

Routledge Studies on Asia in the World

INTERPRETING THE CHINESE DIASPORA

**IDENTITY, SOCIALISATION, AND RESILIENCE
ACCORDING TO PIERRE BOURDIEU**

Guanglun Michael Mu
and Bonnie Pang



This is a highly ambitious book, aiming to develop a critical sociology of Chinese diaspora by applying, for the first time, Bourdieu's influential reflexive sociology to understanding the social experiences and practices of diasporic Chinese communities in the West. Drawing on a wealth of empirical research – both quantitative and qualitative – among young Chinese in Canada and Australia, the book places these young people's identity work, educational trajectories, and resilience building in response to structural societal constraints (such as racism) in a broad sociological framework which transcends macro perspectives on diaspora and micro perspectives on the formation of Chinese subjectivities through Bourdieu's conceptual apparatus of capital, field, and habitus. In this way the book develops pertinent new insights into the contradictory meanings and experiences shared by many among Chinese diasporic subjects, such as 'looking Chinese but not speaking Chinese', the entrapments of inhabiting gendered and racialised bodies, family pressure in schooling, and their responses to racist stereotypes of Chineseness.

Ien Ang, Distinguished Professor, Western Sydney University

What binds us together and what walls us apart across borders, generations, and geographies? In an era of increasingly shrill nationalism and geopolitical conflict, understanding diasporic community, identity, and position is more crucial than ever. This new volume is a major sociological contribution to our understanding of 'overseas' Chinese communities.

Allan Luke, Emeritus Professor, Queensland University of Technology

The bold collaboration of two exciting scholars provides convincing evidence of the relevance of Bourdieu to an emerging area of study on diasporic Chinese youth. Mu and Pang draw on diverse studies in Australia and Canada to enrich our understanding of family, community, and resilience in the Chinese diaspora. Their important book makes a significant contribution to wider debates on identity, legitimate knowledge, and transnationalism in the fields of education and applied linguistics.

*Bonny Norton (FRSC), Professor and Distinguished University Scholar,
University of British Columbia*

Drawing on the work of Bourdieu and his notions of field, habitus, and capital, this book provides a theoretically informed and empirically rich examination of Chinese diasporic youth in Australia and Canada. With a particular focus on educational contexts, Mu and Pang shed new light on questions of racialisation, identification, and resilience demonstrating the heterogeneity of the Chinese diaspora and the importance of countering the cultural essentialism that often colours their popular representation. With the rise of China and the continuing spread of Chinese diasporas, this book makes an important contribution towards understanding these phenomena especially in relation to the experiences of young people proving a valuable text for the sociologies of youth, health, and education.

Megan Watkins, Professor, Western Sydney University

Interpreting the Chinese Diaspora

Globalisation and migration have created a vibrant yet dysphoric world fraught with different, and sometimes competing, practices and discourses. The emergent properties of the modern world inevitably complicate the being, doing, and thinking of Chinese diasporic populations living in predominantly white, English-speaking societies. This raises questions of what ‘Chineseness’ is. The gradual transfer of power from the West to the East shuffles the relative cultural weights within these societies. How do the global power shifts and local cultural vibrancies come to shape the social dispositions and positions of the Chinese diaspora, and how does the Chinese diaspora respond to these changes? How does primary pedagogic work through family upbringing and secondary pedagogic work through educational socialisation complicate, obfuscate, and enrich Chineseness?

Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu’s reflexive sociology on relative and relational sociocultural positions, Mu and Pang assess how historical, contemporary, and ongoing changes across social spaces of family, school, and community come to shape the intergenerational educational, cultural, and social reproduction of Chinese diasporic populations. The two authors engage in an in-depth analysis of the identity work, educational socialisation, and resilience building of young Chinese Australians and Chinese Canadians in the ever-changing lived world. The authors look particularly at the tensions and dynamics around the participants’ life and educational choices; the meaning making out of their Chinese bodies in relation to gender, race, and language; and the sociological process of resilience that enculturates them into a system of dispositions and positions required to bounce back from structural constraints.

