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STUDY OF THE PHENOMENON OF VISITING FRIENDS AND RELATIVES OF
CHINESE DIASPORA

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Hospitality, Recreation and Tourism Management

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science

by

Hao Pan

May 2008

Gonzaga da Gama

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HOSPITALITY, RECREATION & TOURISM
MANAGEMENT

_____
Dr. Gonzaga da Gama
Associate Professor and Graduate Coordinator
Hospitality, Recreation & Tourism Management
Committee Chair

_____
Dr. Ranjan Bandyopadhyay
Assistant Professor, Hospitality, Recreation &
Tourism Management
Committee Member

_____
Dr. Tsu-Hong Yen
Associate Professor, Hospitality, Recreation &
Tourism Management
Committee Member

APPROVED FOR THE UNIVERSITY

_____

ABSTRACT

STUDY OF THE PHENOMENON OF VISITING FRIENDS AND RELATIVES OF CHINESE DIASPORA

by Hao Pan

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of Chinese Diasporas' Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR). Qualitative research methods were employed to capture the lived experience of 16 Chinese Diasporas residing in the San Francisco Bay Area. The findings showed that Chinese Diasporas use VFR to maintain networks with their country of origin, and their desire for accumulation of social capital motivated Chinese Diasporas to take VFR trips, try to maximize the outcomes of their trips, and enhance their current lives in the United States. The findings of this investigation allowed for expanding and clarifying several aspects of the overall VFR experience of Chinese Diasporas. Finally, recommendations for planning effective marketing strategies are suggested to Chinese national and regional tourism organizations/agencies to stimulate VFR among Chinese Diasporas.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Recently, scholars have been studying migration, family life, and friendship as the representatives of the tourism forms of social connections among people (e.g., Larsen, Urry, & Axhausen, 2006). The social connection study conducted by Larsen, Urry, & Axhausen (2006), demonstrated the multiple meanings of tourism. Diaspora Tourism, which is defined by Coles and Timothy (2004) as the forms of tourism undertaken by members of Diasporas communities and focuses on tourism and its relationship with Diasporas communities, is a good vehicle through which to further research on the topic of social connection.

One particular focus of Diaspora Tourism has been the exploration of manifested behaviors that draw out social linkages in the form of visiting friends and relatives (VFR) tourism (Duval, 2004b). When it involves migrants traveling back to former homelands, VFR travel represents a particular form of transnational behavior that has wrapped up within it multiple levels of sociality and degrees of cultural significance (Duval, 2006). Many scholars in tourism study have noticed the significance of VFR to both visiting and hosting communities and have investigated some of the ethnic Diaspora groups (e.g., Duval, 2004a; Falzon, 2003; Stephenson, 2002). However, in reviewing previous studies, the researcher found that the travel behavior of members of the Chinese Diaspora, one of the biggest and influential immigrant communities in the United States, has rarely been studied.

The increase in the ethnic diversity of the United States is one of the most

powerful demographic forces shaping American society (Allison & Geiger, 1993; Orum, 2005). According to 2004 immigration statistics (Rytina, 2006), the second largest ethnic group of immigrants to the United States includes people from Mainland China. Many Chinese Diasporas have strong ties to their homeland and going back to their hometowns for the purpose of VFR during their vacations. According to the China National Tourism Bureau, in 2005 among the 1,555,450 American visitors to China, 90,103 visitors stated that the purpose of their visit was VFR (China National Tourism Association, 2006). With the increase in Chinese immigration to the United States, this number is expected to rise in the future.

To many Chinese Diasporas, the VFR trip is treated as the most important vacation for the whole year or even years. As a significant phenomenon, many Chinese Diasporas spend weeks or even months planning their VFR travel. They also like to discuss their plans or share their experiences with friends during social gatherings with the VFR trip becoming the main topic. Many rational and emotional factors are involved in the planning and executing of a VFR trip. However, the literature appears silent pertaining to the VFR phenomenon of Chinese Diasporas.

As indicated by Allison and Geiger (1993), the majority of leisure research involving race and ethnicity has focused primarily on Whites and Blacks and more recently on people of Hispanic ancestry. Given the influx of Chinese immigrants to the United States and the current geopolitical status of China, research on Chinese Diasporas' VFR trips will aid in informing the literature on leisure behaviors of minority ethnic groups, help people understand the Chinese Diasporas' experience, and identify the

causes of their passion regarding VFR trips. As the San Francisco Bay Area is one of the areas most populated with Chinese Diasporas, it presented an ideal location to conduct research on this topic.

Statement of the Problem

As mentioned above, in spite of the increasing number of Chinese Diasporas in the United States, very little research has examined either their specific travel activities or their leisure activities in general. Stodolska (2000) claimed that although a substantial volume of research was devoted to established ethnic minorities and their often unique leisure behaviors, the leisure of immigrants remains an almost totally unexplored subject.

While the importance of VFR's contribution to a destination's economy is being recognized (Braunlich & Nadkarni, 1995; Moscardo, Pearce, Morrison, Green, & O'Leary, 2000), very little research has studied the VFR experience of Chinese Diasporas, the causes of their behaviors, or the impact of their VFR experiences on their lives in the United States. In addition, marketing strategies or campaigns are rarely conducted towards this market segment either due to limited knowledge of it or the complexities of the target (Lethto, Morrison, & O'Leary, 2001). Thus, there is a strong need for scholars in the tourism and leisure studies field to gain more understanding of the VFR of Chinese Diasporas to address this gap in the literature and provide useful insight for tourism marketing strategies.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the VFR of Chinese Diasporas, including their choices of activities, behaviors, and overall

experiences before, during, and after their VFR trips. In particular, the investigation focused on understanding both the internal and external factors that influence Chinese Diasporas' decision-making process and behaviors regarding this type of travel. Finally, the research made recommendations to China national and regional tourism organizations/agencies for effective marketing strategies to stimulate VFR among Chinese Diasporas.

Research Questions

The following questions guided the current investigation. What is the decision-making process for engaging in VFR? What is the experience of going on a VFR trip? These guiding questions were followed by a series of questions that probe deeply into the meanings of the phenomenon. For example, what are participants' expectations from VFR? What kind of information or service do individuals desiring VFR travel want to get from tour operators or tourism organizations to fulfill their motivations or expectations? Finally, how do tourism marketing activities or campaigns influence their choices of activities or behaviors before or during the trip?

Design of the Study

VFR experiences are unique and personal rather than generalized. In order to understand the VFR experience of Chinese Diaspora, a highly structured quantitative research design would be inappropriate. Tapachai and Waryszak (2000) indicated that in the study of tourism, open-ended, unstructured, conversational, and textual material would help in understanding the experiences of individual travelers. Furthermore, phenomenological research allows the capturing of the everyday experience of people

and how they make sense of their world (Morse, 1994). As VFR experiences are very personal, this research study used phenomenology as the theoretical foundation to understand and interpret the meanings (Giorgi, 1989; Kvale, 1983) of the VFR experience of Chinese Diasporas.

Significance of the Study

Given the number of Chinese immigrants to the United States and their influence on American society, it was deemed imperative to understand the leisure behaviors and travel patterns of this segment. The current investigation enhanced our understanding of this segment which in turn increased our collective understanding of various segments of American society. This research on the VFR of Chinese Diaspora will not only expand the understanding of the leisure activities and experiences among this ethnic group and the way this enhances their current lives in the United States, but will also offer valuable insights to help destination tourism organizations establish successful marketing strategies or tactics for this market segment. This qualitative research will supplement the quantitative tourism marketing research by probing and capturing the deeper causes of tourists' motivations and behaviors.

Definition of Terms

Chinese Diasporas

Chinese Diasporas are either ethnic Chinese or people of the Chinese nation who live outside of China. Diasporic identities are defined by the recognition of necessary heterogeneity and diversity. Chinese Diasporas are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew along itineraries of migrating, but also re-creating the

endless desire to return to their “lost origins” (Hall, 1994). In this thesis, Chinese Diaspora as a term is used instead of immigrant or Chinese American so as to include the transnational Chinese/long-time visitor in the study because there are many of Chinese students and professional/contract workers currently living in the United States whose existence has a significant impact on Chinese American communities.

Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is comprised of five chapters: introduction, review of related literature, methods, findings, and discussion and conclusion. The first chapter introduces the VFR phenomenon of the Chinese Diasporas, the background and need for the study, the purpose of the study with the specific research questions guiding it, and the significance of the study. The chapter ends with a definition of terms and description of the structure of the thesis.

The second chapter reviews the literature on the phenomenon of VFR, issues pertaining to the immigration of Chinese nationals, and processes involved in vacation decision-making. This chapter further discusses the rationale for employing phenomenology as a theoretical basis for the proposed investigation. The third chapter discusses the methods the researcher used in conducting the current investigation, with data collection, development of the interview protocol, data analysis, and issues of credibility and trustworthiness described in detail. The fourth chapter presents the findings of the study. Finally, the fifth chapter discusses the findings of the study and provides both recommendations for future research and strategies for practical applications.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Related Literature

In order to gain background and contextual information pertaining to the VFR experience of Chinese Diasporas, the researcher conducted a comprehensive review of related literature. This chapter summarizes the related literature in the following areas: the immigration history of Chinese Diasporas and their lives in America, the significance and special characteristics of VFR, and the decision-making process, including factors influencing that process. Finally, this chapter briefly introduces the concept of phenomenology as the theoretical foundation of the current study.

Chinese Diasporas

With the increasing diversification of American society, it is becoming important to focus on the needs of each of the various factions that make up society. Given that the Chinese constitute the second largest immigration group in the United States, it is important to understand their travel and leisure needs and patterns. However, a review of the literature indicates that this subject has been neglected (Allison & Geiger, 1993; Orum, 2005). This chapter will address the immigration history of Chinese nationals to the United States, their diversified lives in America, and their choices of VFR as a means to connect their current identities and ethnic background. This review will provide a sound contextual background to the understanding of the phenomenon of VFR for Chinese Diaspora.

Immigration History of Chinese Diasporas

In the United States, the Chinese Diaspora has a very long history covering over

150 years. The major initial wave of Chinese immigration started around the 1850s during the California Gold Rush (Lee, 2003; Chang, 1999). Most Chinese immigrants emigrated from Pearl River Delta in southern China. They worked on the railroads and clustered in Chinatowns. Even today, Chinese who live in Chinatowns primarily speak Cantonese, reflecting the region of China from where they or previous generations immigrated. This immigration wave was stopped by the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. However, the Chinese living in the United States have maintained ties with China through the movements of people, culture, and ideas. Chinese Diaspora defied exclusion in the form of trade between native land and American settlements, female migration and family formation, herbal medical practices, preservation of aspects of Chinese education, and life stories (Chan, 2005). Thus they have never lost their connection with their hometowns.

The second wave of Chinese immigration began in 1952. During this wave, the primary immigrants were people of Chinese descent who had immigrated to Southeast Asia in prior years and were no longer poor or illiterate (Lee, 2003, Chang 1999). Immigration of professionals from Mainland China increased from 1977, reflecting the third wave of immigration. This occurred as a consequence of the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) allowing its citizens to emigrate. These new immigrants tended to cluster in suburban areas and avoid urban Chinatowns. The common language used by them was Mandarin. However, as stated by Lee (2003) and Chang (1999), in the 1980s, the third wave was slowed down because of the widespread concern by the PRC government regarding a brain drain because students who had gone

to the United States to pursue higher education were not returning to the PRC upon its completion of education.

The current trend of migration representing the recent wave of Chinese immigrants to the United States has coincided with the powerful trend of globalization; it is also influenced by the economic development of China. Many new immigrants, including highly skilled intercompany transferees and their family members and friends, have immigrated across the Pacific Ocean to work, live, or travel in the United States due to the tremendous increase in trade and other business activities between China and the United States (Chan, 2005; Yin, 2003). Meanwhile, there is a reverse flow of large numbers of Chinese Americans, both immigrants and U.S.-born, who are returning to China to start businesses or work for U.S. and other Western companies to manage local offices in China (Faist, 2000). Looking at the economic motivations of emigration to the United States and changing political relationships with Mainland China, Chan (2005) claimed that many immigrants realized that they needed the protection of a strong home government. Chinese Diasporas' capital in remittances, investments, and political donations also strengthened ties between native land and overseas Chinese (Chan, 2005).

Life of Chinese Diaspora in America

The daily lives of Chinese Diasporas in the United States have varied widely depending on their origin, income, and social status. These people form one of the most diversified ethnic groups in the United States (Yin, 2003). Many Chinese Diasporas living in Chinatowns are poor, but others are well-educated middle or upper-class people residing in such California suburbs as the San Francisco Bay Area. Many researchers

(e.g., Lee, 2003; Chang, 1999; Yin, 2003) noticed that the vast differences in their places of origin, political affiliations, cultural orientations, and socioeconomic status have transformed Chinese Americans into groups with separate and even conflicting interests.

According to Xie (2005), Chinese Diaspora identity involves two trends among immigrants. One describes people who are attempting to restore their former purity and recover the unities and certainties that they feel are being lost. The other describes those whose identities are exposed to the play of history, politics, representation, and difference, so that they are unlikely ever again to be unitary or “pure.” Chinese Diasporas have made many changes in their lives in the United States. Some of them have over the years adapted to the American lifestyle and are assimilated into the American melting pot whereas others have chosen to remain within their subgroups and maintain Chinese traditions or customs (Yin, 2003). Although a large portion of Chinese immigrants have chosen to become American citizens, their lifestyle or philosophy has not changed much.

However, not all Chinese Americans have passed down the traditions to their children. Lack of knowledge of Chinese language and culture is thus a very common phenomenon among second or third generations of Chinese Americans (Lee, 2003). Americanization was commonly embraced and “Chinese-ness” rejected by native-born generations of the early 20th century (Chan, 2005), but in recent years the increased number of new immigrants from China has changed the situation as demonstrated by the booming of Chinese language schools in the San Francisco Bay Area. Today, it is a trend for most Chinese parents to send their children to Chinese language school on a weekly or even daily basis (Leung, 2007). Given this renewed interest in their ethnic

culture, an important question to ask is how immigrants in a new culture still strive to maintain their own cultural heritage and identity.

Struggling in different cultural frames, Diasporas' cultural identities are constructed through the interaction between similarity and difference in the process of displacement and relocation (Xie, 2004). Paradoxically, as cultures are uprooted from places, ideas of culturally and ethnically distinct places become even more salient (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992). Diaspora members living on cultural borderlands or interstitial zones cluster around remembered or imagined "homelands," practice "authentic home cultures," and form ethnic communities so as to re-root their floating lives and reach a closure in making sense of their constantly changing subjectivities (Shi, 2005). One of the most common ways is through the phenomenon of VFR. The desire to visit China stems from a history of well-maintained familial and cultural ties despite the many years of separation (Lew, 1995). Through traveling between their current host and former homes, the Diasporas witness or consume social and cultural elements established as a result of the Diasporas processes (Duval, 2006).

