalla and Razin, 2014).

Half a century has passed since the inception of the middleman minority theory, and notable changes have taken place in the demographic structure of Chinese immigrants and their destinations. For example, unlike the earlier periods of Cantonese- and Fujianese-dominated emigration, more recent Chinese emigrants hail from various parts of China, and there is considerable cultural heterogeneity between different sub-groups of Chinese immigrants (Guo and DeVoretz, 2006). The newer Chinese immigrants are also organized differently from their predecessors, whose organizations were mainly based on locality and kinship (Liu, 2014). As regards immigrant entrepreneurship, the distinct middleman role that Chinese immigrants used to play in Southeast Asia and North America during earlier periods has been less frequently discussed in studies of contemporary Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs (for example, Kim, 2001; Nyíri, 2011). Unlike the early Chinese emigrants, the destinations for contemporary Chinese emigrants are also diversified across all six continents (Li and Li, 2013).

This raises the question, with the passage of time: is the term 'middleman minorities' still applicable or valid to describe modern-day Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs? This chapter is therefore concerned with the following two research questions:

1. Do contemporary Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs still play the middleman role in host countries?
2. Are there any new features of contemporary Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs?

It would not be possible to explore all the host countries or regions in one study. This chapter therefore chooses to focus on the Asia-Pacific region as it has long been a popular

destination for Chinese migrants owing to its geographical proximity and historical and cultural linkages with China. It is also a beneficial geographical area for conducting research on migrants owing to its cultural, ethnic, economic and political diversity (Castles and Miller, 2009). Therefore, such research with a focus on the Asia-Pacific region has the potential to be extrapolated to other host regions of the world.

The delimitation of the research subject ‘contemporary Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs’ in this chapter is twofold. First, we primarily focus on the post-reform period (1978 to the present) first-generation immigrants from mainland China. Although there are other sizable Chinese diasporas in the Asia-Pacific, including those from Chinese populations in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and Malaysia, these groups exhibit very diverse cultural and social-economic profiles when compared with those from mainland China (Collins, 2002). Therefore, we treat these groups separately, with a focus on recent emigrants from mainland China. The reason for selecting 1978 as the starting point of the contemporary era is that this was the year when China started its economic reform and relaxed its strict controls on her people’s geographical mobility. In the three decades from 1949 to 1978, there were almost no emigrants from mainland China. Therefore, the contemporary Chinese immigrants and their predecessors represent two distinct groups. Second, this study adopts Brockhaus’s (1980: 510) well-established definition of an entrepreneur, who is ‘a major owner and manager of a business venture who is not employed elsewhere’. Hence, business owners, whether they are self-employed or employers, or joint venture partners, are all included.

The primary methodology employed in this study is archival research, and we also present several examples and case studies that were observed from our own field research. The remainder of this chapter proceeds as follows. We begin with a section to summarize the demographic profile of contemporary Chinese immigrants in the Asia-Pacific region. Then, we classify these immigrants employing a typology of immigrant entrepreneurs we have developed. The subsequent two sections focus on entrepreneurs who fall into the middleman minorities category and those who do not and who fall into other new categories. Conclusions are drawn in the final section.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF CONTEMPORARY CHINESE IMMIGRANTS IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC

Since its economy began opening up in 1978, China gradually relaxed its control over its citizens’ internal and international movements, and a vast number of mainland Chinese migrants started to relocate to different parts of the world (Wong, 1998). The United Nations (2019) reported that, by 2019, 10.7 million international migrants were born in mainland China, making it the third largest migrant-sending country in the world. Moreover, in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, China contributed over 7.4 million immigrants to the world, significantly ahead of any other country. The pace of movement accelerated with almost 70 per cent of the total mainland Chinese emigrants relocating from China during the past two decades.

Table 1.1 provides a summary of Chinese immigrants’ demographic profile in major destination countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

Despite varying statistical methods and data available in different countries, we can

Table 1.1 Overview of Chinese immigrants in major destination countries of the Asia-Pacific region

Country	Description	Demographic significance	Data source
Japan	More than 764 000 Chinese nationals and an estimated 1 million ethnic Chinese (2018). Most arrived since the 1980s	Largest group of foreign residents (28.5%)	Japanese Bureau of Statistics (2019)
South Korea	Over 1 million Chinese nationals, about two-thirds were Korean-Chinese (2017). Most arrived since the two countries established formal diplomatic relations in 1992	Largest group of foreign residents (50.6%)	Song (2017)
Singapore	Between 700 000 and 800 000 of newly arrived immigrants came from mainland China (2016). Most arrived since the two countries established formal diplomatic relations in 1990	Second largest group of foreign-born immigrants	Cited in Ang (2018)
Australia	More than 526 000 were born in mainland China (2018). Most arrived since the 1980s. Over 1.2 million residents of Chinese ancestry	Largest ethnic group of non-European descents and third largest group of foreign-born immigrants	Australian Bureau of Statistics (2018)
New Zealand	About 133 000 were born in mainland China (2018). Most have arrived since the 1980s. Over 231 000 residents of Chinese ancestry	Largest Asian ethnic group and second largest group of foreign-born immigrants	Statistics New Zealand (2019)
Cambodia	Some 250 000 Chinese nationals (2018). Most arrived since the 2000s	Largest group of foreign residents (over 60%)	Cambodia Interior Ministry, reported in DW News (2019)