Guanglun Michael Mu is Senior Research Fellow in the Faculty of Education at Queensland University of Technology, Australia. His work in this book was supported by the Vice-Chancellor’s Research Fellowship at Queensland University of Technology and the Australian Research Council grant DE180100107 (*Resilience, Culture, and Class: A Sociological Study of Australian Students*).

Bonnie Pang is Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellow and Senior Research Fellow at Leeds Beckett University, United Kingdom (2019–2020), Senior Lecturer and a school-based member of the Institute for Culture and Society at Western Sydney University, Australia.

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According to Pierre Bourdieu**

**Guanglun Michael Mu
and Bonnie Pang**

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Foreword

With the revitalisation of China (Zhōngguó 中国) as a knowledge-producing superpower come the historical conditions of possibility for a shift from unipolar to multipolar education and research. This revitalisation has produced a new Chinese diaspora (xīn yí mín, 新移民) which in all its complex categories is reshaping the local/global socioeconomic and political landscapes. Around the world the Chinese diaspora is reworking the identities of intellectual cultures, re-norming the socialisation processes of education, and rebuilding resilience through transcultural self-confidence. Given these conditions, this study by Mu and Pang can be read as asking what intellectual connections might English-medium educational institutions now need to make with the heterogeneous diaspora of Chinese peoples.

What then might the Chinese diaspora learn from their research? Mu and Pang identify themselves as part of the complex and continuously evolving Chinese diaspora. Significantly, they demonstrate that scholars of the Chinese diaspora have an important intellectual role to play in the twenty-first century's shift from unipolar to multipolar education through research and education that builds transcultural self-confidence. For instance, they frame the 'diverse Chinese diaspora' as an idiom that expresses a gendered, racialised, and languaging stance through generational differences; a diaspora that makes knowledge claims, negotiates varied categories of geopolitical practice, and creates its own categories for the analysis of self and others. This diverse, heterogeneous Chinese diaspora is studied through young people who live with and through its tense dynamics via family, community, school, media, and labour market. To make sense of young people's positioning and position taking in the Chinese diaspora Mu and Pang explore new ways of being, doing, and thinking Bourdieusian sociology. In doing so, they breach the academic norms that produce a misrecognition of the Chinese diaspora and arbitrarily assign it a negative value. Through the novel concepts of 'habitus realisation' and 'flipped symbolic violence' Mu and Pang demonstrate the possibilities for stretching or otherwise elongating Bourdieu's conceptual tools.

Of all the variations and dynamics among the young people who might position themselves within, or be positioned within the Chinese diaspora, Mu and Pang attach particular significance to their linguistic diversity and the temporal

differences between themselves and their parents and grandparents' life histories. While these young people's identity work, educational socialisation, and resilience building is conditioned by the transnational hierarchical structures in which they are embedded, Mu and Pang explain how these youngsters contribute to the construction of knowledge which constitutes a world of meaning, sense, and value. For institutions of English-medium instruction and research this knowledge is worthy of their investment of time and energy. However, Mu and Pang question the profits stressed by these institutions in their quest for Chinese consumers of English and the knowledge it provides access to, while excluding the building of educational relations through the Chinese diasporas' intellectual culture and history.

What then might others learn from Mu and Pang's study of the young people who constitute the heterogeneous diaspora of Chinese peoples? They raise the stakes in explorations of (imperfect) intergenerational educational socialisation by bringing precision to the contested and contestable work of cultural norming. Specifically, Mu and Pang construct rigorous accounts of the pedagogically mundane landscapes provided by transnational families, social media and learning language(s), sport and mathematics. In grappling with structural constraints on young people's identities, resilience, and socialisation, Mu and Pang take a sociological approach to 'resilience building'. They demonstrate that educators who, despite feeling like insignificant adults have the power to remind those in power that they can design spaces within institutionalised education to free students from contemptuous labels and oppressive hegemonies. Here, the power of Mu and Pang's methods of critical thinking is manifested in their capability to excavate 'resilience' from neoliberal psychology and the symbolic violence evident in its use to pathologise individuals' supposed deficits.