Visit Friends and Relatives (VFR)

To measure demand from various segments of tourism, (primarily for planning and marketing purpose), in 1979 the United Nations proposed a system to classify the tourism demand by delineating the main purpose(s) of visitors or trips: (a) leisure, recreation, and holidays; (b) visiting friends and relatives (VFR); (c) business and professional; (d) health treatment; (e) religion/pilgrimages; and (f) others (Theobald, 2005). The prior literature on the VFR phenomenon is reviewed in the following part in

order to understand the development of the concept and special characteristics of this type of travel.

Until the late 1980s, VFR tourism was one of the most neglected and under researched categories in tourism analyses/studies (Seaton & Palmer, 1997). Seaton and Palmer give three reasons for this historical marginalization: (a) this type of tourism has limited economic value; (b) this type of travel is beyond marketing influence; and (c) this type of travel is affected by political reasons. However, more recently, scholars (Braunlich & Nadkarni, 1995; Moscardo et al., 2000; Seaton & Palmer, 1997) have realized that VFR not only has significance economic and social impacts on the host community, but also the unique characteristics associated with any type of travel.

It was assumed by tourism planners that the ability of VFR tourism to generate revenues was limited as compared to other kinds of tourism. According to the China National Tourism Bureau, 20,255,137 foreign visitors traveled to China in 2005. Among them, only 2% of the visitors stated they were on VFR trip, which is the lowest among all other categories such as meeting/business, sightseeing/leisure, worker and crew, and others. However, among the 1,555,450 American visitors in 2005 to China, 90,103 visitors registered their purpose of the visit as being VFR (China National Tourism Association, 2006). This number did not include Chinese citizens who are permanent residents of the United States or international students and individuals holding work visas. Although not as important as other segment such as leisure travel to some tourist origin countries or regions, the tourism organizations should not overlook the VFR segment when promoting tourism via an emigration host countries/regions campaign.

Aggregate statistical data partly document the changing significance of tourism for visiting friends and relatives. World Tourism Organization statistics show that in 2001 there were 154 million international arrivals for “VFR, health, religion, other” as compared with 74 million in 1990. The average annual growth was 8.5%.

The VFR travelers are very important to some tourism destinations such as China or India that have a large number of emigrants. Langlois, Theodore, and Ineson’s (1999) argue that the stronger the personal affiliation with the country, the more positive the attitude of an individual will be towards the country as a travel destination. In the study of trends in outbound tourism from Taiwan, Huang, Yung, and Huang (1996) found that VFR was the biggest outbound travel segment, with Japan, Hong Kong, and Mainland China receiving the largest numbers of visitors. The VFR market is not only substantial but also exerts more of an economic influence on receiving communities than was previously assumed (Braunlich & Nadkarni, 1995; Moscardo et al., 2000). International VFRs made substantial use of commercial accommodations and had significant expenditures on food and beverages, transportation, gifts and souvenirs, and entertainment (Lethto et al., 2001).

Other than the significant economic significance, the VFR segment also has a strong social impact on both visitor and host. When distant family members or friends do meet up, each visit is likely to last longer and be especially meaningful to all of them. As stated by Larsen et al. (2006), obligations of visiting and showing hospitality become central to tourism and social life networks.

Seaton and Palmer (1997) assumed that VFR was a category of tourism that could

not be stimulated by tourism planners as it happened for reasons beyond the influence of tourism marketing efforts. The authors contended that no special activity was necessary to market VFR, because it would be influenced by the same marketing efforts as those promoting mainstream recreational/leisure tourism. However, recent studies on VFR have found that it has distinct behavior patterns that call for tailor-made marketing attention (Morrison, Hsieh, & O'Leary, 1995; Seaton & Tagg, 1995). In fact, the VFR market has characteristics that may be of unique value for tourism marketing organizations.

VFR travel can be segmented into distinct subgroups by activities in which the participants engage in while on vacation. Moscardo et al. (2000) proposed an initial typology of VFR travel in studying the relationship between the differentiating factors and VFR travel behavior patterns. The model identified five factors for differentiating the VFR market: (a) sector (the distinction between VFR as a travel activity and as a trip type or motive), (b) scope (the distinction between domestic and international VFR travel), (c) effort (short-haul versus long-haul VFR trips), (d) accommodation used (staying with friends and relatives versus staying in commercial accommodation), and (e) focus of visit (VFs, VRs, or VFVRs). In the current study, the researcher hoped to probe the relationship between activity and motive.

The political reason is the third one for the historical neglect of VFR: it has had no lobbying group championing it in the way that recreational and business tourism has been promoted by accommodation groups, particularly by tourist boards that tend to exclude VFR in their tourism accounting due to statistical difficulties (Seaton & Palmer,

1997). In most emigrant countries such as China and India, the traditional marketing targets are tourists from the Western world. In the PRC, some of the state-owned travel companies such as China Travel Services were originally established to accommodate the Chinese Diaspora market. However, after the economic reforms starting in 1978, no government regulations or restrictions limit the customer resources within tourism markets. Travel companies are handling multi-target segments and seldom engage in tailor-made marketing activities towards the Chinese Diasporas. Yet more people on the move in search of work, education, love, peace, or home, have close connections with others and travel considerable distances to visit and to receive the hospitality of their close friends and family members (Larsen, Urry, & Axhausen, 2006).

Travel involving VFR can have a range of special properties (Morrison et al., 1995; Seaton & Tagg, 1995). For example, it may be to highlight an event such as a birth or wedding, or it may be a desire to return to places with personal significance. Alternatively, a VFR trip may be a bonus to a vacation at a popular destination or a business trip. Through personal communication with friends, the researcher noticed that many Chinese Diasporas take several days' vacation after a business trip to China to visit their relatives or do sightseeing; and some companies even encourage their staff to combine business with personal welfare as a benefit.

To gain an understanding of VFR, researchers may find value in pursuing studies of the importance of social networks in well-being, studies of regional ties and ethnic identification, and market research directed at expanding the range of tourists at a destination (Moscardo et al., 2000). Morrison et al. (1995) analyzed VFR as an activity

rather than as a prime travel motivation and found that in some cases, VFR was just one of several activities desired by tourists. However, this research assumed the motivations for VFR influenced the choice of activities or promoted certain behaviors during the trip. Therefore it is necessary for researchers to look at not only motivation but behavior, as well as the links between the two. As most of the research conducted on VFR has focused on non-Chinese, it is also important to understand the experience of the Chinese Diaspora group as a unique market segment comprised of a minority ethnic background. When VFR travel involves migrants traveling to former homelands, it represents a particular form of transnational behavior that has wrapped up within itself multiple levels of socialites and degrees of cultural significance (Duval, 2006).

VFR of Chinese Diasporas

As stated by Stodolska (2000), despite certain post-arrival changes in the participation style and the leisure repertoire itself, the leisure behavior of immigrants is still influenced heavily by the values and customs of the old country. Many Chinese Diasporas have maintained transnational ethnic and cultural identities. Chinese Diasporas try to remain tied to China throughout their lives in the United States with their recreational motivation directly or indirectly affected by their ethnicity and acculturation (Walker, Deng, & Dieser, 2001). However, the strong motivations for engaging in VFR travel sometimes are constrained by external factors. For example, Li and Stodolska (2006) noticed that for Chinese graduate students, temporary residence status in the United States coupled with their strong desire to focus on their studies significantly affected their leisure activities. Instead of going back to China, most of them chose to

invite their parents to visit the United States. Thus to an Chinese Diasporas, the change in role from a Chinese resident to temporary American resident as well as the extraordinary shift of physical settings influences their decision-making process. The changing of belief systems regarding societal conceptions of ethnicity (i.e., a traditional Chinese versus modern Western cultural mental model of correct behavioral practices for members of a particular society) and socioeconomic status influenced VFR decision-making as well (Li & Stodolska, 2006).

As with any travel experience, when discussing the phenomenon of VFR travel, it is important to understand the decision-making process surrounding an upcoming VFR travel experience. The literature identifies several factors influencing decisions pertaining to embarking on a travel experience. The following section will introduce the theory of decision making and address factors associated with the process as a theory of the decision-making process will help increase the understanding of how and why some factors influence the vacation decision-making of VFR travelers.

Vacation Decision-Making

According to Decrop and Snelders (2005), vacation decision-making is a process influenced by both psychological or internal variables—for example, attitudes, motivation, beliefs and intentions, and non-psychological or external variables (e.g., time, pull factors and marketing mix). The following section covers the different stages of the decision-making process and relations among socio-psychological factors that influence this process. A clear understanding of the complexities and interrelationships of the factors is important to understanding the VFR experience of Chinese Diaspora.

Vacation Decision-Making Process

Sirakaya and Woodside (2005) indicated:

Decision-making can be broken down into a series of well-defined stages: (a) recognition that there is a decision to be made, (b) formulation of goals and objectives, (c) generation of an alternative set of objects from which to choose, (d) search for information about the properties of the alternatives under consideration, (e) ultimate judgment or choice among many alternatives, (f) acting upon the decision, and (g) providing feedback for the next decision. (p. 815)

The choice of destination and mode of travel (Pearce & Caltabiano, 1983), expectations (Rekom, 1994), and information sources used (Kim, Weaver, & McCleary, 1996) have all been studied to establish relationships between tourist motivation and various aspects of behavior relevant to tourism management. The revolutionary development of technologies, such as the Internet has given Chinese Diasporas more chances to get tourism information about their home country. Other research studies (e.g., Poria, Butler, & Airey, 2004) have emphasized marketing implications and pointed out the relationship between people's motivation and their socio-demographic characteristics.

Decrop and Snelders (2005) discussed the possible relevance of demographic and socio-psychological variables as contextual factors in the decision-making process of vacationers. From their data, four major types of contextual influences are seen to play a role: environmental, personal, interpersonal, and situational factors. Environmental includes social, cultural and geographical factors. Personal factors can be divided into two parts: primary (age, family situation, education and occupation, personality and life style) and secondary (personal history, vacation experience, personal resources, motives

and involvement). Interpersonal factors include group adhesion, level of communication, distribution of roles, and congruence (conflict-consensus). Finally, situational factors include information, availability, emotions and moods, side projects, tasks, and hazards. External factors such as culture, geography, and social together with internal factors such as personal experience, interpersonal communication, and motives influence a person's decision-making process although their influence may vary with different periods of the process.

Internal and External Factors Influencing VFR

As discussed above, the VFR tourist is classified based on segmentation criteria of activities or behavior that can be used for marketing purposes. However, segmentation criteria are less useful for describing more fundamental and structural aspects of the vacationer's life that are important for strategic marketing planning (Decrop & Snelders, 2005). Therefore, socio-psychological typologies were introduced to the field of tourism research that offered a more integrated view of the vacationer because they connect descriptive aspects of the vacationer with sociological or psychological variables (Decrop & Snelders, 2005). Some of the scholars (e.g., Cha, McCleary, & Uysal, 1995; Cohen, 1972, 1979; Davis, Allen, & Crosonza, 1988) classified the tourist by motives some (e.g., Plog, 1994; Thrane, 1997) used psychographic variables and some used socio-style factors. However, these typologies are unable to make the complete link between the fundamental reasons for VFR tourists to travel and travel behavior without looking at both the internal and external factors influencing the tourist.

This is especially pertinent in the study of the changing of identity or environment due to the Chinese Diasporas' special role as immigrants or transnational individuals or groups. For overseas Chinese:

China is an "existential home". It serves as the center of their personal and social value systems, which are based on the extended family. Though they cannot live in China, it remains the place where they feel most at home. This experience as existential insideness includes the experience of permanent residents of a place. (Lew, 2005).

Cohen (1979) referred to the "existential tourists" as those who are spiritually alienated from their place of physical residence and physically alienated from their spiritual center (which may be either elective or ancestral). Cohen argues that existential tourism is growing as forced and voluntary emigration had increased in recent decades. Pierskalla and Lee (1998) pointed out that the expectancy theory is commonly accepted in the tourism industry as it states that internally held information or beliefs about value and leisure outcomes determine an individual's attitudes, intentions, and ultimately behavior. Woodside, Caldwell, and Spurr (2006) stated that an individual's thoughts and actions can be explained and described accurately only by understanding the holistic complexity of the person's environment. Decrop and Snelders (2005) noted that interpersonal influences in group decision making and the cultural environment have not been taken into account by many scholars when looking at tourist behavior. In addition, almost all typologies suggest mutually exclusive categories of tourists that do not allow consumers to move between categories in response to personal or situation changes or to evolution in their "vacation career" (Pearce, 1988).

As is evident from the discussion in the preceding paragraphs, the factors influencing VFR travel are unique, complex, and very individual. In order to have a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of VFR travel, it is important to understand how individuals make sense of their lived world. Phenomenology, a philosophical tradition promoted by Husserl (1970), affords an optimal opportunity to uncover the deeper meanings held by individuals engaging in VFR travel. The following section will provide a brief elaboration about phenomenology as a theoretical foundation.

Phenomenology as a Theoretical Foundation

Phenomenology is both a school of philosophy associated with Husserl (1970) and a type of qualitative research method that focuses on the subjective experiences of the individual. Creswell (1998) stated that the reality of an object was perceived only within the meaning of an individual's experience. Phenomenology seeks to understand the meaning of an experience through a conversation/interview with a person who experiences it. Research questions employing a phenomenology paradigm attempted to uncover and elicit the essence of an experience from the participants' perspective. The data analysis in this paradigm focuses on interpreting the meanings of the experience.

By reviewing literature related to the Chinese Diaspora, VFR, and the decision-making process, this chapter helps to provide both a comprehensive background and certain contextual information pertaining to the VFR experience of Chinese Diasporas. These studies provided a sound rationale for conducting the current investigation on gaining a deeper understanding of Chinese Diasporas by interpreting the meaning of their VFR experience.

CHAPTER 3

Research Methods

As the purpose of the current investigation was to gain a deeper understanding of the VFR experience of Chinese Diasporas, qualitative research methods were deemed appropriate and thus employed in this study. These methods were supported by phenomenology as the philosophical/theoretical foundation. This chapter describes the methods used in conducting the current investigation. The topics covered include the research design, data collection instruments, and data collection process along with Human Subjects Approval and validity/reliability. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the methods of data analysis employed in the study.