Note: Chinese nationals refer to citizens of mainland China.

roughly estimate that, there are at least 4 million mainland China-born immigrants, of whom most arrived in their host countries after the 1978 Chinese economic reform, currently living in the Asia-Pacific region, accounting for over two-fifths of all China-born immigrants globally. This estimation does not include the millions of Southeast Asians of Chinese descent, nor the sizable number of Chinese migrants from Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau. Nor does it consider the descendants of first-generation mainland China immigrants. Although the data shows that there is a heterogeneous group of Chinese who are migrants in the Asia-Pacific region but who were not born in mainland China, our chapter focuses on the most recent wave of Chinese migration since 1978.

A TYPOLOGY OF IMMIGRANT ENTREPRENEURS

Since middleman minorities mainly refer to minority groups of those who are concentrated in trade and commerce sectors, it does not encompass all types of immigrant entrepreneurs. For instance, an immigrant high-technology firm owner, would not normally fall within the scope of middleman minorities. Therefore, in order to proceed with our study, we developed a typology of immigrant entrepreneurs, based on theory, to explain the development of the phenomenon in recent times.

In Figure 1.1, two dimensions of the coordinate plane are taken from the two distinct characteristics developed from the middleman minority literature (Aldrich and Waldinger, 1990; Bonacich, 1973; Portes and Zhou, 1992; Waldinger, 1986), namely:

1. **Local–global dimension.** Middleman minority immigrant entrepreneurs are normally clustered in the ethnic economy and prefer to do business locally, especially with their immigrant community. This means that they do not usually interact with the wider community and are not much involved in globalization opportunities;

Figure 1.1 A typology of immigrant entrepreneurs

2. **Trader–innovator dimension.** Middleman minority immigrant entrepreneurs are also mainly found in the trade and commerce sectors as trader-merchants. Following Kirzner (1973), they are in effect intermediaries and do not rely extensively on technology or business model innovation.

The x-axis in the typology model represents for the local–global dimension, while the y-axis denotes the trader–innovator dimension. Figure 1.1 shows four typologies of Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs:

- **Middleman minorities.** The middleman minority perspective of Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs is represented by the first quadrant of a coordinate plane which sets a typical middleman minority entrepreneur operating in the trading and commerce sector within a localized ethnic enclave. However, there are other, more nuanced profiles of middleman minorities that are discussed subsequently in further detail.
- **Neo-middleman minorities.** These immigrant entrepreneurs are still confined within the ethnic economy but are more innovative in adopting new business models and new technology. For instance, this may be a developer of a smartphone-based food delivery application (app) created for Chinese restaurants in an overseas Chinatown locality.
- **Transnational traders.** These immigrant entrepreneurs regularly engage in cross-border trade activities and rely on them as their primary livelihood (Portes et al., 2002). They are transnational entrepreneurs but still confined to traditional business models with limited innovation. An example of this type of entrepreneur is a Chinese merchant who imports consumer goods from China and distributes them to local enterprises and stores. This category also includes immigrant entrepreneurs who conduct their transnational business with their main market in mainland China but have decided to migrate for non-entrepreneurial reasons (for example, better schooling and opportunities for children). They may also have homes in various host countries.
- **Global innovators.** These immigrant entrepreneurs differ from transnational entrepreneurs in that they are extensively engaged in innovation-orientated global businesses. For instance, this could be a Chinese immigrant who starts and grows a high-technology innovative venture that operates in different parts of the world.

CONTEMPORARY MIDDLEMAN MINORITIES: ARE THEY LIKE THEIR PREDECESSORS?

It is important in the study of immigrant entrepreneurs to also consider their cultural background. Despite being significantly different from the Chinese migrant entrepreneurs to Southeast Asia and North America in earlier periods, who were portrayed as typically middleman minorities, contemporary Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs still share the same ethnic identity and similar cultural practices with their predecessors. Although currently they may be diverging along different paths, it is unlikely that the entire group will jump into a whole new world in just a few decades. Therefore, we reason that there is still a large segment of contemporary Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs who can fall into the middleman minority category. This is illustrated next.

Being in the Middle: Middle-Class Traders

There is a remarkable convergence between Chinese Confucianism and ancient Greek philosophy. When Confucius proposed the ethics of 'Being in the middle' ('中庸之道') in the fifth century BC, Aristotle echoed this with the philosophy of the golden mean a century later. In Chinese societies, being in the middle is a long-held tradition that translates to thinking and social interaction (Hwang, 2001; Shen, 2013). The Chinese believe that 'the shot hits the bird that pokes its head out',¹ which means that they do not like to stand out against the majority, nor are they willing to sink to the bottom of the economic ladder as pariahs. They would prefer to maintain their petit-bourgeois status (Waldinger, 1986) and place themselves in the middle of social stratification.

