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**Chinese Diaspora in Philanthropic Hybridization: Flexible Identities,
Multiple Loyalties, Motivations of Heart and Head**

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The Chinese Diaspora: Fanning Out from China

The two Opium Wars of 1839 and 1856 in China brought about internal rebellions, conflicts, lawlessness, and the lack of land, crop, and population management. They in turn brought on floods, famines, unsustainable agriculture, and pauperization of the masses. These eroded local governments and municipalities while rampant corruption, deceit and imperial “politics” strangled the young Emperor Puyi inside the Forbidden City. All these weakened and eventually brought an end to over 5,000 years Chinese Dynastic rule in 1912.¹ These were the “push factors” that forced tens of millions of Chinese to migrate into the Nanyang (what is now Southeast Asia). At the same time, there were strong pull factors from British, Dutch, French, Portuguese, Americans colonialists in Southeast Asia. The Industrialization Revolution was at its height in the capitalist countries of Europe, and the desire for a wide variety of raw materials, cheap labor, and shipping networks were acquired with haste through colonization.²

According to historical records, Chinese traders and imperial voyages sailed down to the Nanyang in small numbers sporadically as early as the 13th century. However, the largest exodus took place in the context of the immense turmoil, suffering, and turbulence of the mid-19th and early 20th centuries.³ Chinese diaspora migration fanned out into the Nanyang – from the mid-1800s until October 1949 when Mao Zedong and the CCP became victorious and united China as the People’s Republic of China. Today, over 24 million diasporic Chinese and ethnic Chinese are spread across Southeast Asia in Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Myanmar and Laos, Indonesia, and Timor-Lester.⁴ Albeit, millions of Chinese migrants also made their way to America, Western Europe, Australia, and Africa. This paper and its data focuses on the philanthropic action in the Nanyang or Southeast Asia region.

Research Question, Significance, Methodology

When collecting data for my PhD dissertation study (completed in Aug 2019), peripheral data pointed towards transnationalism, global identities, and flexible multiple loyalties for ethnic Chinese descendants (G2, G3, G4) of the original diasporic Chinese (G1).

Therefore, my research questions are: For these ethnic Chinese descendants (G2, G3, G4) of the original diasporic Chinese (G1), how are they guided in their philanthropy? Who do they see as meaningful beneficiaries of their generosity? What social causes, charitable needs, or philanthropic aspirations will their giving impulse support?

Understanding how locally assimilated ethnic Chinese from diasporic Chinese families think about philanthropy is significant because of the current wealth transfer from G1 to their descendants. G2, G3, G4 who inherit and build on G1 wealth are coming of age to helm philanthropic decisions for Chinese diaspora families.

This paper uses data collected during my PhD dissertation as well as journal articles, conference papers, publications, and material artefacts as acceptable with the grounded theory method and anthropological thematic analysis.

¹ Purcell, *The Chinese in Southeast Asia*, 15.

² Young and Shih, “The Chinese Diaspora and Philanthropy.”

³ Suryadinata, *Understanding the Ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia*, 1–7.

⁴ Young and Shih, “The Chinese Diaspora and Philanthropy,” 5.

Philanthropy of G1 Diasporic Chinese – The Sojourner

The first generation (G1) diasporic Chinese came to Southeast Asia with the mentality of sojourners because their emigration was self-imposed and for survival, fueled by the astounding historical, social, and economic circumstances of the times.⁵ In the context of widespread illiteracy and abject poverty, G1 were mainly young men who were ambitious and willing to risk their lives to travel south to seek a new life in unfamiliar lands, learn a new language, blend in with local, work excruciatingly hard, and resourceful to “make it” for his homeland village. The standard “bon voyage” message was, “go forth to the Nanyang, survive at all cost, make money to send home to help the dire situation in China, and, if possible, build a big fortune and return home to your roots.”⁶ There was also a great expectation for them to be loyal to their root cultures and their families’ home villages. The migration out of China was perceived as a temporary measure to ride out the wave of acute desperation.⁷