Research Design

To gain a deep understanding of the VFR experience of Chinese Diasporas, the researcher conducted a phenomenological investigation by using semi-structured face-to-face interviews to examine the decision-making process and experience of VFR of Chinese Diasporas living in the San Francisco Bay Area. The researcher recruited 16 eligible Chinese Diaspora participants purposively, using personal contacts and snowball sampling techniques (Patton, 2002). The participants were single or multiple members of an individual family, which was defined as one decision-making unit, categorized as either a person who is single, married without children, or married with children. The eligibility criteria for inclusion as a research subject are elaborated on in the following section. Content analysis of the records of interviews has been commonly used in the tourism research studies (e.g., Woodside et al., 2006) because these methods allow

people to discover information and meanings while being unobtrusive. By using semi-structured interviews, participant observations, and field notes, the researcher had the opportunity to explore the feelings, perceptions, interpretations, ideas, and thoughts of the research participants via their responses to both general and specific questions.

Research Target

Although Chinese Diaspora members constitute a major immigrant population, they are characterized by a number of diverse subgroups in the United States. They differ in their places of origin, geographic distributions and patterns of settlement, and varieties of migrants (Chan, 2005). To make it more complicated, individual subgroups' constitutions and attributes change over time (Xie, 2005). It is difficult to capture the entire picture with a single research project. In response to this challenge, the present study was situated in the Diaspora context of the San Francisco Bay Area, in the hope of providing a glimpse into the diverse Chinese Diaspora life.

The research was conducted in the San Francisco Bay Area because of its huge number of Chinese Diasporas. It is not only the historical immigration site for Chinese but also the most attractive destination for new immigrants due to its high-tech businesses. The research focused on the first generation of Chinese Diasporas from Mainland China who live in the United States as citizens, permanent residents, or long-term visitors. The criteria for being included in this study was that all participants had to identify themselves as being a Chinese Diaspora who had traveled back to China within the previous two years.

Participants were selected using purposive and theoretical sampling methods. In the initial stage of the interview, participants were contacted through the existing connections of the researcher. Based on the emergent themes found in the initial stage of interviews, subsequent participants were recruited by a purposive sampling method to further explore the phenomenology of VFR of Chinese Diasporas. When new themes emerged following the analysis of finished interviews, participants who were likely to improve the understanding of the phenomenon in context or help in the interpretation of such themes were selected to get a comprehensive understanding of their experience. Participants included seven males and nine females. Participants represented a variety of Chinese Diasporas: transnational Chinese Diasporas such as international students or contract workers, permanent residents holding Chinese passports, US citizens who needed a visa to travel to Mainland China, etc. Each interview lasted between 20 and 45 minutes. The interviews were conducted either at the participant's home or at various places convenient for the participants. All interviews were carried out either in Chinese or English according to the participant's preference. (The researcher is fluent in both English and Chinese.)

Profile of Research Participants

The names used in the following sections are pseudonyms in order to keep the confidentiality of the research participants.

- 1) *Participant A*: Ms. Zhao came to the United States about 11 years ago to study computer science. She held a student visa when she entered the United States, then changed to H1-B status when she started working in the Bay Area. Her husband was

also an international student from China, but he had gotten his green card when she met him. They have two children. Now all of them are citizens of the United States. They travel back to China at least every other year.

- 2) *Participant B*: Ms. Qian moved to the United States for graduate study in 1998. She married an American Caucasian and currently holds a green card. She went back to China for business or VFR every year before having a child. A recent trip was the first VFR one after the birth of her son two-and-a-half years ago.
- 3) *Participant C*: Ms. Sun, home maker, came to the United States three-and-a-half years ago to married her husband, an American Caucasian. She has a green card. Before she came to the United States, she was a doctor. She has no children. Since her arrival, she and her husband have visited China twice.
- 4) *Participant D*: Mr. Li is married without children. He holds an L-1 visa and has been living in the United States for over two years. His only trip to China was on business. His wife is studying at the university. Both his and his wife's parents have visited them in the past two years.
- 5) *Participant E*: Mr. Zhou came to the United States 1971 for graduate study. He is now retired from an executive position at a high-tech company. His adult children live in other states in the United States. He got married to a Chinese woman from Mainland China three years ago after his first wife passed away. He traveled to China several times in the last three years. As the spouse of an American citizen, his wife had immigrated to the United States some months previously.
- 6) *Participant F*: Ms. Wu's husband relocated to the United States in 2005. She came

to the United States to reunite with him after giving birth to their daughter in 2006. Her husband went back to China several times during their separation period for business reasons. She has an L-2 visa, which makes her eligible for multiple entries to the United States. They took their first VFR trip in Summer 2007 and plan to go back to China every year.

- 7) *Participant G:* Ms. Zheng moved to the United States in January 2000 after a long-term separation from her husband, who was hired by an American company from China. They took their first VFR right after they received advanced parole, which was four years after she moved to the United States. Since then they have taken three VFR trips. The husband also travels to China for business reasons.
- 8) *Participant H:* Ms. Wang came to the United States in 1998 for graduate study. She is currently a green card holder. She married an American Caucasian; she has no children. She frequently took both business and VFR trips to China. She has no intention of becoming an American citizen.
- 9) *Participant I:* Mr. Feng was relocated to the United States in 2004. His wife and children moved here with him. Their frequency of VFR was less than one year as they had multiple entry visas. Mr. Feng also took business trips to China. However, Mr. Feng claimed their frequency of VFR would be reduced due to their child's school schedule.
- 10) *Participant J:* Mr. Chen is single, and just finished his master's study in the United States. He is going to accept an offer from a financial company in Hong Kong. The only VFR trip he took was the one during his job interview trip to Shanghai.

- 11) *Participant K*: Ms. Chu, single, is a Canadian citizen emigrated from mainland China. She is holding an H-1 visa to work in United States. She took one emergency trip to China recently due to his father's health issue.
- 12) *Participant L*: Ms. Wei came to the United States years ago for graduate study. She got married in the United States and has two children. Her husband returned to China recently to open his own business. As a family, they used to go back to China to visit grandparents, but the main purpose of a recent trip was to visit the children's father.
- 13) *Participant M*: Mr. Jiang came to the United States to continue his master's study after 10 years of working in China. His wife and first son reunited with him in the United States several years later. Because of visa issues, his first VFR was not taken until 9 years after his moving to the United States. His wife and two children are American citizens, but he still holds a green card for the convenience of taking frequent trips to China.
- 14) *Participant N*: Mr. Shen came to United States for graduate study. Now, he is American citizen. He applied green card for his mother. She lives with him for over six months every year to take care of his single life and maintains her identity of permanent resident. He rarely took VFR trip since his mother lived with him often, but he thought it was necessary to visit his father and brother sometimes.
- 15) *Participant O*: Ms. Han is a single woman working as an editor at a local newspaper. Her green card application has been in the name checking stage for about two years. Two months ago, her father was ill so she had to apply for an emergency advance

parole to go back to China. It was her first trip to China moving to the United States six years ago.

16) Participant P: Mr. Yang came to the United States as an exchange student after his high school graduation in China. His first trip to China was taken 10 years after his immigration. In the last five years, he and his family have gone back to China almost every year.

Research Instrument

Interview Guide Design

During each interview, the participants were asked a series of questions dealing with issues of their VFR trip experiences, facilitators and constraints regarding having a VFR trip, and factors influencing their decision-making process. At the beginning of the semi-structured interview, based on Decrop and Snelders' (2005) study on typology of vacation decision-making, in each interview, participants were asked to talk about three central themes: (a) general VFR vacation and travel behavior, (b) general expectations and motives, and (c) current vacation plans and vacation destinations.

Subsequently, through the thematic analysis of the interview transcripts, the emerging theory and progressive understanding of the subject guided further probing of the research participants. Participants were queried on their typical motivations for taking a VFR trip, their experiences, and the tourist activities in which they regularly participated during the trip and their level of satisfaction with their experience in general. Participants were also asked to share how their tourist activities reflected their Chinese Diaspora identity and in what way their Chinese Diaspora status affected their choice of

travel activities.

The main questions were followed by a series of probes intended to elicit more detailed responses. In order to get a better understanding of the context of their description of the experiences, the researcher asked supplemental questions during the interviews. For example, what were their own understandings of their identities in the United States? Did their Chinese Diaspora identity influence their choice of vacation destination, and how did it influence their vacation decision-making process? Did experiences before moving to the United States influence their choice of vacation? Did their occupation, education, or income influence their decision? Did other Chinese peoples' vacations influence their choice of vacation destination? What were their motivations to take and their expectations of a VFR trip? Did their motivations and expectations change during different VFR trips? What was the influence of a former experience to future trip planning?

Besides formal interviews, the research organized informal discussion groups among some of the participants. At the pilot study and beginning stages of the research study, the discussion groups helped design interview questions. In addition, a thorough review of literature and feedback from a panel of experts assisted in the choice and selection of the questions. Finally, the questions were field tested with two Chinese Diasporas to ensure the understandability and intelligibility of the questions. For a copy of the interview guide, please refer to Appendix C. The researcher, as a Chinese Diaspora living in the Bay Area, also engaged in participant observation of their lived experiences with VFR travel plans. In addition, the researcher took copious field notes

following each interview or encounter with the research subjects.

Validity and Reliability

Unlike quantitative studies, the validity or reliability of the data in this study does not mean the stability, consistency, or equivalence of the instrument. In fact, it focuses more on the accuracy of data collection and trustworthiness. As the researcher herself is a Chinese Diaspora, her identity and previous experiences made it easier to conduct research by granting her an insider status that allowed her to obtain the cooperation of Chinese participants and to have a better insight into the topic. As an insider, the researcher was able to understand the pressures related to being immersed in a culturally alien environment and having to adjust to different ecological systems. Being aware of her own assumptions and biases and striving to refrain from influencing the interview and interpretation process, she wrote a reflexive journal in which she continuously addressed issues related to this study (Banister, 1999). The researcher also conducted a member check to verify the quality of the data collection and the interpretation of the data.

Triangulation is another important technique that was applied to increase the accuracy of information (Patton, 2002). Triangulation of data collection refers to using more than one strategy to collect information that pertains to the same phenomenon (Depoy & Gitlin, 1998). For example, the researcher used both methods triangulation and analyst triangulation in the current investigation. Methods triangulation was achieved by interviews, field notes, and informal discussion groups to provide the meanings of VFR experience. Analyst triangulation included two individuals reviewing the interview transcripts and field notes for emergent themes. There was a 100 percent

agreement between the individuals pertaining to the emergent themes.

Pilot Study

To test the interview protocol, the researcher conducted a pilot study as to two participants prior to the investigation. The pilot study helped identify the defects in interview questions, check for intelligibility and understanding of the questions and based on the feedback received, the interview questions were modified. This allowed the research participants to address the phenomenon of VFR in a detailed and personally meaningful manner

Data Collection

Human Subjects

As the research investigation was about the VFR experience of overseas people, personal information was gathered and private issues were touched upon during the study. Prior to the researcher beginning to recruit prospective participants, the proposed investigation was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval. Upon approval, the researcher began recruiting subjects. Before each interview, the researcher e-mailed a Consent Form of Participation as required by the IRB to each participant. In the Consent Form, the researcher clearly stated the purpose of the research and possible risk(s) of participating in it. All participants were required to sign the form before participating in the study and before the interviews were conducted. In addition, each research participant had the right to reject the request to participate in the study and had the right to withdraw from the study at any point, including following the completion of the interviews. All personal information was kept confidential as requested by the IRB

and only the lead researcher and advisor had access to the interview transcripts.

Data Collection Procedures

Most of the interviews were tape-recorded. In addition to the recording, following each interaction with the research subjects, the researcher wrote down field notes of the conversations. In the instances when recording was not possible, the researcher took copious contemporaneous field notes. If the interview was conducted in Chinese, the transcript of the interview was translated verbatim into English by the lead researcher who is fluent in both languages. In addition, two people fluent in English and Chinese who were not involved in the research were invited to review the transcripts to ensure the accuracy of the translation and to guarantee that the essence of what was being shared was accurately grasped and interpreted.

After each interview, the researcher wrote a series of interim summaries. The summary contained two or three main themes of emergent information and a short list of clarifying questions based on the interview in order to guide the next interview. The researcher broke the data into constituent parts on the one hand and clustered and extended the data holistically beyond their descriptive accounts on the other (Depoy & Gitlin, 1998). These words or terms used to describe the data were the basic elements of each emerging themes, but were not limited to the single one of them. The correlation between those keywords was analyzed by comparing and examining each line of the data.

Data Analysis

The process of data analysis started with coding the emergent as they were being collected. Before coding the data, the researcher read each transcript as a whole.

Initial coding proceeded with examining each line of data and defining actions or events within it (Glaser, 1978). The various descriptions used by respondents were classified and labeled in order to allow comparisons in the next step of data analysis. The researcher tried to stay attuned to the participants' views of their realities, recognizing that it was not the words themselves but their meaning that mattered (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The constant comparison method was used during second stage of the data interpretation (Glaser, 1978). The researcher compared participants' responses with each other and developed themes that synthesize and explain data that emerged as a result of the coding process.

After obtaining tentative themes, the researcher employed networks for data displays. The data displays supplied the basic materials for plausible reasons things happen as they do (Miles & Huberman, 1994), indicating the essence of the experience for the research participants. Themes were collapsed or in some cases expanded using both convergent and divergent thinking. The researcher was able to simultaneously display the factors influencing the decision-making process of Chinese Diasporas' VFR as well as explore the connection between the sub-themes and major themes. The networks helped the researcher discover what factors are there in the network and how they related with each others.

Upon the identification of the clustered patterns or themes of the data, the researcher constructed an integrative diagram (McMillan & Schumacker, 1993), and cross-analysis (McMillan & Schumacker) to help end the data analysis process. The researcher verified the conclusions by checking the quality of the data and testing the

explanations. The researcher also confirmed the test explanation by using member checks.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

The purpose of this investigation was to gain a deeper understanding of Visiting Friends, and Relatives (VFR) of the Chinese Diasporas including their choices of activities; behaviors; and overall experiences before, during, and after the VFR trips. As the literature reviewed for this current study indicated, VFR experiences are unique, personal, and individualized (Moscardo et al., 2000). After data analysis, several themes emerged. Upon closer examination of the various themes, they coalesced into five central themes, representing various facets related to the VFR experience of Chinese Diasporas: motivation for going on a VFR trip, factors influencing VFR, planning and experience of VFR, and impact of VFR. In the following sections, each of these themes will be elaborated on. As the hallmark of qualitative research methods is to draw attention to how individuals make sense of their lived world (Creswell, 1998), particular attention was be given to the voices of the research participants in the discussion of each of the central themes. Finally, this chapter concludes with a discussion of the perspectives of the research participants toward tourism development in China.