This type of middle mentality in Chinese culture resonates with the portrait of a typical middleman minority. According to Bonacich (1973), the middle position of middleman minorities takes two forms: first, they are mainly in middleman occupations, notably in trade and commerce sectors and, secondly, they occupy an intermediate position in host societies' social strata.

Chinese immigrants have had a long history of entrepreneurship (Ahlstrom et al., 2004; Mackie, 1992). As a minority ethnic group, Chinese immigrants are usually confronted with cultural and language barriers when they are seeking job opportunities in host countries' labour markets. However, the relative disadvantages experienced by Chinese immigrants in the host society does not result in a high unemployment rate among them (Fullin and Reyneri, 2011). Instead, in order to circumvent employment or underemployment and to stick with their being-in-the-middle mentality, many of them turn to self-employment or start their own business as an alternative to wage labour (Beaujot et al., 1994), and this can result in a higher probability of entrepreneurial engagement. For example, Collins (2002) reports that China-born Australian entrepreneurs, whether male or female, have a significantly higher entrepreneurship rate than native-born Australians. In Mandalay, the second largest city of Myanmar, the Associated Press in 2018 reported that 60 per cent of Mandalay's economy was created by Chinese entrepreneurs, with most of them arriving from southern China in recent decades.

Middleman minorities not only have a high entrepreneurial engagement rate, but are also clustered in industries with high liquidity, and are normally absent from more fixed investments, such as industrial and agriculture sectors, or more upmarket industries, such as high-technology and professional sectors (Bonacich, 1973; Weber, 1993; Willmott, 1966). Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs are usually pushed rather than pulled into entrepreneurship as they are often excluded from their host countries' labour market. Consequently, it is often difficult for them to move up the industrial value chain and to go beyond being in the middle. Therefore, they have largely remained in the trade and commerce industries. For example, Selvarajah et al. (2012) surveyed 132 first-generation Chinese entrepreneurs in Australia, among whom only 23 entrepreneurs were in professional sectors, while more than half (67) were in restaurant and retail sectors. Cain and Spoonley (2013) note that there is considerable occupation mobility towards self-employment and small business sectors among China-born immigrants in New Zealand.

The large numbers of Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs in the trade and commerce industries may be explained more by their culture. In the Chinese culture, *guanxi* (interpersonal relationship) is the fundamental dynamic of social networks, and this is

deeply rooted in Chinese social and cultural values (Farh et al., 1998; Park and Luo, 2001). Those typical middleman industries, such as catering and retail sectors, rely heavily on the entrepreneurs' intra-group connections, which are Chinese immigrants' strengths owing to the salient role of *guanxi* in their entrepreneurial activities (Luo, 2007).

In contrast, industries such as manufacturing require entrepreneurs to have strong out-group connections and local familiarity, which in turn are difficult to build quickly among newcomers in host countries and even more so among those who do not share many similarities of the host countries' culture. For example, it is hard for an owner of a manufacturing plant with a minority background to only engage with his or her own ethnic community, because of the need for a whole production line engagement and coordination between multiple parties. Hence, Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs are more prone to be excluded from these industries. Cain and Spoonley (2013) conducted interviews in New Zealand with immigrant entrepreneurs from five countries, and they found that among the mainland China-born entrepreneurs they interviewed, all of them had at least one mainland Chinese supplier and some of them dealt exclusively with Chinese-speaking suppliers. Unsurprisingly, most of them were in service and retail sectors.

One change in recent years is that while Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs were middlemen minorities largely because of their place in the value chain, currently the middlemen characteristic is more nuanced, with many of them also belonging to the middle class. While pre-mid-twentieth-century Chinese emigration waves were dominated by poorly educated and low-skilled labourers who had moved out from mainland China, contemporary Chinese immigrants come from relatively different class and economic backgrounds. Over the past four decades, and particularly since the 1990s, overseas students, professionals and business migration applicants make up the major part of Chinese immigration flow to other countries. Research has found that the more highly educated segments of the population in China are five times more likely to emigrate than the average Chinese person, while in Europe the corresponding comparison rate is only 1.3 (Xiang, 2016).

Overseas Chinese students comprise a significant percentage of Chinese immigrants (Tharenou and Seet, 2014). China is currently the world's largest source country of international students, with more than 5.85 million students from mainland China having studied overseas from 1978 to 2018 (Ministry of Education of China, 2019) and from 2013 onwards, about two-thirds of Chinese overseas students obtain employment and immigrant visas in host countries upon completion of their studies (Zhou and Liu, 2016). Most of these Chinese students come from middle- and upper-class families. Business migrations are another important source of Chinese immigrants. For instance, during the first two decades of the twenty-first century, four-fifths of business immigration to Australia originated from China (Colic-Peisker and Deng, 2019). After overseas Chinese students have completed their studies, or as a condition of their business migration visas, many will consider setting up entrepreneurial ventures in their host countries.

Essential Outsiders: Embedded in the Enclave

Middleman minorities are notable for keeping themselves apart from host societies. As Bonacich (1973) noticed, group solidarity is often the result of hostility and discrimination from the host society (Aldrich and Waldinger, 1990). Therefore, although middleman minorities may do well in gaining economic status, their integration into the host country

often lags behind. Chirot and Reid (1997) describe the Chinese in Southeast Asia and the Jews in Central Europe as 'essential outsiders' to reflect the juxtaposition of their economic position and the host country's exclusion against them.