They brought with them values, traditions, and a familial culture derived from Confucianism. Additionally, there were expectations of those left behind, for remittances to arrest tumultuously dire conditions in China, in addition to a mandate to return when the time came for them to retire. Once outside of China, G1 diasporic Chinese fought for survival, and despite the tremendous changes in the political, social, and economic landscape of Southeast Asia, they carried in their hearts the hope that **“one day I’ll be going home to motherland.”** This psyche weighed heavily on how they thought about charity, generosity, and philanthropy. Giving and generosity naturally follows back to motherland; it was focused on “giving back to China and loyalty to motherland.”⁸

Without doubt, this was the philanthropic values for G1 diasporic Chinese in Southeast Asia. For example, Tan Kah Kee’s philanthropic work in education earned him commendation as one of the earliest Chinese philanthropists in modern China, not only for his charitable donations but more significantly for his “access to education for all” philosophy.⁹ His giving was focused on China although he lived and operated his business from Singapore and the surrounding regions.

Tan Kah Kee gave to finance rural village schools in China and was a progressive activist in the context of his times and generation, e.g., he compensated fathers who allowed their daughters to go to school (daughters in feudal China were kept at home to farm, do the household chores, and raise younger siblings). Tan Kah Kee was most fondly remembered for founding the Jimei Schools and Xiamen University. His personal vision was based on the classic template of Confucian social action, i.e. that education in his home region would extend from his village to provinces and ultimately spread throughout the entire country to contribute to “an orderly China.” This was Tan Kah Kee’s strategy to create a path to social reform and national strength.¹⁰

Lee Kong Chian was imbued with his father-in-law’s (Tan Kah Kee) values of philanthropy. He diligently followed a mantra of “benefit from society and spending on society.”¹¹ His first major

⁵ Suryadinata, *Understanding the Ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia*, 1–7.

⁶ Harper, “Shaping Philanthropy for Chinese Diaspora in Singapore and Beyond,” 43.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Kuhn, *Chinese among Others: Emigration in Modern Times*, 272.

¹⁰ Yong, Gonzalo, and Mar, *Tan Kah-Kee: The Making of an Overseas Chinese Legend*, 49–50.

¹¹ Harper, “Shaping Philanthropy for Chinese Diaspora in Singapore and Beyond,” 48.

act of philanthropy was in 1922, early when in the employment at Tan Kah Kee's company in Singapore – where he donated to build a primary school in the Lee ancestral hall and temple in his hometown in China.¹² On March 29, 1952, shortly before his retirement, Lee Kong Chian decided to set up the Lee Foundation. Ahead of many of his peers, Lee made a long-term commitment to philanthropy in a structured and sustainable fashion – inspired by what philanthropists like Carnegie and Rockefeller was doing in America. His children, grandchildren continued the family's philanthropy through the Lee Foundation in Singapore, Malaysia, and China, fulfilling Lee Kong Chian's far-sighted philanthropic aspirations.

Orphaned at 10 and with the help of a relative, Lien Ying Chow arrived in Singapore to work for a ship chandler from the bottom up, founding Wah Hin & Co. By the late 1930s, Lien had become one of the most successful businessmen in Singapore.¹³ When Lien Ying Chow made the decision to establish the Lien Foundation, he explained, “Having lived in Singapore the whole of my adult life, I am a Singaporean. But there will always be a little part of me that will belong to China.” When China reforms under Deng Xiaoping opened after 1978, the elderly Lien Ying Chow was a first mover in extending substantial contributions to help the Chinese authorities to modernize the infrastructure from the ground up.¹⁴

No matter how rooted a G1 was as a National in Southeast Asia, there always remained an intrinsic biological and emotional attachment to their motherland China. For over thousands of years, Confucianism in China embraced filial piety and benevolence as its foundational virtues. These virtues cultivated the empathy to relieve suffering, generosity in charity, and a collective spirit to advance its ancestry, village, province, and country. They never forgot their Chinese roots and understood their own *self* to be a link in the long and perpetual chain of their ancestral lineage. Because of their clarity of identity, they were unwavering in moral duty, and in executing their philanthropic actions throughout their lifetime: wherever they settled in the Nanyang, they took it as their responsibility to transmit Confucian values to the next generations. In executing their personal vow to respectfully honor the family name and ancestry – philanthropy being one of the platforms to carry out this responsibility.¹⁵