Motivation for VFR

Motivation to engage in any experience is very individual and dependent on a myriad of factors (Fodness, 1994). This is similar to the case when individuals decide to travel (Pearce & Caltabiano, 1983). Consistent with the literature, the motivations for travel were varied among the research participants in this current study. The research participants identified various types of trips they had taken to China, the primary among

them being VFR.

Types of Visits to China

The participants in this investigation indicated that they took various types of visit to China. These included (but were not limited to) VFR, business/conference, medication, leisure tourism, job hunting, special event, and emergency. Among the 16 participants, most of them had claimed VFR as their primary type of visit to China. For example, Ms. Zhao, a marketing specialist at a software company, traveled back to China for about five times in the last six years with all of her trips being planned VFR except for one emergency case. Similar was the sentiments of all other research participants. Meanwhile, because of the global economic development, some of the research participants had taken business trips or participated in conferences hosted in China. Ms. Wu's husband goes to Beijing regularly on business trips because of his company's project based in China. Ms. Qian participated in a conference in China and extended her trip to visit her parents in another city. Ms. Wang's description of her business trips to China was shared by many participants: "I'd like to take business trip to China whenever it is possible, because I will have the chance to pay a visit to my parents."

Travel involving VFR can have a range of special properties (Morrison et al., 1995; Seaton & Tagg, 1995). The findings from this study indicate that some of the participants traveled because of a special event such as a parent's birthday or because of family emergency. For example, Mr. Feng, who took a trip to China in early January to attend the funeral of a relative as the representative of his father, is planning another one in November. He said:

My father will be seventy years old in November. It is one of the most important birthdays to Chinese people. He didn't ask me to go back because of my earlier trip, but as the only son, I must go back and celebrate it with him. I called my sister to discuss the details of the celebration. I will give him a surprise.

Due to the age of their parents, many participants are seriously concerned about their parents' health. As Mr. Jiang's father has not been in good health for years, he keeps his green card status instead of applying for American citizenship so that in case of an emergency, he can go back China in time.

Some participants traveled to for medical purposes, while this may not have been the only focus of the trip. Mr. Yang shared his experience of his visit to a Chinese herbalist and massage doctor. He believed that traditional Chinese medications were more effective for his specific health situation. He also mentioned that the cost of medication was lower in China than in the United States and that he had been taken care of by his relatives in China after a small operation. He had depended on family for post-surgical care.

Ms. Wei described her experience of having a foot massage:

My friend took me to a foot massage salon. I know it is getting popular in the Bay Area, but I had never tried it before, so my friend recommended the place to me. The place's decoration was luxury; it's quite different from the one I saw in the Great Mall. I didn't think I would go into a place like this if I were in the States. The price was very reasonable; the service was great and no need to pay tips. (Laughing) I felt so relaxed (after taking foot massage). I didn't think it can heal my illness, but it helped. It is one thing I missed most about this trip.

Due to the Chinese economic development, job hunting is a new motivation for trips there, as mentioned by Mr. Chen, a newly graduate. He took a trip to Shanghai during summer vacation for a job interview. He explained:

I studied finance, but realized later that as a Chinese it was not easy to find a job. Even after getting a job, it is difficult to make further progress. So I began to look for a job in Asia instead. This summer, a Hong Kong finance company had an opening in their Shanghai branch office. I took a trip to Shanghai for the interview. I'm glad I grabbed this opportunity.

The motivation or focus for each individual's VFR trip might change due to a specific situation. For example, Ms. Wei took a trip to China this summer with two sons to visit her husband who had left the United States early this year to set up his own business in China. She explained:

My previous (VFR) trips were to visit my parents and relatives and do some sightseeing if time allowed. But this summer, our main purpose was to visit my husband. I just wanted to let my two sons have the chance to spend some time with their father. They would not be able to see him maybe until Christmas.

In the Bay Area, many Chinese families were separated by the e Pacific Ocean because one of the parents needed to do business in China and the other one had to stay in the United States to take care of the children. As a new phenomenon of transnationalism, these hyper-mobile Chinese businessmen are called "astronauts" who establish their business in China but have their families residing in the United States to have better education opportunities for their children or to have a safe haven in the event of political unrest (Faist, 2000).

According to current study, although the types of visit and motivation for visit to China were varied, the VFR was still the main one among all the reasons for trips. Even if the focus of the trip might have been different, the activities related to VFR were easily identified. Overall, the participants claimed that visiting parents was the most important reason for them to take VFR trips.

Visiting Parents as the Primary Focus of VFR

The findings of the study suggested that despite Chinese Diaspora's varying behaviors and activities during VFR, visiting parents was the primary focus of their trips. Because of visa problems, health conditions, and various personal issues, many participants' parents could not visit their children in the United States. A VFR trip to China was thus the only choice some participants had to reunite with their parents. To some people, it was an obligation and responsibility required as per their role of daughter or son, which is deeply rooted in Chinese tradition and culture. Ms. Zhao described her VFR this way:

My husband's parents had not been able to visit us for several years because of their age and health conditions. My husband goes back to China about every two years to visit his parents. He took our children with him every time. The grandparents helped us a lot when the kids were young. They missed the kids very much. We spent almost all our annual vacation on trips to visit our parents.

To some people, VFR is a trip that involves many emotional elements. Mr. Feng discussed his feeling of missing and caring for his elder parents:

Internet, e-mail, messenger, the video, and etc.—nothing can stop us from returning to our homeland and even the frequency of the trip. Sometimes, they only make me miss them more. The real experience of face-to-face meeting is totally different from the virtual world.

The eagerness to have a reunion with their parents influenced the participants' choice of activity during VFR. Many participants sacrificed their other travel opportunities just to pay a visit to their parents. Ms. Wang believed that a VFR was meant for spending time with parents. She had no intention of sightseeing without being accompanied by her parents. Ms. Wang's statement about her choice of VFR activities showed how much she valued the time spent with parents:

My husband, he is an American white, always wants to travel to China with me. I refuse him every time. He was interested in visiting the well-known tourist destinations. I am interested in visiting those famous places too, but I had no time for him, for those things. My parents are the only relatives I have in China. The only connection I have with China. I just wanted to spend time with them, stay with them, listen to them, talk to them... Even on my business trip, I stayed in my parents' house instead of hotels booked by the company

Her experienced was echoed in an interview with Ms. Wang:

I traveled directly to the city where my parents were living and stayed there. I seldom spent time on sightseeing. I accompanied my parents to some local attractions when I took longer vacations. Most of the time, I just stayed at my parents' home.

The research findings also suggested that if they did not have parents' living in China, the majority of participants would not travel to China or at least would reduce the frequency of their visits. Mr. Jiang's said, "My wife's parents live in LA with her brother. She didn't mind going back to China every eight or nine years if I hadn't asked her to accompany me." His case was not unusual, Ms. Sun claimed that she would not go back to China after her parents' passed away. She stated that siblings were different from parents. She might still visit them but definitely not as often as the visits she made to her parents. Many participants admitted that without a personal connection, they would not visit China as a tourist destination, or maybe just once or twice in a life time.

Some of the participants' parents often visited the United States, so it seemed not as necessary for them to go back to China and only to pay a visit to their parents. However, some of the participants said their experiences of being a host versus being a guest were different. Ms. Zhao's parents had American green cards and stayed in her house for at least 6 months each year. She said:

Since my parents (especially my mother) visited us often, it seemed not so necessary to visit them back in China. But it was a different experience of being a host and a guest. My parents were very glad when we visited their house. It was different when we were all in China. They thought it was in their home. And I got the feeling of being a daughter too.

Beside the widely shared perception of motivation of VFR as being to visit parents, VFR was also appreciated by some Chinese parents as an opportunity to pass down Chinese culture to the second generation. Ms. Zhao admitted that she expected her children not only to pay respect to their grandparents, but also to learn the Chinese language and Chinese culture from VFR. Her description provided testimony as to the second motivation of Chinese Diasporas' VFR as discussed below.

Passing Down Chinese Culture to Children

Chinese parents recognize the significance of passing down Chinese culture to their children. Mr. Feng believed that VFR was the only chance his daughter had to get close to real Chinese people and culture. According to him:

She learnt things about Chinese people and culture...it was interesting for her to see how different people have different views and behaviors. It is the best way to help her increase the knowledge of Chinese culture and history, as well as how to get along with Chinese people. Only in that context, can the child truly understand China and Chinese people.

He also pointed out:

She might not realize the significance of the trip right now, but she will appreciate it when she grows up. I believe it is the right and most valuable thing I could do for her. Let her know her own people and culture and be proud of it.

Mr. Jiang commented, "We had sent him (his 12-year-old son) to Chinese [language classes] after school, but the words he learned in three years were less than what he mastered in four weeks in China." VFR was often mentioned by Chinese

parents as providing their children with the opportunity to learn the Chinese culture and language.

Although visiting parents as the primary motivation of VFR was shared by all participants, some asserted that sightseeing was also in their planned activities. VFR was not only a special type of travel with distinct social and culture characteristics, but it also provided a chance to relax and pursue personal interests. However, whether or not to engage in leisure activities was a choice made by the participants based on personal preferences and experiences.

Leisure Tourism Activities and Sightseeing

As our participants indicated, VFR was used by many participants not only to provide an opportunity for a family reunion and an opportunity of passing down the Chinese culture, but also to fulfill the participants' life-long dream of exploring well-known tourist attractions in China. Ms. Zhao stated, "I left China too early; there are so many places I had never been able to visit." Mr. Jiang also mentioned, "I took lots of business trips around China. Personally, I am not very interested in leisure tourism, but my wife and children are interested in these places so I always took them to some tourist attractions." Many Chinese Diasporas spend two to four weeks in China, which allowed them to have time for leisure travel activities. Mr. Yang stated that he usually took one week to visit tourist destinations other than his parents' home during his VFR. Some of the participants mentioned that they traveled with their parents to other cities when they had longer vacations. Some participants pointed out that sightseeing was also a good way to introduce their children to Chinese culture and history. Mr.

Feng commented, "I wouldn't go to those places if I were going back alone. However, I'd like to have my daughter look at those places. They are part of Chinese heritage and culture."

As the interview with Ms. Zhao and other participants pointed out, shortness of time, low income, and lack of accessibility to tourist attractions significantly limited their leisure tourism activities when they were in China. This gives them a strong desire to go back to China. Chinese Diasporas' interests in well-known tourist destinations contributed to the engagement in VFR travel.

Desire to Know China

The Chinese Diasporas had the desire to know their country better and took the opportunity of VFR to get first-hand experience of development and changes in China.

This can be best illustrated in the following response by a research participant:

Although we can get the news about China from all kinds of media like the Internet, television, or some other channels, they were from media, had been made up, not real. I never trust them. Anyway, it seems that there is always a gap of information and understanding between here and China. After leaving China for such a long time, I need to know how the common people think and live and I cannot get it through media. I have to go back personally and observe by myself. (Ms. Zhao)

As did many participants, Ms. Qian gave this impression of her first VFR experience:

Not only the new outlook of the city and buildings, I also noticed that many Chinese people, their ways of thinking, speaking, the issues of concern, were changed greatly. Especially after living here (the San Francisco Bay Area) for a few years, I had a strong feeling that their speed of development is much faster than here. And these changes would not be so impressive if just getting from media.

Many participants agreed that without personal experience, they could not have

been able to have such a vivid impression of the development of the country. This personal experience also inspired them to know more about the country.

Renew Social Network, Establish Social Capital

The last but certainly not the least motivation of VFR as expressed by the research participants was to renew social networks and establish social capital. Ms. Zhao mentioned that since she wanted to keep in touch with friends in China. After so many years, many schoolmates and friends had become estranged. She would like to use VFR to renew friendships and communicate with old friends more frequently. Some of the participants wanted to develop social capital in China. Mr. Feng always spent some time with his ex-colleagues or business partners during VFRs. He admitted, "It is important to keep in touch with them. I need to know the development of the industry (in China). They are my opportunity to develop my career in China."

Some of the participants used VFR to maintain their relationships with relatives.

Ms. Wu commented:

The relations with the relatives are the same. Without frequent visits, the relationship would not be close anymore. Visiting relatives is in particular good for kids. We have no relatives in the United States. It is necessary to let her know that we have kinships back in China. We are not alone. If we came back to China someday, she would know that she will have friends to play with.

The feeling of loneliness was another reason that Chinese Diasporas value the opportunity VFR provides to maintain relationships with their friends or relatives. Ms. Zheng said:

I have some friends here, but the social life is still very limited because I spent lots of time on work and children. I really enjoyed the time staying in China. My mom took care of my children, I could do whatever I'd like to do, eat whatever I'd like to eat. Surrounded by parents, brothers and sisters, relatives,

and friends, I could never be so at ease when I was here.

In summary, the motivations for VFR were varied. The factors influencing Chinese Diasporas' decision-making process regarding VFR were also complex. The following section will present the main factors that were found influential in the decision making process of VFR from the collective analysis of the interview data.

Factors Influencing VFR

VFR was a major event in the lives of many participants. It was also a highly involved process because of its taking a long time and involving strong emotional factors. Therefore, the decision-making regarding VFR has been presented as a long planning progress involving extended problem solving (Decrop & Snelders, 2004). The researcher had adopted the terms internal factors and external factors to describe the variables involved in the process (e.g., Decrop & Snelders, 2004; Woodside & Lyonski's 1980). In order to create a clear picture of the VFR process, the researcher in the current study classified internal and external factors into three categories: (a) facilitators, (b) constraints, and (c) other factors. The internal and external factors influencing the decision-making process and behaviors included (but were not limited to) an individual's personality and experience, family or social ties, and environmental factors such as the technological renovation and tourism promotion. Each of these played a role as a facilitator or constraint in VFR.

Facilitating Factors

Personal ties and connections with China. The findings of the current study indicated that people with parents living in China were more likely to take the VFR trips

than other Chinese Diasporas. Without this personal tie to China, most Chinese Diasporas would not choose China as a vacation destination. Ms. Sun commented, "My parents are living in China. It is the only reason that makes me go back there. I won't go back again if they no longer live there." Ms. Han claimed, "My parents used to spend lot of time at my brother's (in Texas). I used to live close to my brother before moving here. Thus I had never thought it was necessary to go back to China (until my parents went back to China)."

Many participants related their repeat VFR trips as facilitating their personal ties with China. Mr. Feng commented, "Without relatives in China, we would not go to China". Ms. Wang confirmed, "I will visit China because it is such a unique place. However, without personal connections with China, I would not go many times. Once or twice at most depending on the experience."