Bonacich (1973) argues that discrimination against middleman minorities is caused by their middleman positions where they generate disproportionate profits as a result of information asymmetry between producers and customers. This is exacerbated by the middleman minorities' antagonism against the majority group (Bonacich, 1972), and their low social assimilation. With the advance of globalization and the information revolution, it is no longer as easy to take advantage of information asymmetry as a minority intermediary, especially in advanced economies. However, discrimination and hostility against immigrants from mainland China is still apparent in many Asia-Pacific countries (for example, Fitzgerald, 2007; Seol and Skrentny, 2009). Even in Singapore and Hong Kong, where the ethnic Chinese predominate the population, discrimination against newly arrived Chinese immigrants is also common (for example, Ang, 2018; Ng et al., 2015). Meanwhile, with the fast-growing number of new Chinese immigrants in many Southeast Asia countries, there is also rising controversy and anti-Chinese sentiment in this region (for example, Pheakdey, 2012).

As a consequence of discrimination, middleman minorities develop strong community or ethnic solidarity over time in order to resist assimilation, and this is typically evident in a number of characteristics, such as residential self-segregation, preference of endogamy, persistence with their heritage, language and culture (Bonacich, 1973).

For middlemen immigrant entrepreneurs, a distinctive characteristic is that they are inextricably intertwined with their ethnic enclave economy. We argue that the connotation of enclave economy is twofold. First, it refers to middleman entrepreneurs being geographically concentrated in ethnic enclaves. Second, it suggests that they are heavily reliant on ethnic networks in doing business and they target co-ethnic customers as their niche market. In the typology model (Figure 1.1), we use the term 'local' to indicate middleman immigrant entrepreneurs' scope of business, in that they predominantly focus on their ethnic economy, take advantage of their ethnic networks in doing business and do not usually interact nor get involved with the wider community and transnational businesses. That is, they are embedded in the host society's enclave economy (Kloosterman and Rath, 2001; Kloosterman et al., 1999).

Among Chinese immigrants who are middleman entrepreneurs, their geographical preference is to be in a Chinatown of their host countries. This is a typical type of ethnic enclave (Zhou, 2010), where a compact homogenous Chinese settlement with a core of Chinese businesses (Chen, 2018) can be seen in many countries and cities where Chinese immigrants are clustered. As in the past, there still appears to be considerable numbers of newly arrived Chinese immigrants, especially merchants, hawkers and investors, found mainly in Chinatowns, who use it as an initial launch pad to safely set up and expand their ethnic-based business. For example, Hurstville is a suburb situated within Sydney's metropolitan area with a significant number of Chinese immigrants and is considered to be Sydney's contemporary Chinese ethnoburb (Wang et al., 2018). In 2016, 49.4 per cent of the residents in Hurstville were of Chinese descent while over 40 per cent were born in China, and this has increased by about 10 per cent over the past decade (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). Hundreds of Chinese-related businesses, including Chinese restaurants, Chinese grocery stores, immigration and education consulting firms, and

Chinese language schools are clustered around the centre blocks of Hurstville, among which many are run by newly arrived mainland Chinese immigrants. This example is contrary to some studies which claim new immigrants no longer linger in ethnic enclaves (for example, Chen, 2018).

Ethnic networks, which generate a powerful bounded solidarity (Portes and Landolt, 2000) are central to Chinese middleman entrepreneurs. *Guanxi* is crucial in determining Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs' industrial choices but, more importantly, within the ethnic community, *guanxi* is of paramount importance to the way Chinese entrepreneurs do business. For example, many Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs secure personal loans from private lenders via their ethnic networks in order to start a business, a mechanism similar to the concept of the credit slip as delineated in Coleman's (1988) social capital theory. Private lending is prevalent among overseas Chinese entrepreneurs as it is often hard to obtain loans from banks in host countries. Another example is that among the over 1 million Chinese immigrants in Japan, people from the Chinese Fujian province comprised a significant portion and many Chinese restaurants and grocery stores in Japan are operated by Fujianese immigrants. However, most of them do not have Japanese citizenship and many are undocumented immigrants (for example, Liu-Farrer, 2010). Hence, it is extremely difficult for them to borrow money from Japanese banks or use other regular channels. However, Fujianese immigrants are arguably one of the most kinship-orientated groups among the Chinese sub-groups (Brandstädter and Santos, 2008). There are various Fujian hometown- and clan-based associations across Japan, many of which can act as an intermediary for Fujianese immigrants to access private lending and, in some cases, Fujian triad gangs charge exorbitant rates for these private loans (United Nations, 2002). As regards clans, see the entry by David Leong, in Dana (2011).