Philanthropic Motivations of the “Heart” and “Head”

The identity-based motivation (IBM) model of Oyserman argues that identity is highly malleable, context sensitive, influences what actions people take, and helps make sense of the world.¹⁶ This in turn sheds light on whether and how much people give, and indirectly also why people give.¹⁷ In the case of diasporic Chinese, their filial piety to family and ancestry, traditions of mutual aid, charitable impulse, and longstanding heritage of benevolence motivate the “heart” when it comes to philanthropy. Social norms have also molded the identity and culture to influence what actions people take – in this case, it is philanthropy.¹⁸ Coming from a Confucian

¹² Huang, “Shifting Culture and Identity: Three Portraits of Singapore Entrepreneur Lee Kong Chian (1893-1967),” 81.

¹³ Lien, *From Chinese Villager to Singapore Tycoon: My Life Story*, 67–70.

¹⁴ Harper, “Shaping Philanthropy for Chinese Diaspora in Singapore and Beyond,” 46.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Oyserman and Destin, “Identity-Based Motivation.”

¹⁷ Aaker and Akutsu, “Why Do People Give?,” 268.

¹⁸ Aaker and Akutsu, 268.

family/ancestry-based society – where the interdependent-self looms in importance – social identities may be more powerful predictors of giving than personal identities.¹⁹

When China opened in 1978, Deng Xiaoping invited Lien Ying Chow back under the auspices of the “Friendship for Overseas Chinese Association.” As he got off the trains in Shenzhen, Huge placards with huge bold Chinese words greeted him with “热爱祖国” [Love the Motherland of your Birth]. Tears streamed down the cheeks of 72-year-old Lien Ying Chow. He cried, despite not having been back to China since he left when he was fourteen-years old – that is almost 6 decades ago. Those words played into the elderly Lien’s heart and all kinds of emotions that triggered the link to his ancestry and foundational identity. He responded with a tremendous commitment of philanthropic funding for building bridges, roads, buildings, and infrastructure to help the communist leadership to step into economic development and modernization of China. Lien was self-identifying in his commitment to China, a typical G1 identity that informs their worldview and values.²⁰

As we have now seen, Tan Kah Kee, Lee Kong Chian, and Lien Ying Chow gave from the “heart” based heavily on their identity-based commitment to China. This was the typical worldview and values as represented by G1 diasporic Chinese: dispersed from an original “center”; maintained longing, memory vision, or myth about their original homeland; believe they are not fully accepted by their host country; see the ancestral home as a place of eventual return; are committed to the maintenance or restoration of homeland; continued relationship with the homeland.²¹ Relationship giving based on *guanxi* also combines well with identity-based giving where there is no need for reports, and trust is based on I know the person who introduced or leads in philanthropic action.

The next generation (G2) – though born and raised outside of China – grew up in Chinese-centric households and attended clan-based Chinese education. They soon began to recognize that the success of their family businesses was dependent on resources, access to networks, and social norms from these local communities, outside of China. As their identity evolve, they felt it quite natural to be extending philanthropy to the local communities where their families have settled. Each day, as they witness and experience the identity base of their G1 parents, they also saw more migrants streaming in from China daily – hundreds were getting off the migrant boats and arriving in local communities (e.g. Singapore) for work. Charity for new arrivals now begin to be given outside of their own dialect/clan identities, since as locals they see it useful to help build up the labor and skilled resources where they operate. Soon, they support schools, hospitals, housing, and social welfare locally. We begin to see flexibility in identifying with local communities since their stakes as Nationals are now becoming evident: “We are settled as Singaporeans; the philanthropy follows how I identify myself, i.e., a Singaporean with Chinese heritage. Therefore, I give to Singapore.”²²

Similarly, the Fundraising Campaign to build Nanyang University in Singapore from 1953 through 1955 was the perfect storm based on identity based and “heart” model. We now see diasporic and ethnic Chinese extending philanthropy outside of family/clan ties for the benefit of

¹⁹ Markus and Kitayama, “Culture and the Self,” 227.

²⁰ Harper, “Shaping Philanthropy for Chinese Diaspora in Singapore and Beyond,” 60.

²¹ Safran, “Diasporas in Modern Societies,” 83–84.