The closeness of the personal ties influenced the frequency of VFR. Mr. Shen stated, "My mother is living with me. I think it is necessary to visit my father and brother (in China), but I can stand to see them every three or four years, especially my brother." The closeness of the relationship was also influencing the length of visit as indicated by Ms. Wei:

If my husband came back to the United States, we would not spend such a long time in China. I had never spent so much time in VFR before. We have no choice now. It is the only way I could make our children to see their father.

Communication technology renovations. The reduced cost of communication, such as long distance calls, e-mail, and instant messenger, makes it easier for Chinese Diasporas to keep in touch with their relatives in China more frequently. More

communication technology renovations such as web cameras even make it possible for them to see each other without meeting in person. Interestingly, some of the participants stated that the more they communicated with their parents, the more they wanted to visit them. Mr. Feng remarked:

I used a web camera to contact her (his mother) at least once a week. It was not easy for her to use this new technology at her age. It would be easier just to use the phone. But she tried so hard just to have the chance to see my face. It makes me feel sad and guilty. She needs me go back and talk to her face to face.

Personal experience. Some of participants spent less time on leisure travel when they lived in China, which makes them have the desire to visit China. Mr. Chen said, "I seldom traveled when I was in China. I felt sorry about that when I came here." To some participants, their ability to travel was limited by financial problems when they were in China. Mr. Yang's story is representative:

In the fourth year of my study in China, I got a scholarship from an American university, so I came here right after the graduation. The half of my life was spent in the United States. I like traveling, but as a poor student I did not have much chance (when I was in China). Now, I can afford it, so I used every trip (to China) to explore some places I dreamed of before.

Children's positive influence. As discussed before, Chinese parents think much about their children's education. Many of them took the trip to China to give their children the opportunity to study Chinese culture. To them, the vacation was not only for the happiness of the children, but also had significant meaning. Mr. Feng is one of those parents. He stated:

Taking a child to China is the best way to let her understand Chinese culture. I hope to return to China every year to enhance her understanding of China. We always visited the tourist attractions with historical heritages. It is different from our trips taken in the United States. We took more recreation trips here like hiking or skating. She needs to learn Chinese language, culture, and tradition

about China from VFR.

Constraints and Obstacles

Although most of participants thought there were no constraints or obstacles to stop them from VFR, from their descriptions of the trips, the transcripts revealed some factors that constrained their ability of taking VFR, the frequency of VFR visits, and the choice of activities during VFR.

Status in the United States. The findings indicated that majority of participants did not go back to China in the first three to nine years after they moved to the United States. Their status in the United States was the number one reason for them to make this decision. In this research, most participants came to the United States to continue their study. They did not want to go back to China during their years of study considering the legal restrictions on student visa and the difficulty and complexity of applying for a new visa. They did not want to waste their time and money on the trip. This finding is similar to Li and Stodolska's (2006) pertaining to Chinese graduate students in the United States.

However, there was one exception among the sixteen respondents, as indicated by Ms. Qian:

I got a six-month multiple-entry visa (as a student). I did not want to waste it, so I just went back (China). Most of students would not go back to China during their study years. It is not rare that some Chinese students did not go back to China for eight to nine years after coming to the United States. There were economic reasons, but the most important reason is that they were afraid of being rejected by the U.S. embassy. There are of course some people who think that the United States is heaven and are not willing to go back. In particular, if they are from small and poor areas of China. I did not mind being rejected. Going to America was just one of my choices. And in the fact, I successfully got my visa renewed.

After graduation, the participants found jobs in the United States by changing their immigration status to an H-1B visa. The restriction of the visa made it impossible for them to leave the country. Ms. Zhao's description is representative of this dilemma:

The reason I didn't go back in the first five years is mainly because of the visa. I was afraid that I could not get the H-1B approved if I returned to China. I also heard that the procedures to apply for visa were quite complicated, troublesome and time consuming.

To avoid all the troubles associated with having a visa, most of the participants chose to go back to China only after they received their "green card" as did Ms. Zhao, who said, "My first trip returning to China happened after my getting the green card." To many Chinese Diasporas, the process of waiting for the green card is endless and torturous. Ms. Han related her story:

My green card application has been in the name checking stage for about two years. Two months ago, my father was ill so I had to apply for an emergency Advance Parole to go back. This Friday, my mother called me that my father might need to have an operation; I might need to go back again. I have to apply for another emergency Advance Parole. It is not only the money, but the whole procedure drives me crazy.

Some of the research participants felt lucky about their visas. Three participants came to the United States holding multiple entry working visas with a two-year validity. All of them took trips to China within the first one or two years after moving to the United States.

Some of the participants mentioned the inconvenience of being an American citizen as regard to their VFR. Mr. Jiang told us:

My wife and two children are American citizens. I did not apply for it (citizenship) as I need to go back very often because of my father's poor health. It takes time and money to apply for visa to go to China. So it is best for me to

keep my current status (permanent resident).

Children as a negative factor. Many parents perceived small children as a constraint to their VFR trip. As a result of undeveloped transportation, lodging, and the sanitation conditions in China, as well as the large population, many Chinese would not take their children to China when they were too young. This of course, influenced the frequency of the adults' visits to China. The vulnerable situation of children also influenced their choice of VFR activities. The parents normally would not engage in too much tourism activities on a VFR trip if traveling with young children. Mr. Feng stated, "We will take my daughter to visit the destinations beyond Beijing only when she is old enough." Ms. Wu shared her opinion, "We only went to parks in the neighborhood, or the places that my daughter could enjoy at her age."

Work as a constraint to VFR. Many participants mentioned that they had to consider their work schedule before planning VFR. The changing of a work plan had an influence on their VFR plan. Ms. Wang said:

I have no special consideration on when is the best time to go back to China. I had taken the trip both in the summer and winter. I usually decide when I need to go back by myself according to the work arrangements.

The unhappy experience. The unhappy experience of previous trips was an important reason constraining participants from taking repeat visits. California is famous for its beautiful climate. Many participants complained that they were no longer used to the climate in their home town after many years of living in the San Francisco Bay Area. The change in the environment made them sick and influenced their impression of the trip. Many participants admitted they would consider weather and

seasons when planning a VFR trip. Pollution and overpopulation were also cited as other reasons impacting their satisfaction with VFR. All of the research partners confirmed they would not go back during some special periods, such as when the SARS epidemic was rampant in China.

The experience of meeting with unfriendly-behaving people was another reason that stopped them from repeat visits to China. Ms. Sun, who is married to an American Caucasian, described her unhappy experiences:

People stared at us like we were animals in the zoo. Peddlers blocked us to sell their products on the streets, some of them even promised to give me a commission by taking me as a tourist guide or something. My husband was cheated when he shopped alone.

Other Influencing Factors

Individual family members' situation. As a family vacation, the preparation for a VFR trip normally involved every member of the family. In order to make it a success, it was important to coordinate with all family members. However, sometimes husbands and wives took separate trips or stayed for different lengths. Ms. Zhao indicated that their family went back together only twice while other times she and her husband traveled separately to adjust to each others schedule. Mr. Feng said:

I had only one week's vacation. So I left my wife and daughter in China and came back alone. On our next trip to China, we also plan to go back separately. My wife or I will go back with my daughter first and leave my daughter with the grandparents. The other one will pick her up after one month. Then each of us will have the chance to go back and spend a suitable time.

Mr. Feng also pointed out:

We must manage to coordinate the family members' time from the China side. We used to go back in winter, during New Year, especially the Chinese New Year period for they would have a longer holiday break. However, after my daughter

starts going to school, we will not have much time in the winter break. Fortunately, the grandparents are retired.

The feeble influence of the tourism industry. Unlike the leisure tourist, Chinese Diasporas said they paid little attention to tourism promotions or campaigns about China. Most of the participants had never heard any tourism promotion from a Chinese tourism organization. Mr. Yang said he read on the internet that there were some kinds of promotions of China in New York, but he did not hear them locally. Mr. Jiang mentioned he read about tourist programs from a local Chinese newspaper, but did not hear of a campaign by any Chinese tourism organizations or the government. Some of the participants noticed the tourism promotion of local governments or tourism organizations when they were in China. However, they admitted it would not influence their choice of activities very much.

Financial resources. Financial difficulty was seldom mentioned among the participants due to the fact that most of the participants being in the middle class, but some participants mentioned an increase of the airfare might influence their choice of airlines or frequency of travel. Ms. Li mentioned that her family had tried to make a flight reservation on Air China through travel agencies at the beginning, but in the end, they bought the tickets from the United Airlines website to get a better price. Both Mr. Feng and Ms. Sun stated they would decrease their frequency of visiting China if air travel costs did rise too much.

Attraction of visiting other destinations conflicted with desire for VFR. Some of the participants struggled to choose between China and other tourist destinations. Ms. Zhao indicated that she would like to visit other destinations very much as she had only

one long vacation annually. However, as long as her parents were living in China, she felt that she might spend all her long vacations in China. She is not the only person with this conflict. The descriptions of participant vacations spent in America presented a much wider scope of interests and choices of activities.

Planning and Experiencing VFR

The analysis of the logic of VFR decisions based on the collective descriptions of the participants' experience was also helpful in understanding the decision-making process of Chinese Diasporas. This section covers the generic decision on choices of transportation, frequency of VFR, information collection, family involvement, vacation activities and post-reflections of the trip.

Pre-trip

The motivation for VFR has been discussed in the previous section, so the findings of the research will be presented from the logistics of the trip preparation. The preparation for trips normally includes a decision on the dates for the trip, reservation of an airline ticket, communication with relatives and friends, and collection of information regarding the destination. Mr. Feng's conclusion regarding this planning for his trips was representative of the process the research partners engaged in:

In ordinary circumstances, all of our family discusses and decides on the traveling time, but other arrangements, for example, airplane ticket reservations, activities in China, used to be decided and arranged by my wife. Every time after returning to the U.S., we started to plan the next trip. We will tell our parents our plan after we make the decision on the time frame to go. All the other things will be handled till two or three months before the actual trip.

Pertaining to the determination of when was the best time to take VFR, the research participants indicated various answers depending on different individual

situations. Mr. Zhao said they had no plan to fix a time frame to go back. The trips were generally taken when they were not too busy at work and the children also had time. Many research participants indicated that free time was the most important factor to be considered when they were planning trips. This trip also had to fit with everyone's schedule. That was the main reason why husbands and wives sometimes had to take separate VFR trips.

Generally, three periods of time were preferred by most of the participants. The first was during winter break from the end of December to early February which is the holiday season in both China and the United States. Most people have their longest break at the holidays. However, for families with school-age children, summer vacation is the best time to take VFR trips. This is the second preferred time period. Finally, some people chose either early summer or autumn for VFR because this was the best tourist season in China in terms of the weather.

Influence of parents/relatives' visiting of the United States on frequency of VFR.

The frequency of VFR trips varied ranging from several months to nine years. Most of the participants claimed they had a plan to visit China regularly after getting the green cards. Other than participants' status in the United States, the research findings indicated that parents visiting the United States influenced the frequency of VFR. Mr. Li stated that both his parents and in-laws had visited them in the past year, so he had no plans to go back to China in the near future. Mr. Shen's mother visited him regularly and stayed with him for about six months every year in order to maintain her green card. He stated:

I haven't seen my father for more than three years. He is still working and he doesn't like here. I thought about going back by accompanying my mom and having a look at my dad and my brother, but every time I was blocked by this or that. I sometimes felt guilty to leave my father alone in China. He is getting older but fortunately, he is in good health. I don't know if it was a right decision to apply for the green card for my mom.

Online booking as the new trend. Most participants booked their airline tickets through travel companies run by local Chinese. More recently, some airlines started offering online booking, which is getting popular among some Chinese Diasporas due to its competitive price and convenience of payment. It normally took the participants more than one month to investigate and reserve airline ticket. The airline ticket represented the major expenditure for the trip. Ms. Zhao stated that his family chose to travel right after the children got off from school in order to avoid the summer peak season. Mr. Wu indicated that his parents asked them not to go back to China because of the high travel cost.

Other than the price factors, two more issues were mentioned by the participants when asked about their preference of airlines. Most of the participants emphasized the convenience of the flight route. No one wanted to spend time and effort on a connecting flight and wanted to avoid the risk of delay and other uncertainties. Direct flights were the most preferred even if they cost more. The network of the airlines was another consideration. Mr. Feng indicated that they used to travel by Air China but changed to United Airlines as they could also accumulate mileage from domestic travels. He commented, "If Chinese airlines' mileage can also be used within the United States, we would choose Chinese airlines. After all, it makes me feel more comfortable when traveling with Chinese airlines."

Various methods to get information about China. The investigation suggested that many participants tried to collect information about China before taking the trip even though they might arrange leisure travel activities prior to departure. Some of them browsed the Internet to obtain information about their destination. They visited specific websites to read the recommendations from other Chinese Diasporas. Some of the participants such as Ms. Qian, asked for recommendations from their friends either in China or the United States. Ms. Wang stated that she was interested in the show and theater information in her hometown. She always went to a Chinese website to get the information. Ms. Qian said they went to the doctor to consult regarding health issues as they were traveling with a small child.

Trip Experience

Use of commercial accommodation is not common. Participants used commercial accommodations when leisure tourism activities were involved in their VFR trips. Compared with the vacations they took in the United States, Chinese Diasporas had longer stays during VFR trips. According to the current investigation, the length of VFR ranged from one week to three months. Many of the participants expressed that they stayed at least two weeks during each visit. Many participants claimed they stayed in the house of their parents or relatives during VFR. Ms. Wang confirmed, "I stayed in my parents' house. I wanted to spend more time with them. Even on my business trip, I stayed in my parents' house." Mr. Feng's experience was a little different: "During my business trips, I stayed in the hotel booked by the company for easy access to the office, but I went back to my parents' house during the weekends and stayed overnight." Some

of the participants pointed out that they would like to stay in hotels, but in consideration of their parents' feelings, they compromised by being accommodated in a relative's house.

Mr. Zheng told her story:

We stayed in my sister in-law's house in Beijing. My mother in-law was staying with them at that time. Actually, I prefer to stay in a hotel, but the elder wanted to have more time with our children. It was very inconvenient in the summer (to stay with relatives). But we don't want to hurt their feelings.

However, many participants stayed in the commercial accommodations when they traveled away from their parents' home. Normally, their relatives or friends in China helped them to book the hotels. Mr. Yang stated that it was usually his sister who helped him reserve everything about his leisure travel ahead of his departure. Ms. Sun echoed that her brother helped them book the hotels in China.