Middleman entrepreneurs also prefer to hire employees of the same ethnicity or origin to lower costs, as the host society's labour market may be segmented by ethnicity and immigrant employers (Bonacich, 1972, 1973). Consistently, many Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs also have a very pronounced preference for hiring co-ethnic employees. For example, in Japan, over half of the *Kenshuusei* (研修生 in Japanese), that is, foreign labours who entered Japan via a skills trainee programme, are Chinese nationals. In spite of its 'skills' title, this was a loophole for Japanese employers to recruit low-skilled and low-paid foreign labour (for example, Bélanger et al., 2011). Thousands of Chinese *Kenshuusei* ended up in Chinese restaurants or firms and factories owned by Chinese entrepreneurs. These Chinese employers preferred to hire Chinese employees partially because they wanted to reduce business costs, but also because these employers themselves were not fully integrated into Japanese society, therefore, hiring a co-ethnic employee would decrease coordination costs in doing business (Den Butter et al., 2007).

Similarly, in Australia, in most Chinese restaurants or grocery stores in Sydney, Melbourne or Brisbane, employees are usually Chinese nationals on working-holiday visas, Chinese students, or the business owner's relatives; you are less likely to see a non-Chinese native Australian working in these businesses. In New Zealand, Cain and Spoonley's (2013) study reports that, Chinese business owners prefer to hire co-ethnic bilingual speakers as an important strategy to overcome their own difficulties in English language proficiency.

‘Falling Leaves Return to Their Roots’: A Sentiment-Based Sojourner Orientation

The sojourner orientation is central to Bonacich’s (1973) middleman minorities theory. Some scholars even refer to her theory as the sojourner theory. The sojourner orientation has been subjected to criticism as some scholars suggest that in the contemporary context, immigrant entrepreneurs are less likely to be sojourners and sojourner orientation did not contribute to business performance (Aldrich and Waldinger, 1990; Waldinger, 1986). Bonacich (1973) has argued that the sojourner orientation does not necessarily mean an imminent return by the immigrant to his or her home country. Although many immigrants wish to return to their home country, they believe they may not do as well in their homeland owing to various factors, such as reverse culture shock, lack of social networks or other political and economic reasons (Ho et al., 2018). Accordingly, they may relinquish the dream of becoming a ‘glory returnee’,² and instead settle down while deeply burying inside the desire to return home. Bonacich (1973: 593) illustrated this by using the example of Jews and argued that the Chinese immigrants desire to return may appear to be symbolic as can be seen in the way Jews pray for ‘Next Year in Jerusalem’ to keep their attachment to their ancestral land.

Traditional Chinese culture advocates ‘Falling leaves return to their roots’(落葉歸根) (Mah, 1999), which signifies no matter how successful a person is in a foreign land or anywhere other than their hometown, he or she is a sojourner anyhow, and ought to return to their homeland when they are old. Furthermore, ‘To die in a foreign land’(客死他鄉) is a major taboo in traditional Chinese custom. For example, Tan Kah Kee, a prominent China-born entrepreneur, migrated to Singapore at the age of 16 during the Voyage to Nanyang exodus and established extensive businesses in Southeast Asia, but returned to the then deprived and turbulent China in his old age during the 1950s, partly because of his homesickness and the belief in return to roots.

However, in more recent times, return to roots does not mean that Chinese immigrants must permanently return to China. Instead, it is now perceived as more of an attachment to their origin that will shape and strengthen a person’s sojourner mindset and make it more difficult for the individual to integrate into the host country. While the notion of a sojourner mindset originated from earlier Chinese immigrants, it has been passed on to the recent Chinese immigrants and is reflected in many aspects of their life and language. For example, despite having lived in Southeast Asia for centuries, many ethnic Chinese still call the region Nanyang, which literally means south of the ocean. Similarly, some Chinese immigrants in Japan still refer to the country as Dongyang, a century-old alias of Japan among Chinese communities which translates to east of the ocean.

In Chinese, *huaqiao* refers to expatriates who are Chinese nationals, in contrast to *huayi*, which refers to people of Chinese descent but who are not Chinese citizens. However, many Chinese immigrants still call themselves *huaqiao* instead of *huayi*, despite having lived in the host country for decades and renounced their Chinese citizenship (Seet, 2007). In various Chinese business associations across different host countries, the leader of an association is usually colloquially referred to as *qiaoling*, which translates to the leader of *huaqiao*, or expatriates’ leader, irrespective of their nationality. This Sino-centric viewpoint and the attachment to the homeland is deep rooted, constantly sculpting the Chinese immigrants’ sojourner mindset and strengthening their ethnic identity, which

makes them more likely sojourners than many other immigrant groups. For example, a Chinese gift shop owner in Australia when interviewed said:

In some major cities in Australia where Chinese immigrants are clustered, there are many gift and souvenir shops named 'XX *huiguo* gift (or souvenir) shop' run by recent Chinese immigrants, and they usually have the shop's Chinese name printed on an eye-catching plaque hung in front of the store. *Huiguo* (回國) in Chinese means 'go back to home country'. For many people, it is difficult to apprehend [*sic*] that except Chinese international students and tourists, most Chinese residents here should already call Australia home, and they are the most regular customers of these shops. Meanwhile, some non-Chinese customers will also occasionally go to these shops. So, this raises the question in their minds, why would the owners give such a controversial and bizarre shop name? We have brought this question to a Chinese shop owner in Perth, Western Australia, and she answered us that most first-generation Chinese immigrants that she has met, whether Australian citizens or not, all used to calling 'go to China' as *huiguo*, and so does she. Furthermore, many Australian-born second-generation immigrants also use this phrase because they learnt it from their parents. Hence, she named her shop after this common verbal phrase so that many customers will have intimate feelings/associations with the name and derive business for her.