How do Mu and Pang move the research field forward? In terms of the move towards postmonolingual research methodologies they explicitly acknowledge the tensions associated with the monolingual mindset in research which, in this context sees English assert itself over multilingual researchers' uses of their repertoire of languages-and-knowledge. Mu and Pang scrutinise the privileged and taken-for-granted scholastic view of English-medium universities which cloak their governing monolingual mindset above and beyond questioning. In asking how and why this particular scholastic perspective is normalised and the languages-and-knowledge of 'others' is systematically silenced, Mu and Pang provide a valuable critique of the construction and dissemination of knowledge in this intellectual field.

This book is written largely in academic English, using theoretical tools originally produced in French and disseminated through English for international research publication purposes. However, Mu and Pang exercise 'flipped symbolic violence', their concept, to reject the imposition of a monolingual mindset on scholars among the Chinese diaspora, and instead make evident a range of postmonolingual research practices which they desire to use themselves. Of necessity, their study of the Chinese diaspora entails collecting evidence from

knowledgeable participants who speak Pǔtōnghuà (普通话), which they make evident in their use of Hànzì (汉字) and English translations. They go further, identifying in their repertoire of languages-and-knowledge theoretical concepts from Zhōngwén (中文) that they activate, mobilise, and deploy for instance to elaborate on complexities of the concept of ‘flipped symbolic violence’ (for example, jǐ suǒ bù yù, wù shī yú rén, 己所不欲, 勿施于人). This elaboration of their scholarly capabilities provides a reminder for those who invest power in academic English and the knowledge it provides access to, of the power, languages and knowledge of the Chinese diaspora. The purposeful uses of these postmonolingual research methods are Mu and Pang’s strategic response to the monolingual mindset which prevails in the English-medium universities in which they work and an intellectual field which demands their use of English for research publishing purposes. Throughout this book they take on a position as postmonolingual researchers, among other positions, to extend the history of languages-and-knowledge exchange, shift to multipolar centres of knowledge production, and develop the new research capabilities these now require.

Through this internationally significant study of the Chinese diaspora, Mu and Pang in their modesty raise an immensely significant question: what does it mean now for institutions of English-medium instruction and research to look to Zhōngguó for trade, economic investment, knowledge workers, and students while being unable to theorise or think critically in Zhōngwén. Importantly, through their methodological extensions to Bourdieu’s theoretical framework Mu and Pang invite contemplation of the meanings yet to be generated through analytical concepts from the languages-and-knowledge of the Chinese diaspora. To do so, they recognise the need to educate a mass of researchers capable of deep engagement with this agenda who can model the desired practices through collective efforts. To this end, Mu and Pang hold that pedagogies of doctoral research education are necessary for the intergenerational extension of capabilities engaging in research which uses postmonolingual practices to deal with the tensions posed by the monolingual mindset, in both English and Chinese intellectual fields.

To advance the reciprocal learning, bilateral communication, and postmonolingual innovations in knowledge production made possible by the Chinese diaspora, Mu and Pang acknowledge the need for transforming the structural constraints – to flip the symbolic violence – of research education. Research supervision and academic mentorship which promote transcultural self-confidence in the rising generation of scholars from the Chinese diaspora are necessary for disrupting hierarchical, unidirectional knowledge flows in academic English. Such pedagogical interventions and associated knowledge production and dissemination are directed at securing government and university policies that embed research by the Chinese diaspora in the local/global knowledge economy. Postmonolingual researching provides a means for bringing to the fore the languages-and-knowledge researchers from the Chinese diaspora actually use to learn from interviewees; to conduct scholarly dialogues and knowledge exchanges with colleagues, and engage in mutual critiques through

peer reviews. Recent developments in knowledge production through post-monolingual researching are creating researchers among the Chinese diaspora with the capabilities for new forms of theorising and opening up new spaces for critical thinking in languages beyond academic English. Mu and Pang have moved the possibilities for intergenerational change among Chinese diasporic researchers to extend these postmonolingual research practices and the agendas produced through such research.