²² Harper, “Shaping Philanthropy for Chinese Diaspora in Singapore and Beyond,” 53.

public good. The vision to build a first Chinese University outside of China to benefit not only diasporic Chinese descendants. Gifts from \$5 to \$5 million came from thousands of donors from all walks of life who participated in collective giving from the masses. 550 acres of land in Singapore was donated by the Hokkien Huay Kuan, and top Chinese merchants stepped forward to cross clan lines to join in philanthropic action.

To understand the philanthropy of diasporic families and their descendants, one has to ask what is a diaspora? Like a transnational network, it is connected by ties of ethnic bonds across boundaries across nations and countries. These ties show up as cultural traditions of food, festivities, philanthropic giving, political support, and entrepreneurship. They meet in temples, homes, restaurants, rented offices much like fraternities and sororities. It is not a specific place. The diaspora exist through material flows of goods, politics, culture, business, gestures of giving, public service, hosting of visiting fellow diasporic colleagues. They defend or protest, advocate, and raise money, medicines, blankets, books, toys, vehicles for diasporic colleagues. In doing so, they unknowingly engage in many aspects of volunteerism and philanthropy. As migrants send funds home, they are also influential with “social remittances” such as development ideologies or social agendas.²³ “Social Remittances” was coined by Levitt to highlight the intangible resources transmitted by migrants along with financial remittances and philanthropy.²⁴

Shedding the Sojourner Mindset

WWII opened the eyes of the sojourning diasporic Chinese, and they returned to post-WWII reconstruction and reintegration with a strong sense of nationalism. Their reverence for and trust of their colonial masters was never the same; they began to rely more on local community leaders rather than colonial masters: “As an immigrant, one’s sense of self/identity is challenged, searching for something familiar that you can call your own.”²⁵ At the same time, motherland China was suspended in a state of flux due to its closed-door policy and the Cultural Revolution from October 1949 until 1978. Sojourning outside of China with the vision of retiring to China became less and less viable as:

- Chinese men intermarried with the local women and their descendants (G2, G3, etc.) are now being born in the “New Lands” in Southeast Asia.
- Some gained economic success and became local tycoons commanding wealth, land, power while others thrived at various levels of prosperity.
- Many chose to become Nationals of the various Southeast Asian countries that were at the same time forming as new nations post-WWII and post-colonization.

Impulses of the “heart” are soon quickly checked by rational prudence of the “head.” Having to solve problems of the lands they have now just adopted, they quickly assimilate, advocate, and find resources for their own survival. Diaspora philanthropy begins to shift, guided by strategies to be more measurable, impactful, and optically correct since they are now settled as Nationals.²⁶ Hence, philanthropy of Chinese families evolved to become more scientific, professionalized, and strategic. Like mainstream philanthropy in the US, diaspora philanthropy of G2, G3, G4, increasingly shifted away from charity for the poor model to more targeted, policy-driven,

²³ Roohi, “Giving Back,” 34.

²⁴ Levitt, “Social Remittances,” 926–48.

²⁵ Harper, “Shaping Philanthropy for Chinese Diaspora in Singapore and Beyond,” 56.

²⁶ Johnson, *Diaspora Philanthropy*, 46.

strategically focused, based on data and professionalized forms of giving. Philanthropists began to cultivate their beneficence more from the “head.”

Debates about “heart” and “head” philanthropy have always existed – which is better or best? Veteran strategic philanthropists Bill and Melinda Gates deeply believe that one still needs to cultivate “heart” to feel the pain to kick start the impulse into philanthropic action. Melinda attests that experiencing the suffering in the “heart” helps one to sustain the hard work and dedication needed to navigate massive challenges on the ground to solve problems at root – using more of the “head” to troll the world to work out solutions really work.