IDENTIFYING NEW TYPOLOGIES: WHO ARE THEY?

The previous section discussed the traditional type of middleman entrepreneurs among contemporary Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs in the Asia-Pacific region. As illustrated in Figure 1.1, we argue that there are three major new types of Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs that have emerged in the contemporary era, with distinct features of business model, technology adoption, target market and business scope, when compared with traditional middleman immigrant entrepreneurs. In this section, we illustrate this phenomenon with examples and case studies.

Neo-Middleman Minorities

Following from Aldrich and Waldinger (1990) who employed the term 'pseudo-middleman minorities' to distinguish the new middleman traders from the earlier middleman traders, we propose the term 'neo-middleman minorities' to describe those immigrant entrepreneurs who are still confined within their ethnic economy, but are more innovative in adopting new business models and new technology. The following are two examples.

Daigou shoppers

Daigou, literally meaning buying on behalf of in Chinese, is a new type of e-commerce channel that has emerged in the past decade both in mainland China and many overseas Chinese communities (Xie, 2018). *Daigou* is a novel direct-to-consumer or *daigou*-to-consumer (D2C) business model and its core mechanism is to take advantage of resource asymmetry. Some products may be expensive and hard to find in China while being cheaper and easily accessed in another country, for example, cosmetic products in South Korea and nutraceuticals in Australia. Other products, though, may be scarce or expensive in other counties while cheaper and easier to find in China, for example, numerous made-in-China consumer products.

Daigou shoppers are professional shoppers, who can be individuals or even entrepreneurs that set up a *daigou* service company. They buy products on behalf of consumers both in the home and host countries. Most *daigou* shoppers conduct their business via Chinese online business platforms, such as alibaba.com or WeChat. Some even run their own websites, such as daigousales.com. In New Zealand, for example, there were reportedly an estimated 350 Chinese *daigou* entity stores in 2017 (McDougall, 2017). If a customer in China wants to buy New Zealand infant formula, which is scarce but popular in China, he or she can directly place an order with a *daigou* agency in Auckland, which is normally established by an immigrant Chinese entrepreneur. The agency's manager dispatches employees to purchase the infant formula from pharmacies in the city and deliver the product back to China via a Chinese-operated express delivery company, which usually is at a much lower cost than a New Zealander-run courier company. Meanwhile, if a Chinese immigrant in Auckland wants to buy some made-in-China consumer products, some *daigou* agencies can also provide *daigou* services by contacting their suppliers in China provided the business is lucrative.

Although *daigou* shoppers are engaged in cross-border business, their business is almost exclusively focused on Chinese customers and they deal largely with other Chinese-run firms in the supply chain. Therefore, the *daigou* business is still embedded in the enclave economy. Given the large numbers of mainland Chinese migrants in many Asia-Pacific economies, some of these entrepreneurial ventures have experienced significant growth. For example, in 2017, *daigou* retailer AuMake International was able to list on the Australian Stock Exchange (Reuters, 2017).

Meanwhile, the emerging *daigou* industry is sometimes considered by the host country as well as the Chinese authority as a grey market (Zheng, 2017), with some even involved in illegal activities, such as circumventing tariffs (Xie, 2018). *Daigou* shoppers are perceived as opportunistic traders by some locals (Marano, 2018), hence, similar to traditional middleman entrepreneurs, they are also likely to be discriminated against or resented by the host society.

EASI delivery

Founded by Chinese-Australian entrepreneur and innovator Shen Jie in 2014 in Melbourne, EASI has quickly become a popular Asian food delivery app in Australia. As of 2018, it boasted 200 000 downloads and delivers food from over 20 000 partnered restaurants across all the Australian major cities. EASI is a smartphone-based app that operates similarly to Uber Eats (they were founded in the same year). The app is highly user-friendly and both the English and Chinese language systems of the app are professionally elaborated (as is a recently added Japanese version).

While being a novel and highly innovative entrepreneurial venture, EASI, similar to *daigou* shoppers, is still confined within the ethnic economy. Its partnered restaurants are mainly Asian restaurants and particularly Chinese restaurants, and its target market also predominantly caters to ethnically Chinese customers. Owing to most of the EASI couriers delivering food by bicycle, their delivery services are mainly limited to Chinatowns and their peripheral suburbs. EASI's pronounced ethnic market preference can be seen in their distinctive delivery bicycles or couriers' yellow vest uniforms; all of them have noticeable Chinese characters. An EASI delivery bicycle in Sydney's Chinatown has Chinese characters on it which translate to 'Sydney food delivery'. This

form of ethnic economy orientation is extremely rare among other ethnic businesses in most host countries.

Transnational Traders

Transnational traders are entrepreneurs who still are confined in traditional business models, but unlike the traditional middleman entrepreneurs, their businesses extend over the enclave economy and reach out to the wider cross-border community. We demonstrate this with two cases.