Michael Singh
Professor
Western Sydney University

1 Introduction

Approaching Chinese diaspora and Pierre Bourdieu

Diasporic Chinese are believed to have the third largest population, the longest history, and perhaps the widest spread in the world. Decades of research have presented us a panoramic and penetrating picture of diasporic Chinese in terms of their origin, motivation, and distribution; the potholes and distractions along their goldrush journey; their struggles for surviving and thriving in the face of discrimination, antagonism, and xenophobia in white dominant societies; as well as their identity work in modern, multicultural social spaces. In this new millennium, stories and experiences of diasporic Chinese continue to spark scholarly debate. The exponential growth of globalisation, the rapid expansion of migration, the significant development of inclusivity, the emerging forms of socioeconomic dynamics, and the striking rise of China are rewriting the quotidian life of diasporic Chinese. In turn, the life politics of diasporic Chinese comes to reshape the socioeconomic, cultural, and political landscapes of the global era. Therefore, the picture of diasporic Chinese is never complete but continues to evolve. Such continuous evolution necessitates ongoing research on diasporic Chinese. In this book, we aim to contribute in terms of enriching knowledge about the identity work, educational socialisation, and resilience building of diasporic Chinese young people.

The point of departure of this book is that vibrancies in the macrocosms of economy, polity, and power translate into dynamics of the microcosms of family, school, and community; and translate further into individual social dispositions and positions. At the same time, individuals have a certain level of agency to repaint the landscape of social structures. To understand and theorise power, politics, and practice around diasporic Chinese's identity work, educational socialisation, and resilience building, we have recourse to Pierre Bourdieu's reflexive sociology. Yet, both Chinese diaspora and Bourdieu's sociology are scholastic fields exposed to strident contestations. In this opening chapter, we first approach the scholastic fields of diaspora and Bourdieu; we then set the scene of the book by revisiting the social space of Chinatowns worldwide and a depiction of contemporary diasporic Chinese in Australia and Canada; at the end of the chapter, we provide a synoptic overview of the book.

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We foreground the discussion of Chinese diaspora and Pierre Bourdieu to construct the research context and to establish the theoretical foundation of the book. To this end, we follow the suggestion of Wacquant (1989, p. 51):

The trick, if I may call it that, is to manage to combine immense theoretical ambition with extreme empirical modesty. The summum of the art, in social science, is, in my eyes, to be capable of engaging very high ‘theoretical stakes’ by means of very precise and often mundane empirical objects. We tend too easily to assume that the social or political importance of an object suffices in itself to grant importance to the discourse that deals with it. What counts, in reality, is the rigor of the construction of the object. I think that the power of a mode of thinking never manifests itself more clearly than in its capacity to constitute socially insignificant objects into scientific objects (as Goffman did of the minutiae of interaction rituals) or, what amounts to the same thing, to approach a major socially significant object in an unexpected manner – something I am presently attempting by studying the effects of the monopoly of the state over the means of legitimate symbolic violence by way of a very down-to-earth analysis of what a certificate (of illness, invalidity, schooling, etc.) is and does. For this, one must learn how to translate very abstract problems into very concrete scientific operations.

Diasporic Chinese is becoming increasingly visible in multicultural societies. This is a ‘normal’ and normalised status in the empirical world. Here we aim to transform diasporic Chinese from ‘mundane empirical objects’ into significant ‘scientific objects’ by engaging with Bourdieu’s sociology. It is by no means our intention here to colonise Chinese diaspora research by Bourdieu’s sociological instruments; neither do we intend to test Bourdieu’s sociological theory on Chinese diaspora populations. In contrast to transplanting Bourdieu into Chinese diasporic contexts or pre-empting Bourdieu’s explanatory power in Chinese diaspora research, we make an attempt to approach a sociology of Chinese diaspora through Bourdieu. As it is overambitious to examine every life aspect of diasporic Chinese, we focus on the identity work, educational socialisation, and resilience building in this book. By doing so, we hope that we do not misinterpret Wacquant’s call, as quoted above, to ‘combine immense theoretical ambition with extreme empirical modesty’. To begin with, we construct the scientific objects of the book, that is, diasporic Chinese.