Choice of leisure tourism activities. Some of the participants stated that they had a plan for leisure tourism activities before departing to China, while others claimed their activities were arranged completely by chance. Spending time or not on leisure activities was an individualistic choice based on personal experience, family, friends, and social influence. Ms. Sun said that she and her husband had visited almost all the well-known tourist destinations in China so they did not want to do too much leisure travel. They spent most of their time locally, going shopping, visiting local parks, and eating out with relatives. Mr. Zhao told us her husband always spent some days on leisure travel because he usually had longer vacations in China, but she did not go to many places if traveling back alone due to her short stay. Mr. Meng stated he had traveled around China when he worked there so he was not interested in leisure tourism to those places. However, his wife and children were interested in these places so he

always took them to some not far away from his home town or on their trip route. Some participants were influenced by their friends' experience or activities. Mr. Meng's wife went to Hong Kong on her way to Shanghai last year. She said all her friends in China had been to Hong Kong and thus she had to go to.

Engaging in leisure tourism activities in local areas. The findings of research indicated that most leisure tourism activities took place in local areas as participants claimed that they would like to spend most of the time with family. Lots of activities were arranged by their relatives and friends. Places of interest included those with historical and cultural heritages, children's amusement park or museums, rural resorts, and places invoking memories. Mr. Feng's sister took her daughter to Children's museums and shows. Sightseeing, shopping, and dining were the most popular VFR activities mentioned by participants. Ms. Qian talked about her brother taking them to a spa resort in a rural area, "The spa was not popular when I was in Beijing last time. It is really a good place for busy city people to relax during winter time." Mr. Meng's friend from elementary school took him to the old neighborhood where they had grown up together. He said:

He took me to the old plants where my father had been working for forty years. We used to live in the nearby factories dormitories. I spent about twenty years in the neighborhood until I went to the college. I didn't recognize the place. The address is the same, but all the plants had been transformed to art galleries, studios, restaurants and bars. The new owners (most of them are supposed to be artists) keep the construction of the old plants but decorated them differently. I can still find the traces of the old plants here and there. Some of them were left on purpose by the new owner. I had a weird feeling when visiting those plants. Something seemed like I was familiar with but there were things completely different from my memory.

Besides sightseeing visits to the historical sites, and shopping or dining with

friends, the findings indicated that many participants went to museums, galleries, theaters and concerts. The interest in culture and social life made Chinese Diasporas different from normal tourists.

Reflection on the Trip

Indoubtedly, the experience of the VFR influenced the planning of the next trip. The negative influence of dissatisfaction has been discussed in the previous section. However, it is interesting to see that some of the participants denied their motivation to go back to China had been influenced by the unhappy experience of a previous trip. Ms. Zheng expressed her ambivalent feeling about VFR:

I felt exhausted and fidgeted after spending two or more weeks in China. The weather, the pollution, overcrowded places, and snooty people drove me crazy. I missed my quiet home in America very much. I told myself I would not go back again. However, as soon as I landed in the San Francisco airport, I began missing China. I began to miss the cozy old house of my parents, the smell of the food, even the noise of people's uncontrolled loud speaking. Then I began to dream of the next trip's coming.

Impact of VFR

Some participants claimed VFR did not have a direct impact on their lives in the United States. Participants spoke about factors that influenced their annual vacation plan. Mr. Feng stated that after his first trip, he decided to go back at least once a year to let her daughter keep in mind that she was Chinese. Mr. Jiang said his life here was involved with his parents' lives in China as he communicated with his parents several times a week and took the VFR often due to the health of his father. However, he admitted that the impact on his son was obvious. His was impressed by how diligently the Chinese students studied. He thought his son was good enough, but now he realized

that compared with Chinese students, he had too much time to play. His wife complained she did not have the chance to travel a lot as her friends did in China who often traveled overseas. She used to be the person to be envied, but now she thought she was like a person from the countryside.

To some participants, the VFR was just one of their leisure vacations as Ms. Zhu commented:

Not too much impact. I have been used to the life here in the United States. I took my brother's home as my home. My parents stay with them often. This trip is more like a leisure travel experience to me just like the trips I took to Mexico or Europe. It was just another memory of a happy trip.

Beyond general impressions of the trip, some of the participants shared their deeper thoughts about VFR. The data have been classified and presented in the following sub-themes.

Feelings of Homelessness

Ms. Zhao commented, "Neither side is my home. Many years ago, from my first trip to China, I realized that China was no longer my home." Mr. Jiang shared her opinion by telling his own experience:

When I came to the U.S., I had only hundreds of dollars in my pocket. I left my parents, my wife and my first son in China. I left my home in China. I felt so lonely and homeless. Now, I have my own house, live with my wife and my sons, all by my hard working. I call it my home, but I still have the feeling of homelessness. It is not identity confusion. It might be my sons' problem when they grown up. I am very clear that I am Chinese, a Chinese living in another country. I didn't have the feeling of attachment to this place. Diaspora as you told me. What a sad word. I always called my VFR as "going home". But it is just my parent's home after my wife and children moved to The United States. I used to have a home in China when I was here alone. Now, I don't know where my home is.

Ms. Wei's story was unique, but sounded familiar to many Chinese Diasporas

living in the Bay Area:

I used to think of U.S. as our home, because my whole family was here. Now, my husband is back in China. It is no longer our home here, but it is not a home there (China) either. He always wanted to go back to China. He always thought we are outsiders here. In fact I agree with him. However, for my children's sake, I'd rather call the United States our home. They have been used to the life here. As long as they think of the United States as their home, I will live here with them. But my home is separated.

Recollection of Happy Memories

Many participants agreed that VFR bring back happy memories of the time they spent in China. Ms. Zhao stated:

It was a kind of nostalgia. After being abroad for such a long time, the memories I had about China were only the happy ones. Even if the real experience was not as good as I expected, it was still very nice to meet relatives, friends, and old schoolmates. It made me recollect the memory about the happy and innocent time I spent there.

Comparison of Both Sides

It is easy to understand that many participants compared life on both sides after their VFR. Most of the time, it does not mean to result in proclaiming which side was better but just acknowledging the huge difference. Ms. Qian's commented:

My life in the United States seems like it had never changed since I got married. Many things happened to my friends within one or two years. They changed jobs very often, got married and divorced, had a baby, bought a house, the second house, bought a new car, a second car, etc. Most of the time, they talked and talked, I was just listening there. I realized we lived in two different worlds.

Feeling Comfortable When in China

Some of the participants indicated they felt more comfortable when they were in China. Ms. Wu stated:

I felt my life in the United States was in a very hard, unfamiliar environment, no close friends.... I felt more comfortable back in China, both physically and mentally. The grandparents helped me take care of the kid. I had some spare time for myself. I had people to talk with. I was really relaxed when I was in China.”

Ms. Wang commented:

Many friends here told me that they were not used to the life in China, but I am to the contrary. I liked the time spent there very much. I enjoyed the reunion with the old friends. I enjoyed the night life and entertainments, even with the overcrowded places, the noise. It is a horrible feeling to think that I might not return to China one day. Although I married an American Caucasian, I had never thought of living in the United State permanently. Beijing is the only place that I don't want to leave. I don't say that Beijing is perfect. But it gives me the feeling of home.

Reconnecting to Roots

Mr. Zhou was the only person among the participants with no parents living in China. He identified himself as an American after living here for over 40 years. However, when he looked at his sons, he realized that he was still a Chinese. He raised his sons in his words, “as American did.” So he reflected that, his son did not allow him to see his grandchildren more than once every year. “They know nothing about filial piety; they care nothing about their elders because I did not teach them. If I were really an American, I would not feel so hurt.” So Mr. Zhou took trips to China, got married to a Chinese woman, and lived in her house in China for months. He commented, “I like the feeling of being surrounded by Chinese. Although we have different views about many things, we share the common ground of being a Chinese.”

Guilt Feelings for Not Visiting Parents Often

Some of the participants commented that they had the feeling of guilt if did not visit their parents for a long time. Mr. Jiang stated,

To me, trips to China were not only a necessity but a must. I cannot imagine not visiting my parents for more than one year. At their age, we don't have much time left, especially my father. I would be very sorry if I hadn't spent the time with him.

Ms. Qian indicated that her friends in China blamed her for not caring enough about her parents:

They thought I spent too much time and attention on my son instead of my parents. I agreed with them. I felt guilty. Now as a mother, I can understand how important the children are to their parents. Maybe it is because of their age and health, they looked so weak. I had never thought that they might need me. We didn't talk a lot actually, and nothing important, but I can feel their happiness when I stay with them. I hope I can spend more time with them.

Comments and Suggestions Regarding Chinese Tourism Development

Airlines received the most complaints from all participants. Many participants experienced flight delays due to all kinds of reasons, but which most times were unknown. The participants hoped airlines have more transparent service and communicate with passengers in a timely manner.

The overcrowded tourist attraction was another reason for complaints as too many tourists in those places affected their satisfaction of the visit. Some participants hoped the management could control the tourist flow within their capacity without increasing the cost of admission. However, many participants indicated that they had noticed the improvement in the infrastructure and facilities in the tourist attractions and other public areas, especially in big cities. The majority of the participants had not participated in

group travel. For them, the group travel was not considered because of its tight schedule and limited programs.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of VFR travel of Chinese Diasporas, including their choices of activities, behaviors, and overall experiences before, during, and after the VFR trips. Qualitative research methods were employed to capture the lived experience of 16 Chinese Diasporas residing in the San Francisco Bay Area. The findings of this investigation have allowed for expansion and clarification of several aspects of the overall VFR experience of the Chinese Diasporas. The findings have provided clear examples of Chinese Diasporas' VFR experiences and have shown that on the one hand, the experiences are similar to other transnational migrants, in that they use VFR to maintain networks with their country of origin (Duval, 2006); on the other hand, the desire for accumulation of social capital motivated Chinese Diasporas to take VFR trips, tried to maximize the outcomes of their trips and also enhance their current lives in the United States. This investigation also added an insight into both the internal and external factors influencing the VFR decision-making process by focusing on the Chinese Diaspora's preparation, choice of activity, and feedback regarding VFR. The characteristics of the Chinese Diasporas' VFR were impacted by the dual influences of its unique social-cultural background and their personal experience. Finally, recommendations for planning effective marketing strategies will be suggested to Chinese national and regional tourism organizations/agencies to stimulate VFR among Chinese Diasporas.

VFR—Obligation and Opportunity

Larsen et al. (2006) argued that researchers have overlooked how more and more tourism is concerned with producing social networks such as visiting and receiving the hospitality of friends and relatives living elsewhere and fulfilling social obligations. As the current findings suggest the focus of most of the participants' trips to China were on VFR. Being either the first generation of the immigrants or long-term visitor, such as contract workers or international students, all of the participants had relatives and friends living in China. For some participants, going back to China was the only way they could have a reunion with their parents. Traditionally, in China, all adult children are expected to provide financial and physical care for their parents (Ikels, 1993). Under communist China, adult children were required by law to provide physical and financial support for elderly parents (Gu & Liang, 2000). Filial piety or *xiao* is a Confucian concept that encompasses a broad range of behaviors, including children's respect, obedience, loyalty, material provision, and physical care to parents (Zhan & Montgomery, 2003). The deeply rooted Chinese culture value systems made these Chinese Diasporas believe that going back to China and visiting their parents was the proper way to show their regard for family order and tradition.

Considering this primary motivation for VFR, other leisure tourism activities such as sightseeing and recreational activities, such as shopping and dining, were treated as side products of VFR. Without this primary focus on visiting parents, many Chinese Diasporas admitted they would not take trips to China. Therefore, to many Chinese Diasporas, China was not a simple tourist destination. Instead, most participants'

perceptions about VFR are about going back home and spending time with family members, especially parents. On the one hand, it makes China a destination that cannot be replaced by others, but on the other, whenever the main motivation no longer exists, China as a tourist destination will lose its attraction to Chinese Diasporas.

As Duval (2006) stated, when VFR involves migrants traveling to former homelands, a particular form of transnational behavior has wrapped up within it multiple levels of socialities and degrees of cultural significance. Various activities were mentioned by participants as providing feelings of spending time with families. Celebrating traditional holidays was the important occasion for family reunions. Participating in the birthday celebrations of a parent was a way to show respect and *xiao*. The most popular and easy symbol of a family reunion was dining with parents. The findings from this investigation informed that as distinguished from common leisure tourists, the VFR of Chinese Diasporas was not influenced by tourist seasonal elements, but were highlighted and enhanced by traditional holidays such as “Qingming” and “Chinese New Year” that are usually not tourist seasons for travelers from overseas.

Leisure tourism activity was not emphasized by the majority of the research participants. It seemed that to most Chinese Diaspora, VFR was an obligation rather than a leisure activity, especially when compared with the vacations they had in the United States. Those vacations were more active and included a significant component of leisure activities. The purpose of those vacations was more focused on relaxation or personal hobbies. It was only after their permanent or long-term stay in the United States that spending vacation time with parents via VFR trips became essential. This

perception seemed to be the direct result of tradition Chinese culture as encouraged by Confucius in which individuals should lead an ordered, family-centered way of life represented by their eagerness to reunite with and spend time with family members instead of engaging in leisure tourism activities.

Our findings also suggested that lack of availability of a social life significantly constrained Chinese Diasporas' satisfaction towards life in the United States and facilitated their eagerness to visit China. According to the existing literature, many permanent immigrants to the United States had only limited social networks (Stodolska, 2000). Immigration often leads to broken social ties, which subsequently limit immigrants' participation in social types of leisure. Thus the increase in VFR trips stems from what Boden (1994) calls a compulsion to proximity, the desire to be physically co-present with other people (Boden & Molotch, 1994). The face-to-face contact brought by VFR satisfied Chinese Diasporas' need for retying social networks. The geographical "stretching out" of social networks made VFR tourism desirable and indeed necessary, because social networks typically do not only function through phone calls, texting, and e-mail (Larsen et al. 2006).

For many Chinese Diasporas, although they cannot live in China, it remains the place where they feel most at home (Lew, 2005). Parents became the symbol of the "spirit" home. To many participants, the visit to their parents was not only showing respect to them but constituted a trip to the "spirit" home, where their personal and social value systems stemmed from. The findings indicated that many participants mentioned VFR as trip of "going back home" and described these trips as journeys for recollecting

sweet memories. Thus nostalgia is one of the most important causes of embarking on a VFR trip.

Some of the participants had a perplexing feeling about China and “home,” especially the people who had left China as young, single individuals and established their own families in the United States. These Chinese Diasporas who experienced more than one culture along their travel or migrating routes were caught up at the intersection of multiple, sometimes conflicting, subject positions, and did not feel at home anywhere (Shi, 2005). Stephenson (2002) argued that “dual-place orientations and identities” were the result of ties that were maintained between current place of residence and former homes. The findings of the current study suggested that many participants had the feeling of “homeless” after their first time going back to China. The feeling of being outsiders in their current host country made them yearn for home. However, the reality and dissatisfaction came after VFR made them reevaluate their situation.