In philanthropy, this determination to continue the work of the “head” is often kept afloat by the compassion and convictions in the “heart.” Truly, you need both “heart” and “head” in an iterative process to make giving complete and meaningful because they feed off one another. One gives purpose to the other, and one builds on the other in an iterative process to manifest as each culture’s “traditions of giving” over time.²⁷

Hybrid and Pragmatic Global Citizens in the Context of the Times

Identity is malleable, constantly in flux and never fixed²⁸ – especially explicit cultural identity.²⁹ Chinese diasporas are both ethnic-parochial and cosmopolitan at the same time.³⁰ While some settled into local communities and stayed put for generations, many moved from country to country – engaging in “long-distance nationalism” and politics of their homeland, with capacity to shift orientations in response to local predicaments or world historical events.³¹

Naturally, this leads to multiple loyalties over a lifetime. To assimilate and optically appear to be “local,” their philanthropy is often used as a platform to affirm their identity as Nationals.³² Without clarity of China’s position after 1949, many now see themselves living out their final days as Nationals in the newly formed countries in Southeast Asia. Thus, philanthropic giving serves a crucial identity fulfilment.

For the G1 generation, their identity is fulfilled when giving back to homeland. This is because they are physically and temporarily removed from the “home base,” often living in the “memory of what they left behind. However, as G2 – born and raised abroad – comes of age, their philanthropic decisions of G2 and subsequent generations will depend on how they juggle their multiple loyalties and flexible identities. Without the “motherland memory” to fall back on, future generations will likely reduce their giving to their parents’ country of origin.³³

From Diasporic to Transnationalism Mindset

In this new age of migration and re-migration, the politics of citizenship is transformed by increased ease of mobility across geographies, flexibility of identities, multiple loyalties, and bargaining power through skilled contributions as transnationals. At the same time, globalization,

²⁷ Harper, “Shaping Philanthropy for Chinese Diaspora in Singapore and Beyond,” 124.

²⁸ Hall, *The Silent Language*.

²⁹ Aaker and Akutsu, “Why Do People Give?,” 270.

³⁰ Werbner, “The Place Which Is Diaspora,” 191.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 120.

³² Hall, *The Silent Language*.

³³ Najam, “Diaspora Philanthropy to Asia,” 142–46.

new technologies, and the rise of global media and communications are redefining human connectivity, travel, social-political dynamics, and economic-trade interdependence.³⁴ Younger and more recent generations of ethnic Chinese are losing their diasporic DNA and instead acquiring transnationality DNA.

Coined by Aihwa Ong, “Flexible citizenship” starkly outlines how ethnic Chinese descendants are today more transnational than diasporic. A Chinese investor based in San Francisco claims, “I can live anywhere in the world, but it must be near an airport.”³⁵ His constant international travel is the network that facilitates the transfer of resources (including philanthropy), skills, ideas, and influence – an advantageous political power.³⁶ Increasingly, policy makers with huge diasporas outside their countries are engaging and managing “their” diasporas: a) to promote the states’ interest or as ambassadors to facilitate bilateral trading relationship, and potential sources of revenue and investment; b) domestically, diaspora groups are called upon to help advice and facilitate overseas investment, philanthropy, collaboration for international economic prosperity.³⁷

Global transnationals know very well they can transcend the limits of state boundaries and institutions because the emergent cyber way of life are in their favor. When ethnic Chinese of Australian citizenship were asked to describe their identity, they replied, “...it depends.”³⁸ They seem to have a variety of sophisticated strategies to negotiate their identity: within mainstream society in Australia, outside of Australia, in their homeland, over social media, even more flexible if they are re-immigrants or new/young migrants.³⁹

In retrospect, older generations of diaspora already recognized the advantages of being globally centric, e.g., the CP Group (Charoen Pokhpan) is Thailand’s largest transnational corporation, whose Chinese descendants were able to maintain and re-assert their Chinese identity through hybridization and cultural flexibility. As a Thai company, the CP Group was among the first companies to be granted corporate license to operate a business when China economic reforms of Deng Xiaoping opened in 1978; by 1994, CP Group has become one of the largest foreign investors in China.⁴⁰ Another example further south in Southeast Asia are the Peranakans or Straits-Chinese of West Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia. Fusing Chinese, local Malay/Indonesian, and colonial Western cultures, their way of life and outlook. Thriving in hybridization, cultural flexibility, and multiple loyalties, Peranakan families retain a good level of Chineseness, and yet are assimilated into local communities while gaining the trust of their colonial Western masters.