Revisiting the notion ‘diaspora’

Chinese people have long been known for their disposition of migration, with their earliest documented voyage of exploration dating back more than 2,000 years. According to 《史记》 (*Records of the Grand Historian of China*),¹ Emperor Qin (*Qinshihuang*, 秦始皇) feared death and sought a way to live forever. He delegated to Xufu (徐福) the mission of looking for the elixir of immortality. Entrusted with the mission of discovering the secret of immortality for Emperor

Qin, Xufu made his first journey to the eastern seas in 219 BC. Xufu led a fleet of 60 barques with 5,000 crew members, 3,000 virgin boys and girls, and a mass of craftsmen with different expertise. He returned several years later without finding any immortals believed to live on the Penglai Island. He then set sail again in 210 BC. The fleet anchored in a place called 'Flat Plains and Wide Swamps' (平原广泽),² where Xufu proclaimed himself king and never returned. Xufu's journeys to the eastern seas may qualify Chinese as an ethnic group with the longest history of migration. Historical reviews of Chinese migration are abundant in the literature (W. Li, 2016b; Liu, 2015; Poston & Wong, 2016; Priebe & Rudolf, 2015; Wang, 1991; Zhou, 2017). Only a brief recount is required here.

Wang (1991) proposes one of the earliest models to categorise overseas Chinese. According to Wang's (1991) typology, overseas Chinese can be identified as *huashang* (华商), *huagong* (华工), *huaqiao* (华侨), and *huayi* (华裔). The term *huashang* literally means Chinese traders or merchants. This is the dominant pattern of Chinese emigration during the precolonial era of Chinese imperial states. Early *huashang*, predominantly from Fujian province, took seasonal workers, who were mostly their relatives or/and fellow villagers, to South-east Asia. Some returned home regularly to prepare subsequent journeys; whereas some settled overseas, developed migration networks, and planted seeds for further trade. In either way, *huashang* established 'peripheral capitalism' (Wang, 1991) on the fringes or outside the reach of the imperial state, staying away from both the repressive, contemptuous, bureaucratic orthodoxy that disapproved of monetary profit, and the symbolic power of Confucianism emphatic about ritual and social bonding rather than financial gains. The term *huagong* commonly refers to Chinese coolies, mostly from Guangdong and Fujian provinces, who were indentured workers at overseas plantations, mines, and infrastructural sites. This is the dominant pattern of Chinese emigration during the colonial era, culminating in the goldrush years. The term *huaqiao* literally means Chinese sojourners, generally including first-generation Chinese immigrants living overseas who retain strong connections with their motherland China. The term *huayi* broadly refers to people of Chinese descent, who are later generations of the former three categories, and who may or may not maintain strong connections with China.

Interestingly, W. Li (2016a) politically makes a further distinction between *huaqiao* and *huaren*. The former term is formally used for designation of Chinese citizens living outside Greater China, namely Chinese Mainland, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau. The latter term, with no reference to Chinese citizenship, is typically used to denote first-generation Chinese immigrants from Greater China who have taken up permanent residency or citizenship in another country. Irrespective of different terminologies, the two notions are both China-centred, with a political connotation of recognition of, and connection to, the motherland China.

Huashang and *huagong*, owing to their historical origin, have less current relevance, whereas *huaqiao*, *huaren*, and *huayi* are still widely used to identify

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overseas Chinese. However, the sociocultural and linguistic diversity of overseas Chinese comes to shape a highly complex and demographically heterogeneous group that makes any attempt at typological conceptualisation partial and contingent at best, and misleading and problematic at worst. In some Southeast Asian states, particularly Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia, a relatively large proportion of citizens are of Chinese descent. Some may well maintain Chinese culture and language, irrespective of generation, whereas others may not. In either case, they may not identify themselves as *huaren* or *huayi*. At times when national identity has high stakes, they may prefer to use Singaporean, Malaysian, or Indonesian, instead of identifying with China or Chinese (Wang, 1992). At other times when cultural identity is salient, they may choose to use Singaporean *huaren* (Singaporean Chinese), Malaysian *huaren* (Malaysian Chinese), or Indonesian *huaren* (Indonesian Chinese), whether they are first-generation immigrants from Greater China or long-settled later generations. In some situations when Chinese cultural identity is lost or fading, they may use Singaporean *huayi* (Singaporean of Chinese descent), Malaysian *huayi* (Malaysian of Chinese descent), or Indonesian *huayi* (Indonesian of Chinese descent) merely for the purpose of designating their historical genesis and biological body. In this case, Chineseness has become what Gans (1979) means by ‘symbolic ethnicity’. In other situations when racial identity has more reference, East Asian or Asian may be used as a collective, pan-ethnic identity.

