Research Report

Name: CHEN, CHIEN-YUAN

Organization (at the time of the grant): University of Hawai‘i at Manoa

Title of Research:
Familiar Strangers Afoot in Taiwan: Social Imaginaries among East Asian Tourists

Purpose of Research:
Cultural tourism in the age of globalization serves not only to discover exotic cultures, but also to function as the most effective means to intensify mutual understanding between guest and host. It thus possesses huge potentials to resolving cultural confrontations. The recent increase intra-Asia tourism reflects the regional economic developments which have taken place over the past few decades. Tourism practices that have emerged in East Asia embody the historical complexes intertwined with colonialism, war memories, and Cold War ideologies. In particular, the tourism industry in contemporary Taiwan encapsulates the triangular relationship linking Taiwan, Japan, and China that has taken shape as a product of historical forces. I use “familiar strangers” to describe these intra-Asia tourists, such as Japanese, Korean, and PRC visiting Taiwan, who have already possessed certain preconception, whether positive or negative, about the destinations. In this project, I expect to explore what role of the shared past in East Asia plays in tourism practices participated by these “familiar strangers.”

My research focuses on a number of questions. If touristic discourses and tourist reactions are assumed to be mutually influential, which “social imaginaries” inform and shape tourism practices? What dominant image of Taiwan is represented through tourism, specifically with regard to the historical relationships with Japan and China? By examining intra-Asia tourism through this triangular relationship, I will attempt to illustrate (1) how Taiwan's past(s), its memories and histories, are represented in particular tourism sites, and evoke different responses in Japanese and mainland Chinese tourists, and (2) how these tourists use Taiwan as a reference point to re-position themselves within East Asia. This project represents an attempt to understand how fluid conceptions of “Chineseness,” “Japaneseness,” and “Taiwaneseness” have figured in Taiwan’s tourism discourse, which has focused on different tourist populations during different periods of time.

This project on intra-Asia tourism provides a multi-directional and practical methodology for the study of tourists, and proposes a new way of understanding tourism practices in light of culture and history as well as economy. In addition to the methodological innovations I propose, my project addresses issues of cultural politics and will help resolve
issues central in daily life in East Asia. Cultural tourism in Taiwan has stimulated heated debates concerning economic development and ideological struggles, which have been particularly intense over the past two decades. At the regional level, the opening of Taiwan to PRC tourists in 2008 has presented an opportunity for a greater understanding of cultural similarities and differences amongst the peoples of Taiwan, Japan, and China. Intra-Asia tourism thus figures as a new stage for these familiar Asian strangers to reimagine their neighbors. A new imaginary may reduce cultural confrontations and encourage regional cooperation, at a juncture at which all East Asian states are in great need of addressing a wide range of domestic and transnational issues in the age of globalization.

Content/Methodology of Research:
This project aims to understand how fluid conceptions of “Chineseness,” “Japaneseness,” and “Taiwaneseness” have figured in Taiwan’s tourism discourse, which has focused on different tourist populations during different periods of time. In order to map the terrain of tourism in Taiwan as dynamic cultural formation, I will conduct a transnational and multi-sited ethnography in the three cities of Osaka, Shanghai and Taipei from October 2009 to September 2010. This program represents a new approach to Asian tourism through the lens of multiple bilateral relationships. My fieldwork focuses on the social imaginations of tourists as expressed through their impressions of Taiwan, with special attention being given to the question of how ethnicity (“Japaneseness,” “Chineseness” and “Taiwaneseness”) is perceived and played out in touristic discourses.

My ethnography is divided into: (1) interviews and surveys with packaged tour operators and participants in both China and Japan, and (2) on-site participant observation at historical sites in Taiwan. For the first component, I intend to establish connections with travel agencies and package tour participants—I will be in communication with the participants both before and after their travels. For the second component, I have worked as tour-guide at two historical sites in Taipei to explore how Taiwan’s history, including the recent past, is represented to and perceived by tourists. In Taiwan, I have chosen the Palace Museum and the Chiang Kai-Shek Memorial Hall for on-site participant-observation, for museums and memorials always carry relatively explicit and significant historical meanings. My transnational education and previous life and fieldwork experiences qualify me to conduct a comparative study at multiple transnational sites. My fieldwork experiences in 2002, 2003, 2006, and 2008 in Taipei and Tokyo have qualified me to conduct urban ethnography targeting moving populations in multiple locations. In addition, my ability to speak Chinese (both Mandarin and Minnan dialect), Japanese and English allows me to interview three different populations.

As part of my ethnography, I also analyzed historical and government documents and media representations to supplement my interviews. In an effort to understand “official” representations through historical records and government documents, I collected official statements, policy reports and statistics concerning tourism strategies conducted within
the Japan-Taiwan dynamic and the PRC-Taiwan dynamic. In addressing media representation, I collected and analyzed major newspaper articles, television broadcasts, tourism websites and blogs, travelogues, promotional clips and commercials, and airline magazines, Asia Echo (1976-2008) in particular.

**Conclusion/Observation:**

**Conclusion**
Taiwan is hardly a new destination for the Japanese escapes. In my previous research on Morinaga’s travelogue in the 1920s’, I outlined how a romanticized imagination toward colonial Taiwan has served as a tropical paradise existing outside Japan’s mainland. These imaginations toward Taiwan vary in different periods and often respond to notions of Japanese desire. The imaginations, to certain extent, symbolize diverse escapes and thus echo to the combined images of Nanyō (southern seas,) men’s paradise, the authentic China, the nostalgia toward Japan's pre-war days, and a relaxing destination for office ladies (OL). With a special focus on circulation within East Asia, this paper aims to reconsider diverse concepts of escape within a triangular relationship amongst Japan, Taiwan and China. In contrast to a clear-cut distinction between modern and postmodern tourism, my ethnographic research argues Japanese tourism in Taiwan has incorporated a mixture of themes; notably, alienation, nostalgia, and escape. Due to a wariness of tourism being viewed as neocolonial exploitation, an inclusive concept of “shitashimi” (familiarity), has replaced “nostalgia” continuously functioning in tourism discourses. This “shitashimi” and tourism imagination thus is derived from diverse aspects of historical complex, modernization and popular culture. In this sense, Taiwan has become a site full of diverse imaginations.

**Research Result**
During the period of my research at Osaka, I have published a paper in Finish Anthropological Journal, Suomen Antropologi, on my earlier research entitled “Transcending Whose Past?: A Critical View on the Politics of Forgetting in Contemporary Taiwan.” In June 2010, I presented my ethnography on Taiwan’s tourism at Asian Studies Conference Japan (ASCJ), entitled “Re-presenting Taiwan on the Edge of “Chineseness”: Taiwan’s Contemporary Tourism after 2008 Direct China–Taiwan Flights Initiated” at Waseda University. In addition to the previous work, I attended the organized panel, “Escape Japan: Inside and Outside,” in the 2011 annual meeting Association of American Anthropology, and presenting my ethnographic research on current Japanese tourism bound for Taiwan, entitled “Escape to a Place of Familiarity: Transformations of the Japanese Tourism Imaginations toward Taiwan.” (The panel participants have planned to publish panel papers in an American journal of Japan studies.)