New digital and social media (the medium) are constantly reshaping traditional giving cultures into hybrid continuums, therefore transnational giving and motivations are continuously evolving and mutating. Today, for ethnic Chinese to maintain a sense of Chineseness through identifying with one’s “ancestry” no longer requires one to be physically attached to motherland China. Generations of flexible identities and multiple loyalties arising from hybridized hearts and

³⁴ Koh, “Towards a Theory of ‘Skilled Diasporic Citizenship,’” 6.

³⁵ Ong, “On the Edge of Empires,” 41, 771.

³⁶ Adamson, “The Growing Importance of Diaspora Politics,” 293.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 294.

³⁸ Lu, “Understanding the Chinese Diaspora,” 268–71, 274.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 274.

⁴⁰ Auethavornpipat, “Flexible Identity,” 42.

familial roots have molded ethnic Chinese to forge a shared sense of ethos through festivals and a way of life. These extend across space and time, so that the “whole world” is where they can exist as an ethnic Chinese engendered from a diasporic beginning.⁴¹

Although dispersed politically, ethnic Chinese are connected by ties of solidarity of ancestry. Their ancestors have shown agility in shifting orientations and switching agendas in response to local predicaments or world historical events. Riding on the explosion of information – and a technology-driven world order, one can be loyal to transnational networks and at the same time flexibly identify locally for citizenship rights. This hybridity is contextual or versatile in different social settings. In the age of cyberspace, a diaspora can, to some degree, be held together or re-created through the mind, through cultural artefacts or festivals, and through a shared imagination.⁴² The current powerhouse of media landscape makes possible various social media platforms for new-age diasporic and ethnic Chinese to express their identity on different platforms, making ethnic Chinese identities of diasporic and transnationality even more complex.⁴³

What does this mean for their philanthropy?

Philanthropy in the Context of Hybridization, Flexible Identities & Multiple Loyalties

As personal and work experiences become hybridized with multiple loyalties, it should be no surprise that future generations of ethnic Chinese will have much weaker links with mainland China. As they become westernized or secular in lifestyle, education, and religion, there will come the time when they cease to “give back” to their parents’ or grandparents’ homeland. Their choices in philanthropy follows the contextual mutation of their own Chineseness and evolution of flexible identities and multiple loyalties through religion, lifestyles, ethics, worldviews, and localized social norms. The following examples of data collected confirms:⁴⁴

Tan Sri Tan Chin Tuan was very westernized in the way he divested his wealth and inheritance. Practicing Chinese culture through his Peranakan lifestyle and his wife’s Christian lifestyle, with an outlook that went beyond that of being Chinese with Confucianism and ancestral worship. Tan Chin Tuan’s philanthropy echoed a very Anglo-Saxon way of being charitable: helping the poor, the needy, and widows — more aligned with Christianity than with ancestral worship.

Today, Tan Chin Tuan’s G3 ethnic Chinese grandson identifies with Chinese ethnicity but with strong Peranakan roots and lifestyle. He sees the necessity to converge top-down and bottom-up philanthropy believing that it is very much about using both the head (strategic) and the heart (compassion): “Both have to come together in a very holistic and very top-down & bottoms-up approach where they converge and meet at some point. Additionally, he also identifies with values from Methodist missionary and Christian spirit. Now living and raising his own family in Singapore, his own core Asian values are reinforced. He attributes Christian values as weighing just as heavily in his being generous or philanthropic. That is, religion and its values had a greater impact on him, rather than ancestral worship or Confucianism.

⁴¹ Werbner, “The Place Which Is Diaspora,” 119–31.

⁴² Georgiou, “Identity, Space and the Media,” 21.

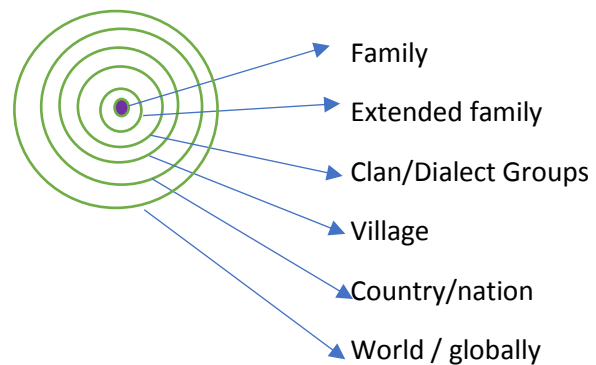
⁴³ Lu, “Understanding the Chinese Diaspora,” 263–72.