Chinese investors in Cambodia

Since the 2000s, there has been an influx of a large number of Chinese businesspersons and foreign direct investment (FDI) into Cambodia (Nyíri, 2012; O'Neill, 2014), especially in the past few years when the two countries decided to strengthen cooperation under China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). In 2018, there were reportedly some 250 000 Chinese nationals living in Cambodia (DW News, 2019), and many of them were operating businesses. Sihanoukville, a Cambodian port city, attracted large numbers of Chinese immigrants as it was declared a tax-free economic zone under an agreement between China and Cambodia. Online gambling was legalized in the city and thousands of Chinese immigrants invested in the lucrative peripheral industries such as hotels, restaurants, tourism and tourism-related manufacturing (Guardian, 2018).

Cambodia is designated a least developed country (LDC) by the United Nations as its domestic consumption remains at a low level and it lacks a complete supply chain to sustain many industries. Therefore, as transnational traders, these Chinese investors are heavily dependent on China as their major source of labour, consumer products and capital. They fly frequently between the two countries and, to them, Cambodia is more of a marketplace than a host country, although many of them have been living there for almost two decades. Another reason they are transnational traders rather than traditional or neo-middleman entrepreneurs is owing to their range of customers. Although many of their customers are Chinese visitors or tourists from China, they also have a considerable number of customers from other Asian and Western countries, as well as local Cambodians. Therefore, these businesses cannot be defined as an enclave economy (Citrinot, 2019).

A Chinese business migrant family in Australia

In the past few decades, many advanced economies, such as Australia, New Zealand and Singapore, have introduced various business and investment migration programmes to attract wealthy and entrepreneurial migrants. These business migration programmes, generally require applicants to have had a successful entrepreneurial record in their home country. The applicants also have to establish one or more businesses in the host country in order to meet the visa requirements (Hoang, 2015). Consequently, many of these business migrants are engaged in cross-border businesses as they have business connections in both home and host countries.

A number of studies apply the concept of dual embeddedness to delineate these transnational Chinese entrepreneurs, and argue that they are dually embedded in their host and home countries, hence, they maintain strong business and social links with both countries (Colic-Peisker and Deng, 2019; Dimitratos et al., 2016; Ren and Liu, 2015).

We interviewed a Chinese business migrant in Western Australia in 2019. The participant and his wife own a 20-employee import–export company in an eastern China city in the Yangtze Delta region. A few years ago, the couple applied for an Australian business innovation and investment visa (188A), which targets small to medium-sized enterprise (SME) owners. In order to meet the visa requirements and thereby obtain permanent resident (PR) status, they set up a small business, hired two employees and bought an apartment in Australia. However, since the couple were unfamiliar with the local environment and they had not established wide networks in such a short period of time, their Australian business underperformed, and struggled to reach the threshold required for their PR application. Therefore, they did not suspend their business in China because they were relying heavily on its profits. As a compromise, while sending their daughter to a local Australian school, the participant and his wife take turns to reside in Australia and China for six months at a time so that they can manage both businesses.

Global Innovators

Immigrant entrepreneurs who are global innovators are usually innovation orientated and draw on new technology and new business models to drive business growth as they take advantage of globalization to participate in cross-border business activities. Traditionally, Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs in the Asia-Pacific region have not been widely considered innovation driven, as high-technology Chinese immigrants overwhelmingly opt to operate from the United States in preference over other countries (for example, Hart and Acs, 2011; Saxenian, 2002). However, the landscape has changed rapidly in the past two decades. This is largely owing to China's rapid economic development and its ambitious plans to transform itself from the world's manufacturing hub to an intelligence-driven powerhouse, as envisioned in its ambitious 'Made in China 2025' plan. As a consequence, in recent years, there has emerged a burgeoning group of Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs who are global innovators in the region (Tharenou and Seet, 2014). We present the following two cases.

Group case: Internet-based Chinese innovation going abroad

In the early 2000s, the Internet model in China was mostly based on imitations from the United States. However, during the last decade, Internet-based innovation in China has not only caught up with many advanced economies but, in some cases, overtaken them. In areas like mobile payment, artificial intelligence, social media innovation, China is already recognized by some experts as a 'global leader in technology' (Waugh, 2018). This dramatic technology revolution not only spread domestically, but also spawned a growing number of Chinese entrepreneurs extending their business abroad, penetrating the global market as global innovators.

For example, Panda Credit is a big-data-based financial services provider which predominantly focuses on the Southeast Asian and Indian market. Founded by a female overseas returnee entrepreneur Ye Wenjun in 2017, it soon reached 5 million users in less than three years. Similarly, TikTok, a video-sharing social-networking service launched by a young Chinese technician and entrepreneur Zhang Yiming in 2016, has become one of the most downloaded apps globally (Kumar and Prabha, 2019). In order to develop more customer-orientated business strategies, various offices and branches have been established by TikTok in Japan, Singapore, Australia and many other countries. Didi,

an app-based ride-hailing company, founded in 2012, is currently administrated by chief executive officer (CEO) Liu Qing, a female overseas returnee and a Harvard graduate. Didi is considered a major global competitor of Uber, but it provides a wider range of services and a more customer-orientated business model (Liu and Kim, 2018). This helped Didi to successfully out-compete and eventually acquire Uber China in 2016. Since 2015, Didi has initiated its globalization strategy and it is now operating in several Asia-Pacific countries, such as Japan and Australia.

