



Chineseness across Borders: Renegotiating Chinese Identities in China and the United States

Andrea Louie

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What happens when Chinese American youths travel to mainland China in search of their ancestral roots, only to realize that in many ways they still feel out of place, or when mainland Chinese realize that the lives of the Chinese abroad may not be as good as they had imagined? By considering programs designed to facilitate interactions between overseas Chinese and their ancestral homelands, Andrea Louie highlights how these programs not only create opportunities for new connections but also reveal the disjunctures that now separate Chinese Americans from China and mainland Chinese from the Chinese abroad.

Louie focuses on “In Search of Roots,” a program that takes young Chinese American adults of Cantonese descent to visit their ancestral villages in China’s Guangdong province. Through ethnographic interviews and observation, Louie examines the experiences of Chinese Americans both during village visits in China and following their participation in the program, which she herself took part in as an intern and researcher. She presents a vivid portrait of two populations who, though connected through family ties generations back, are meeting for the first time in the context of a rapidly changing contemporary China. Louie situates the participants’ and hosts’ shifting understandings of China and Chineseness within the context of transnational flows of people, media, goods, and money; China’s political and economic policies; and the racial and cultural politics of the United States.

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