The strong sense of nostalgia that Chinese Diasporas felt consisted of sentiments that both pulled them to China as a place where they feel a sense of belonging, and pushed them toward their adopted lands as a place where they preferred to physically live and work (Lew, 2005). It explained people’s expectation of VFR but feelings of disappointment and being lost when they felt they were no longer used to the life in China. Some of the participants accepted the fact of “being homeless” as the lifestyle they chosen. Some of the interviewees managed to find a harmony in their internal feelings of perplexion. Some of the participants chose to focus on the more physical issues of daily life instead of mental

struggles. The VFR trips as indications of nostalgia and collective belongings were contested in the critical significances and diasporic reach (Bruner, 1996).

Another paradoxical finding of this research suggested that although research participants admit that their lifestyles and cultural practices have changed and that after coming to the United States, they feel incompatible with lives back home, participants deny that they have been “Westernized” or “Americanized” (Shi, 2005). Previous research studies have shown that some of the Chinese Diasporas choose not to pass Chinese Culture on to their children in order to melt into the American culture and be accepted by the mainstream society. However, in the current study, all the participants paid much attention to second generation’s education regarding Chinese language and culture. Similarly, Duval’s (2004b) research regarding return visits among Caribbean migrants where parents of Caribbean origin felt obliged to keep in touch with their homeland and to personally introduce its key features to their children.

What has made Chinese Diasporas change their attitude towards Chinese culture? The findings suggest three reasons for the appearance of this significant phenomenon. First, the American society is more open, with diversified cultures being widely accepted, especially in the San Francisco Bay Area. Second, the Chinese immigrant population increased rapidly. Children now have more chances to explore Chinese language and culture. Third, the economic development of Mainland China motivated people’s enthusiasm towards China.

However, the researcher wonders whether parental eagerness to clarify their own belongingness crisis played a role in the “Chinese language and culture study rush.”

Gupta and Ferguson (1992) stated that the ideas of cultural and ethnically distinct places or peoples become perhaps even more salient when Diasporas faced complex situations. Hall and Zeppel (1990) stated that travel and tourism were very powerful generative forces of affiliation and identity that helped to confirm people in the various communal, sacred and cosmological connectivities. Therefore, Diasporas' practices of constructing the myth of return, denying the label "Westernization," or marking cultural boundaries with "authenticity" should not be perceived simply as evidence of their nationalist or cultural loyalty to home countries/regions. Rather, the practices are part of an ongoing negotiation of a cultural in-between, when their memories and experiences of both "there" and "here" or "then" and "now" are all reckoned in (Shi, 2005).

Duval (2006) concluded that the result of VFR travel might be significant to the Chinese Diasporas for whom it is not only a chance to reunite with parents, relatives, and friends, but also a chance to reestablish social networks with people in China. As the interview results indicated, VFR was used by many Chinese participants not only to provide chance to fulfill their social obligations of having reunions with parents or relatives, but to offer the chance to reconnect the social ties that had been broken after their move to the United States. Li and Stodolska (2004) stated that the desire for accumulation of human capital was the primary factor that motivated Chinese students to leave their country. The current findings suggested that seeking of social capital was also motivating Chinese Diasporas to go back to China. Indubitably, this new trend of transnational migration owes itself to the rapid economic development of Mainland China.

In conclusion, the research results suggested that VFR of Chinese Diasporas was a responsibility stemming from the traditional Chinese culture to show respect to elders. It was also a chance to pass on Chinese culture to the younger generation. Finally, the new trend of investing in social capital provides a new purpose for traveling back to China.

Factors Influencing VFR Decision Making

Specific aspects of decision making have been studied extensively in the literature, but nostalgia has received little attention (Decrop & Snelders, 2004). The study of Chinese Diaspora's VFR offered a chance to take a closer look at this kind of decision-making process. In the previous section, the factors influencing VFR decision making were categorized as facilitators and constraints. The VFR behaviors and activities have been displayed in the logistic sequence of VFR. This is worthwhile for managerial activities such as marketing communication, booking, and product positioning (Decrop & Snelders, 2004). However, decision making is a complex process, in which it is hard to speak of a particular order in which plans evolve or decisions are made (Decrop & Snelders, 2004). Therefore, in the following part, the researcher adopted the method of Decrop & Snelders (2005) to analyze the VFR decision-making process from social, cultural influence, personal, interpersonal, and situational factors.

Influence of Social and Cultural Factors

Most of the research participants came to the United States during the third and fourth waves of Chinese immigrations. The purposes for their moving include study,

work, and reunions with their family. The length of participants' residence in the United States ranged from 18 months to over 40 years. During this period of time, the world around them changed a lot. As reported by Nyiri (2001), after 1978 the People's Republic of China had progressed to the point of celebrating migration as a patriotic and modern act and encouraging transnational practices among people who are in the process of leaving China. Obviously, the change in the government's attitude towards Chinese Diasporas encourages their VFR.

In addition, more recently elements of Chinese heritage such as traditions or holidays are being celebrated not only by most Chinese Americans, but have begun to be accepted by some mainstream Americans (Chan S., 2003), especially in culturally diversified places such as the San Francisco Bay Area. America has become enriched by a cornucopia of different languages, symbols, and cultural paraphernalia. Cultural diversity has gradually become a fact of life for millions of Americans (Orum, 2005).

Besides social- political influence, the economic development has played an important role in VFR decision making. Generally speaking, most of the participants in the current study belonged to the middle class. They benefit from the high-tech booming of Silicon Valley. The expense of VFR was not considered as a constraint by most of the participants. Meanwhile, the economic development in China has become an added attraction to the VFR trips. More airlines operate flights between the United States and China, and it has never been so convenient to travel across the ocean. Even the tourism development in China has strong influence to overseas Chinese Diasporas. Overall the Chinese Diasporas have more choice of leisure activities than before.

The revolutionary development of technology such as the Internet also means overseas Chinese have more opportunities to obtain tourism information about their home country. According to a survey of 700 adults of Chinese descent conducted by Sina.com and Interviewing Service of America (2001), two-thirds of Chinese American Internet users have engaged in travel-related activity on the Internet. While Chinese Diasporas tried to manage their life in the current host country with immigration-related factors such as altered family and friendship networks or shifts in their socioeconomic position, they are still influenced heavily by the values and customs of the old country (Stodolska, 2000). In the global media market, cultural flows from “peripheral countries” to Western cultural “centers” are reinforced by technologies such as the Internet, satellite TVs, digital videos, and other electronic media, which have made Chinese ethnic media content highly accessible for Chinese Diaspora members living in these Western “centers” (Shi, 2005).

Whether single, married, or parents, all participants have direct relatives in China. However, the closeness of the relationship influences their eagerness for VFR. Parents are the strongest pull factors for participants to take VFR trips while siblings have a much weaker influence. This explains why most of the participants admitted they would not go back to China after their parents pass away. No study findings indicated that whether single or married, participants with children traveled less (or more) than participants without children. However, the purpose of showing the grandchildren to the elders and the wish of to pass down Chinese culture adds more motivation to those with children for VFR.

Influence of Personal Factors

Most of the participants play multiple roles in their lives. In the family, they are sons (daughters), husbands (wives), and fathers (mothers). In society, they are citizens, employees (employers), and friends. The different roles influence their decision-making process. First of all, the findings indicate that the content and priority of VFR motivations change. As a son or daughter, visiting parents is the primary purpose of the trip. When they become parents, participants undertake education in Chinese culture as part of their purpose. Second, the choice of activities changed. Some of the participants engaged in leisure tourism activities only to fulfill the requirements of a spouse or children. Third, the length, timing and frequency of VFR are influenced by the multiple roles as most of the participants admitted their VFR was arranged according to a work or school schedule.

Even in the same family settings, due to different roles or activities and their different perspective of the experience, different people have different impacts on VFR. In the study of a wife's involvement in the tourism decision process, Zalatan (1998) pointed out that normally a husband and wife have different perspectives on the process of vacation decision making. Wives have a marginal involvement in tasks related to the financial aspects of the trip, but are more involved in the decision-making related tasks at the destination. Similarly, the findings suggest most VFR activities are unplanned and passive. The involvement of relatives and friends influences the choice of leisure activities during VFR.

Obviously, personal histories also had marked differences among Diaspora members (Shi, 2005). Personality and lifestyle influenced the behaviors and choices of activity during VFR. As has also been stated by Li and Stodolska (2004), status in United States was one of the key factors influencing the decision-making process. In addition, a person with no interest in travel was not expected to engage in leisure travel activities in VFR. Individual interests influenced the participants' choices of tourism destination and program. The findings of the current study indicated that some Chinese Diasporas were more interested in the tourist spots regarding historical heritages while some were more drawn to recreational facilities or activities. Museums and theaters were also among some people's choices, which is quite different from typical group tourists. Indeed, some places are particularly well-suited to provide the conditions for face-to-face sociality (Shi, 2005). Thus, one might say places can matter in VFR tourism, although in a different way from more straightforward sightseeing forms of tourism.

Personal history and vacation experiences also influence the decision-making process. People with more travel experience in China are unlikely to engage in additional tourism during VFR, while people with less experience are more interested in traveling to tourist destinations other than their parents' home.

Personal resources are other factors that influence decision making regarding VFR. People with better financial resources find it easier to make the choice of VFR. Shi (2005) stated that "if compared with Diaspora members, especially those of the upper middle class in the United States metropolitan areas, the interviewed new arrivals are to

some degree financially disadvantaged.” This explains why the majority of participants traveled more frequently five or six years after immigration when they have a more stable life in the United States. Meanwhile, the Chinese Diasporas in the Bay Area have relatively broad access to ethnic cultural content such as ethnic media cables, videos, and online news services (Shi, 2005). This gives them more chances to know about China. Chinese Diasporas’ resources in China also directly influenced their choice of activities. Finally, the number and closeness of relatives and friends decided their frequency of engaging in leisure and recreational activities.

Influence of Interpersonal Factors

The findings suggest that interpersonal factors such as family adhesion did not influence decision making regarding VFR, but strongly influenced its timing, frequency, and activities. The individual situational factors in regards to spouse, children, and even relatives in China are among the considerations when making a VFR plan. Communication plays an important role in the decision-making process. Many participants admitted they communicated and negotiated with all parties to find a solution. If no consensus could be reached because of a schedule conflict, it was not uncommon for husbands and wives to take separate VFR trips.

Influence of Situational Factors

Many participants admitted that they would like to visit relatives and friends when on business trips to China. Family emergencies are another special situation pushing Chinese Diasporas to take VFR. Although tourism promotion had little influence on when to take a VFR trip, it did have an impact on the choice of activities. Many

participants admitted they would adjust their leisure tourism activities in reference to local tourism promotions.

Influence of Emotions and Moods

Normally, unhappy experiences constrain people from repeating visits. This is also true of the Chinese Diasporas' choices of leisure activities during VFR. However, these experiences have little influence as to the VFR decision. Emotional factors played a much more important role here when compared with other types of tourism.

Dissatisfaction with previous experiences such as receiving bad services from some travel businesses or encountering unfriendly people stopped participants from visiting their parents and "home."

Certainly, the intersection of the specific personal factors of these participants with their cultural identities cautions us against any assumption of there being a collective behavior pattern in relation to VFR. All individuals negotiate their economic, political, and cultural dependency differently, and this difference is already inscribed into their VFR decision-making process.

Suggestions and Recommendations to the Tourism Industry

Based on the previous facilitating/constraining factors findings described in chapter 4 and discussed in chapter 5, the researcher proposes some marketing strategy implications designed to stimulate Chinese Diaspora VFR. The premier motivation of VFR is visiting parents. Without it, many Chinese Diasporas would not make the trip to China. Therefore, Chinese Diasporas' VFR market is not sustainable to the Chinese Tourism industry. When the immigration tide recedes, the Chinese tourism industry will

face the problem of losing a large segment of the market. Maintaining the first generation's connection with China and inspiring the second generation's interest in China is a hard task.

Fortunately, the research indicated that Chinese Diasporas have a strong desire to pass down Chinese culture to their children. The Chinese tourism industry should take this opportunity to promote Chinese culture to overseas Chinese especially the second and third generations. Therefore several strategies focusing on enhancing Chinese culture popularization and directed towards Chinese Diasporas is more likely to be effective than executing a single national image-advertising campaign. Evoking cooperation across government, marketing organizations, NGOs, and sectors of the travel industry may help to successfully implement such cooperative marketing programs.

The planning and preparation of VFR normally lasts a long time, varying from a month to years. Most of the participants admitted they begin to plan the next trip right after the current trip ends. During this preparation period, any information about tourism development in China may influence their arrangement of itinerary and leisure activities. As native Chinese, Chinese Diasporas had little interest in the common tourism campaigns targeted at Western travelers. Based on their current leisure activities pattern of focusing more on local tourist spots and destinations, the researcher suggests the tourism organization of China provide more information on local tourism development instead of promoting the image of the country as a whole.

As the findings suggest, Chinese Diasporas used various methods to obtain information about China. The Internet becomes an important resource to get

information. However, none of the national or regional tourism organizations' websites were mentioned by any participant, and most information was gotten from unofficial resources such as other tourist comments and recommendations. Generally speaking, Chinese tourism organizations are nonentities in the guidance and organization of the VFR market. The findings suggest that leisure tourism activities of Chinese Diasporas are mostly unplanned, unorganized, passive, and solitary. Seeking and creating local mega-events will reinforce Chinese Diasporas' need to engage in leisure tourism activities. Many Chinese Diasporas' leisure tourism activities are limited when compared with their vacations in the United States. One important reason is lack of access to information resources. Personal influences channels (Kotler, 1997) seem to be the most effective marketing communication channels. Promotional materials will be welcomed if they can easily be accessed from the Internet. Many participants expressed their desire to book all the hotel and sightseeing arrangements when they are in the United States. However, the limited information and difficulties with payment stopped them from making more arrangements for the VFR trip.

As the airlines are the most used tourism business by Chinese Diasporas, the researcher suggests the airlines package air ticket and hotel accommodation products based on their domestic flight routes. The government, NGOs, and other sectors of the tourism industry should cooperate to create a travel-friendly environment and events for young children, relationship-bonding travel products and themes, and frequent traveler programs and themes. This may offer Chinese Diasporas the chance of being their guests, and receiving their hospitality, and perhaps enjoying their knowledge of local

culture (Larsen et al., 2006).