Shi Zhengrong

Shi Zhengrong, a Chinese-Australian entrepreneur and scientist, represents a typical Chinese immigrant global innovator. Shi obtained his doctorate in renewable energy engineering from the University of New South Wales in the early 1990s, and then worked as a researcher and set up a few high-technology businesses in Australia. Shi returned to China in the early 2000s after he acquired Australian citizenship, and later set up a solar power company – Suntech Power. Headquartered in China, Suntech also had businesses and representative offices in Australia and several other countries in the world. Suntech was the first Chinese private high-technology company to be listed on the New York Stock Exchange (Seet, 2010). Shi was also named China's richest man in 2006 and the company was ranked among the top three in the world's photovoltaics industry in 2013.

Suntech filed for bankruptcy in 2013 owing to the company's financial crisis. However, Shi's innovation and entrepreneurship journey did not stop there. In 2019, it is reported that Shi returned to Australia, dubbed as the 'Sun King' and unveiled Australia's largest lightweight solar set-up (Coote, 2019).

One characteristic of the founders of these global businesses is that they are global talents that live, study and work in many countries (Ho et al., 2016). They capitalize on the developments of increasing global mobility, self-initiated expatriation and 'boundaryless' careers (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996; Cerdin and Selmer, 2014), especially in the context of international talent flow (Carr et al., 2005). For example, Ye Wenjun, studied in Dublin, Ireland and London, UK, before returning to China to work and establish Panda Credit in Beijing. She has been based in Southeast Asia since 2017 to focus on growing her market there. Similarly, Shi Zhengrong moved back to China after he had secured Australian citizenship to start Suntech Power. However, with the change in economic conditions, he has returned to Australia to pursue new opportunities.

CONCLUSION

The middleman minority theory forms an important body of scholarship in immigrant entrepreneurship research. Originating in the context of colonial and early post-colonial societies, a typical middleman was profiled as an immigrant of ethnic minority background who occupies an intermediary occupation, most likely a small business owner in trade and commerce sectors. Despite being discriminated against by the locals, he or she does not hold an extreme subordinate economic status and is often better off than an average native. He or she retains strong ethnic and cultural identity and prefers to do business with his or her own immigrant community. Most importantly, he or she holds an ambivalent attitude towards the host country and acts as a sojourner struggling to decide

whether to settle down permanently or to someday return to his or her home country (Blalock, 1967; Bonacich, 1973).

Framed within the context of the contemporary era, we evaluated new (1978 to the present) immigrant entrepreneurs from mainland China in the Asia-Pacific region against the portrait of classic middleman minorities as their predecessors. Based on two dimensions of local–global and trader–innovator, we identified another three emerging types of Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs in addition to middleman minorities: neo-middleman minorities, transnational traders and global innovators.

We conducted a review of the recent literature on contemporary Chinese immigrants by using archival research which was supplemented with cases drawn from secondary data and from our own field studies.

We find that in general, the majority of Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs are still middleman minorities since they are mainly in trading, catering and retail industries, they are not fully integrated into the host country and they prefer to do business with their own Chinese community and hire Chinese employees. However, unlike their predecessors, newer Chinese immigrant middlemen entrepreneurs are more likely to be considered as middle class in host countries owing to their financial resources and educational levels. They are sojourner orientated, with many of them being more sentiment based towards China rather than anticipating an imminent or actual return to China.

Meanwhile, we also find evidence for three new types of contemporary Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs. For each group, we illustrate with a group case and an individual case. From the cases, we notice that, while still in relatively small proportions, many of the Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs are gradually moving out of their enclave economies, moving up the value chain, and a few of them are becoming global innovators. Furthermore, we can see that female Chinese high-technology entrepreneurs are showing a noticeable presence in globalization and technology innovation, which are the major drivers that are propelling the transformation of contemporary Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs. We thus expect increasingly more immigrant entrepreneurs to break through the enclave economy and diverge into different entrepreneurial paths in the coming future.

This study also faces some limitations that are likely to guide further research. First, there are some competing theories which may assist the understanding of our analysis. For example, the extension of the dual-embeddedness theory, namely, the mixed embeddedness theory was not used or discussed in detail but may have scope for better understanding the growing phenomenon of Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs who are global innovators (Ho et al., 2018). Second, this chapter focuses exclusively on the Asia-Pacific region, and we cannot generalize our findings to other contexts but this can be achieved through further research in other major host regions for mainland Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs (North America, Europe and certain parts of Africa).

NOTES

1. The sentence is a literal translation of the Chinese proverb ‘槍打出頭鳥’.
2. The term ‘glory returnee’ is derived from the Chinese idiom ‘榮歸故里’, which means when a person succeeds in a host place or country, then he or she returns homeland with glory and respect from people of the homeland.

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