⁴⁴ Harper, “Shaping Philanthropy for Chinese Diaspora in Singapore and Beyond,” 64–156.

Born and raised in Singapore, Daniel Chew is ethnically Chinese, but his job and professional work takes him and his family around the world. He has become flexible with several identities — identifying first as Christian, second as Singaporean, and lastly as Chinese. On the peripheral, Daniel also sees himself as Asian and a world citizen since his work requires him to live and work in different countries. During his childhood and teenage years, his family was in great financial adversities; his university and church were generous in extending scholarships, guidance, financial help, and opportunities that lifted and transformed his life. Today, he gives based on his gratitude to these 2 Singapore institutions: his church and his university alma mater.

Is an “Asian” Brand of Philanthropy Emerging?

Laurence Lien, Co-Founder of Asian Philanthropy Circle (APC) and grandson of G1 Lien Ying Chow, underscored the “communal spirit” as the core of Asian philanthropy, i.e., giving to people who were like you – as expressed in the diagram below:⁴⁵



One of the key traits of “Asian” philanthropy is: the familial and ancestral memory of G1 diasporic ancestors, i.e. keeping the honor of the founder is a priority in view of ancestry vs. legacy of the individual as in the West. Data from interviewees below show the “Asian” perspective of philanthropy.⁴⁶

- Raising children in Asian cultures is family-centric; this carries over to their philanthropy, i.e., giving to family, clan, community first, then slowly moving towards the public. It seems very natural to start philanthropy from family (that is why we have the saying, *Charity starts at Home*), to your clan, and then moving out to your own community and public good for the country.
- In the West, raising children is not family-centric because I hear that parents kick their children out of the home when they turn 18, and ask them to pay rent if they keep staying at home — this is the opposite of Asian values. Perhaps therefore this carries over to their tendency of giving outside of family, i.e., for public good.
- Westerners tend to give outside of their family immediately. The public good seems to overrule considerations of giving to the family, the clan, community, state, country first. We

⁴⁵ Harper, 112.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 136–49.

start by creating a giving culture at home, as this is critical for sustaining philanthropy into future generations. That is a fundamental difference.

- Asian philanthropy is more holistic – solving the many layers surrounding the problem, rather than treat the pimple you see. There seems to be more alignment between Asian and European philanthropy as it is community-based in the way we solve problems, whereas Americans invest in the problem.
- There is less concern over the passing down of the practice of philanthropy which is talked about a lot in Western philanthropy. This is because we tend to have this built into family/ancestry structure and the family DNA and value system.
- Asians keep a low profile when giving because they do not want to attract the attention of their governments (G1 wealth may not be totally clean), and for their own personal security.
- Asians shy away from being confrontational and that ethos carries over to philanthropy, in that the request for a donation is done more subtly and less direct. The Asian ask is more along the lines of a suggestion to “do good,” while at the same time, honoring their family and pay respect to their ancestry and elders.
- I feel that philanthropy in the West sometimes comes across as hegemonic behavior, with an attitude of, “you need cultural adjustment, value adjustment, and a better/more efficient way to achieve such and such a level, so do it this way.” Naturally, smaller countries do not come out to say, “we have a better way of doing things.”
- There is also the matter of humility that stems from Confucian virtues that assumes that one is never “full or all knowing” vs. Western values of self-esteem and self-confidence in learning.
- *Family* is not Chinese — it is Asian. Muslims, Malays are very family centric, e.g., in the hospital. When one member of the Malay family is ill, ten people are sitting in the corridor — they are all ready, willing, and happy to sit in the corridor for the whole time to take turns. This shows the family connectivity. In reversal, when Westerners turn 18 years old it is the milestone for children to leave home and not be part of the family so much anymore.

The enduring legacy of Chinese diasporic philanthropic action and generosity would certainly play a part to shape “Asian” philanthropy. However, only time and future research will tell us what other cultures and traditions of philanthropy will also bring to bear the full portrait of “Asian Philanthropy.”

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