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study had some limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, it was conducted in an area with a fairly large population of Chinese Diasporas. The specific setting of this study might play a role in explaining some of its findings. It is possible that experiences of Chinese Diasporas may vary between different geographic locations within the United States. Second, the research data were collected based on the participant's description of personal experience after VFR; its accuracy might be influenced by the participant's emotions, goals, or beliefs over time (Levine & Safer, 2002). Further data collecting methods such as document triangulation (photos, correspondence about VFR), onsite observations, and interviews should be used to improve the trustworthiness of the findings. Most importantly, the scope of this study was quite limited, and future research could benefit from more in-depth analysis of the social-cultural factors affecting VFR behavior of Chinese Diasporas.

Future research should also isolate social-cultural factors affecting VFR patterns of Chinese Diasporas from factors related to socio-economic status, networks of social relations in the host country, and specific reasons for immigration. The use of ethnographic approaches would constitute an appropriate avenue to pursue these goals. It would also be beneficial if empirical research exploring cultural issues in tourism could be conducted on ethnic populations in the natural environment of their home countries. The current study focuses on the Chinese Diasporas as the visitor. The reflections of relatives and friends who are deeply involved in the VFR should be examined as well as

their attitude also influenced the practice of VFR.

Conclusions

This study was undertaken with the backdrop of the rise of the interest in mobility of Chinese Diasporas' VFR trips as a viable tourism segment in China, which itself has experienced phenomenal growth in the United States. Through qualitative interviews and reviews of decision-making theories, this study proposed a deeper understanding of the Chinese Diasporas' VFR and the factors influencing their decision making regarding VFR. The ethnic and cultural influence on their motivation and both the facilitating and constraining factors affecting the decision making were developed through examination of Chinese Diasporas' social and cultural environments. The last section presented suggestions to the Chinese travel industry. .

External and internal factors identified in the study can be found by many of the traditional theories of decision making. However, existing decision-making models constructed for tourists in developed countries appear to be inadequate in the Chinese Diaspora setting. To fully appreciate the experience of Chinese Diasporas and the significance of their VFR trips in improving the quality of their lives, tourism scholars need to consider the fundamental changes that have been taking place in the current host country and China, as well as the unique strategies that Chinese Diasporas adopt to adjust to the changes. Their adjustment involves selecting VFR as means to connecting their past and current lives. Their choice of VFR is also a function of what they think and care about and choose to spend time on (Banaji & Prentice, 1994).

This study is an attempt to investigate the Chinese Diasporas' VFR experiences

using an anthropological theoretical foundation rooted in the social sciences following a qualitative research approach. The findings of the interviews reflect the cumulative life experiences of the Chinese Diasporas and the cultural changes embedded in the transnational society. Individual experiences of VFR depend on the way people choose to adjust their current status with their social environments. Although the focus of this research is on Chinese Diasporas' VFR experiences, the findings of the study can be applied more generally to the practices of the Chinese tourism industry.

Researcher's Reflection

As a Chinese Diaspora herself living in the San Francisco Bay Area, the researcher has had the opportunity to go into the Chinese community and listen to the voices. Her identity gave her easy access to the research participants and a "trusted insider" status. Her own experience as a Chinese Diaspora made her sensitive to the nuances of meaning expressed by the participants and the different contexts of data reflecting unique meanings to sentiments shared by the research participants. The researcher was able to take her own identity as an advantage to gain the "transparency" and "reflexivity" (Jamal & Hollinshead, 2001) prescribed by qualitative research methods. To ensure the validity and credibility of the research, the researcher applied triangulation and member checks at all stages beginning with data collection to the analysis and interpretation stages of the investigation. The accurateness of the transcript and the analysis of the interviews were confirmed by the participants.

As a final note, the current investigation revealed that unlike research indicating that earlier generational cohorts of Chinese Diasporas' taking their identity as a

“negative” factor in their lives, the research participants in this study were actually embracing their identity and taking advantage of it. They were also very optimistic about their future. Many of the research participants believe that their Chinese identity affords them with more opportunities to develop on both sides of the Pacific Ocean. Thus it is the task of Chinese tourism organizations to spark the trend of VFR.

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**San José State
UNIVERSITY**

**Office of the Provost
Associate Vice President
Graduate Studies & Research**

One Washington Square
San José, CA 95192-0025
Voice: 408-924-2427
Fax: 408-924-2477

E-mail: gradstudies@sjsu.edu
<http://www.sjsu.edu>

APPENDIX A
INSTITUTION REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER

To: Hao Pan

From: Pamela Stacks, Ph.D.
Associate Vice President
Graduate Studies and Research

Date: July 10, 2007

The Human Subjects-Institutional Review Board has approved your request to use human subjects in the study entitled:

"The study of the phenomenon of visiting friends and relatives of Chinese Diasporas"

This approval is contingent upon the subjects participating in your research project being appropriately protected from risk. This includes the protection of the anonymity of the subjects' identity when they participate in your research project, and with regard to all data that may be collected from the subjects. The approval includes continued monitoring of your research by the Board to assure that the subjects are being adequately and properly protected from such risks. If at any time a subject becomes injured or complains of injury, you must notify Dr. Pamela Stacks, Ph.D. immediately. Injury includes but is not limited to bodily harm, psychological trauma, and release of potentially damaging personal information. This approval for the human subject's portion of your project is in effect for one year, and data collection beyond July 10, 2008 requires an extension request.

Please also be advised that all subjects need to be fully informed and aware that their participation in your research project is voluntary, and that he or she may withdraw from the project at any time. Further, a subject's participation, refusal to participate, or withdrawal will not affect any services that the subject is receiving or will receive at the institution in which the research is being conducted.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (408) 924-2480.

cc. Gonzaga da Gama, 0060

The California State University:
Chancellor's Office
Bakersfield, Channel Islands, Chico
Domínguez Hills, East Bay, Fresno
Fullerton, Humboldt, Long Beach
Los Angeles, Maritime Academy
Monterey Bay, Northridge, Pomona
Sacramento, San Bernardino, San Diego
San Francisco, San José, San Luis Obispo
San Marcos, Sonoma, Stanislaus

APPENDIX B Consent Form

Agreement to Participate in Research

Responsible Investigator: Hao Pan

Title of Protocol: The study of the phenomenon of visiting friends and relatives of Chinese Diaspora

1. You have been asked to participate in a research study understanding the Visit Friends and Relatives (VFR) experience of Chinese Diaspora.

2. You will be asked to participate in informal conversations and semi-structured face-to-face interview describing your lived experience of VFR trips and factors influencing your vacation decision-making process. The interview will be audio taped.

3. There are no anticipated risks to participate in this research study.

4. There are no overt benefits to participating in the investigation. It is hoped that as a result of participation, you may have an increased awareness and enhanced understanding of the VFR experience.

5. Although the results of this study may be published, no information that could identify you will be included.

6. There is no compensation for participation in the study.

7. Questions about this research may be addressed to Dr. Gonzaga da Gama, Associate Professor, Department of Recreation & Leisure Studies, at (408) 924-3000. Complaints about the research may be presented to Dr. Bethany Shifflet, Interim Chair, Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, at (408) 924-3000. Questions about a research subjects' rights, or research-related injury may be presented to Pamela Stacks, Ph.D., Associate Vice President, Graduate Studies and Research, at (408) 924-2480.

8. No service of any kind, to which you are otherwise entitled, will be lost or jeopardized if you choose to not participate in the study.

9. Your consent is being given voluntarily. You may refuse to participate in the entire study or in any part of the study. You have the right not to answer questions you do not wish to answer. If you decide to participate in the study, you are free to withdraw at any time without any negative effect on your relations with San Jose State University or with any other participating institutions or agencies.

10. At the time that you sign this consent form, you will receive a copy of it for your records, signed and dated by the investigator.

☐ **The signature of a subject on this document indicates agreement to participate in the study.**

☐ **The signature of a researcher on this document indicates agreement to include the above named subject in the research and attestation that the subject has been fully informed of his or her rights.**

Signature

Date

Investigator's Signature

Date

APPENDIX C
Informed Consent Form (Chinese)

问卷调查参与同意书

研究负责人：潘浩

研究题目：海外华人回中国大陆探亲旅游现象的研究

1. 您已被询问参与本学术研究之调查。本研究之目的在于探讨海外华人回中国大陆探亲旅游现象。
2. 您即将被邀请参加一次面对面的访谈调查。该访谈调查是关于您回中国大陆探亲旅游的经历及感想。
3. 参与本研究所没有任何的风险及危险。
4. 参与本研究没有明显的利益。本研究希望可以增进您对回中国探亲旅游的了解。
5. 本研究结果有可能被公开出版，但是所有可供辨识您个人身份的信息将不会被公开。
6. 参与本研究并不会得任何报酬。
7. 任何关于本研究的相关问题可向 潘浩，电话: (408) 823-3249，或者导师 Gonzaga da Gama 教授，电话: (408) 924 3000 提出。任何关于本研究之申诉可向 Bethany Shifflet 博士 即游憩与休闲研究系 代理系主任 电话: (408) 924-3000 提出。任何关于本研究参与者之权力问题或本研究引起之相关伤害可向 Pamela Stacks 博士 即研究与学术研究部 副主任 电话: (408) 924-2480 提出。
8. 如果您拒绝参与本研究，并不会失去任何您原本应享有的设施与服务。
9. 您的同意参与是基于您个人意愿。您可以拒绝参与全程的研究或任何部分的研究。在您决定参与本研究后，您可以在任何时候退出参与本研究而不会造成任何您与圣荷西州立大学 (San Jose State University) 或任何其它相关研究机构之间的负面影响。
10. 当您签署这份同意书后，您将收到一份由研究者签名及标注日期的同意书复印件供您保留此记录。

- 参与者在本文文件上的签名代表同意参与本研究。
- 研究者在本份文件上的签名代表允许上述人士参与本研究并保证该参与者已被充分告知其个人权力。

_____
参与者签名

_____
日期

_____
研究者签名

_____
日期

APPENDIX D

Interview Guide

1. From your perspective what is general experience of taking a VFR trip?
  - a) When did you come to the USA?
  - b) What was your primary purpose of coming to the USA?
  - c) What is your current status in the USA?
  - d) What relationship do you have with China? Any relatives or friends?
  - e) What is your education level in China? Do you have working experience in China? If yes, what was your income level in China?
2. How often do you visit China?
  - a) What factors motivate you to travel back to China? Please describe.
  - b) What factors stop you from visiting China? Please describe
  - c) Having a family including children, do you think affects you in your ability to take a VFR trip? In what way?
  - d) What are your thoughts about tourism campaigns and promotions pertaining to China?
3. What was the experience of your first time going back China after being in the USA?
Please describe.
  - a) When was your first time going back to China?
  - b) What was the motivation for you to go back?
  - c) What was your experience when in China?
  - d) Describe your feelings including post-trip reflections.

4. Please describe the experience of your recent VFR trip.

- a) What was the purpose of the trip? Was it different than your previous VFR trip(s)?
- b) Where did you stay during the trip?
- c) Where did you visit during the trip? Did you participate in any tourism activities?
- d) Were you satisfied with the trip? What were the aspects you liked/disliked the most about the trip?
- e) How much money did you spend for on trip, such as transportation, accommodation, food, gift, etc?
- f) How much did you spend before trip (In USA)? How much did you spend during trip (In China)?
- g) Did any external factors influence you choice of the trip? For example: Promotion? Marketing? Information technology?

5. What kind of trip do you like to take for vacation? Domestic or international?

6. What kind of destination or travel product you like to choose for your vacation?

- a) Will you choose China as a vacation destination if you have no special relationships there?
- b) Do you like to join a tourist group when traveling back to China?

7. When do you plan to take your next trip to China? What do you expect to do during your next trip?

8. What suggestions do you have for the tourism development in China with a particular

reference to VFR travel?

9. What does VFR mean to you? Please describe.

10. How does taking a VFR trip impact your life in the USA?

11. Any other thoughts or comments?

APPENDIX E

CHINESE INTERVIEW GUIDE

访谈提纲

1. 请简单介绍一下您个人和家庭的情况。
  - a) 您是什么时候开始长期居住美国的?
  - b) 您移居美国的最初目的是什么?
  - c) 请问您目前在美国的身份?
  - d) 您和中国目前有何种联系? 有亲戚或朋友在中国定居吗?
  - e) 请问您在中国和美国的教育水平? 工作经历?
  - f) 介绍一下您的家庭成员
2. 请从您个人的视角描述一下回中国探亲访友旅行的总体感受。
  - a) 请问您多长时间回中国探亲访友一次? 有固定时间段吗? (寒假, 暑假, 圣诞, 等等)
  - b) 由谁做探亲旅游决定?
  - c) 提前多久作计划? (例如订机票, 饭店, 旅游安排等), 为安排行程需要哪些信息, 如何获得这些信息?
  - d) 每次停留多长时间? 停留几个城市(地方)?
  - e) 会从事旅游活动吗? 什么样的旅游活动? 当地的旅游宣传会影响您的活动安排吗?

- f) 您为何会中国？请描述哪些因素会促使您回中国？
  - g) 哪些因素阻止您回中国？
  - h) 孩子或家人是影响您探亲访友旅行安排的因素吗？会在哪些方面有影响？
  - i) 您对过去的探亲旅游的总体印象是什么？
3. 请描述您抵达美国以后第一次回中国探亲访友的经历。
- a) 您何时第一次回中国？
  - b) 当时的动机是什么？
  - c) 请描述您在中国的经历。
  - d) 请描述您在当时以及旅行结束后的感想。
4. 请描述您最近一次回中国探亲访友的经历。
- a) 此次旅行的目的是什么？和以前的旅行有不同吗？
  - b) 此次旅行的食宿是如何安排的？
  - c) 此次旅行访问了何处？参加旅游活动了吗？
  - d) 您对此次旅行满意吗？哪些方面最满意/最不满意？
  - e) 您为此次旅行花费多少？交通，住宿，饮食，礼物，等？
  - f) 您为此次旅行在美国花费多少？ 在中国花费多少？
  - g) 有外界因素影响您此次的旅行安排吗？比如说旅游宣传， 活动， 信息等？
5. 您假期喜欢安排什么样的旅游活动？国内还是国际旅行？您喜欢什么样的旅游目的地或旅游产品？

7. 如果和中国没有特殊的联系，您会选择到中国旅游吗？
  - a) 回中国时您会选择团体旅游吗？
8. 您打算什么时候下一次回中国？您对下一次的旅行有何期望？
9. 您对中国的旅游发展，特别是探亲访友旅行有何建议？
10. 请描述探亲访友旅行对您的意义。探亲访友旅行对您在美国的生活有何影响？
11. 其他建议或评论？