The aforementioned nomenclatures are equally protean in Western countries where there are relatively large populations of Chinese descent, for example, the US, Canada, and Australia. The prescribed, categorical nomenclature can become completely dysfunctional in contexts of mixed-race and ever-evolving and swinging identities. When successfully ‘assimilated’, overseas Chinese may identify with their colonial motherland, claiming a pure American/Australian/Canadian identity and becoming a ‘Banana’ person – yellow outside and white inside (Khoo, 2003). Some may form a pan-ethnic Asian identity as a collective response to racism, or may (re)claim a Chinese or hyphenated identity (e.g. Chinese-American, Chinese-Canadian, Chinese-Australian), especially for first-generation new Chinese immigrants given the rise of China (Benton & Gomez, 2014). Therefore, the imposed, predominant nomenclature to categorise overseas Chinese is difficult, if not impossible; is problematic, if not fallacious.

In recognition of the challenges to typologically conceptualise overseas Chinese, we choose to use the term ‘Chinese diaspora’. It is by no means our intention to adopt a simplistic approach and overlook the heterogeneity of diasporic Chinese populations. Indeed, Hall (1990, p. 235) has long reminded us:

The diaspora experience as I intend it here is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of ‘identity’ which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity.

The heterogeneity of diaspora is worthy of scholarly debate, but our focus here is not to categorise diasporic Chinese populations but to decipher the matrix of identity, resilience, socialisation, and learning of Chinese children, adolescents, and young adults in different diasporic contexts, Australia and Canada in particular. The themes of this book are introduced momentarily. We now spend some space conceptualising diaspora.

The term ‘diaspora’ originally referred only to the dispersion and exile of Jewish Christians from Judea and later from Israel (Safran, 1991). It was then extended to describe almost all nameable emigrant or immigrant groups as well as their descendants dispersed outside their place of birth, origin, or ancestry. Brubaker (2005, p. 1) uses the term ‘the “diaspora” diaspora’ to describe the proliferation and dispersion of the term ‘diaspora’ across semantic, conceptual, and disciplinary spaces. But the latitudinarian use of ‘diaspora’ erodes the discriminating power of the term and undermines its ability to make distinctions: ‘The universalisation of diaspora, paradoxically, means the disappearance of diaspora’ (Brubaker, 2005, p. 3). To save ‘diaspora’ from extinction, we need to reappropriate the term by relooking at its definition, boundaries, and features.

Diaspora is an umbrella term ‘for the many extra-territorial groups that, through processes of interacting with their origin state, are in various stages of coalescence or dissipation’ (Gamlen, 2008, p. 842). Diasporic populations can include temporary sojourners or transnational migrants staying/living alternately in their sending and host states, and first-generation emigrants and their descendants, who – in certain places at certain times – form a fully fledged diaspora community in their settled country (Gamlen, 2008). Emphatic about connections to homeland and the home-host binary, Gamlen’s (2008) understanding of diaspora aligns with Safran’s (1991) conceptualisation that proposes a helpful list of common features of diaspora. These include dispersal from the homeland, retention of a collective memory of the homeland, commitment to the homeland, desire to return to the homeland, collective consciousness and solidarity, and partial or full exclusion or marginalisation from the hostland. Less helpful, however, is the binary of home and host, as the hostland can have already become a well-established home away from home whereas the homeland can have already become the most unfamiliar home (Mu, 2016). In addition, Safran’s (1991) criteria may overemphasise the connection to homeland. He indeed observed that some diaspora communities (e.g. diasporic Chinese community) generally have less or no desire to return to the so-called homeland (Safran, 1991).

Brubaker (2005) provides a condensed version of diasporic features and identifies three core constitutive elements of diaspora: dispersion (either forced or voluntary) across state borders, orientation to a real or imagined homeland as a source of identity, and boundary-maintenance as a distinctive community vis-à-vis a host society. Yet these criteria for diaspora are more suggestive than conclusive, as Brubaker (2005) acknowledges that each of these criteria is variously weighted in different diasporic contexts and each confronts its antithesis. First, dispersion is not only caused by migration of people over borders but also