The Malaysian Chinese Diaspora in Melbourne: Citizenship and Belongingness

Low, C. C.

History Section, School of Distance Education, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800 Minden, Penang, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to examine the relationship between citizenship and belongingness among the Malaysian Chinese diaspora in Melbourne. It draws on migration and transnationalism theory in understanding the relationship between citizenship and the notion of home. The analysis shows that the Chinese diaspora still regards Malaysia as their "home" and equates "home" with "family." In order to preserve the sense of belongingness to their home, the Chinese diaspora adopts the strategy of maintaining Malaysian citizenship while preserving Australian permanent residency status. Transnational mobility has shaped their understandings in which they appreciate their Malaysian passport as a travelling document to their place of origin, while bringing their family to Australia for vacations. The idea of travelling back to their home country with a tourist visa seemed to be unacceptable to the Malaysian diaspora. This article suggests that the diaspora desires flexibility in their citizenship choices and inclines to maintain the status quo when it comes to the question of belongingness.

Keywords: Citizenship, belongingness, transnationalism, Chinese diaspora, Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

The ever increasing global migration of Malaysians has raised important questions about their citizenship and belongingness. As reported by the World Bank, there are between 0.8 million and 1.4 million Malaysian diaspora members living across the globe in 2010 (2011, p. 103). Singapore has the largest community of Malaysians overseas, followed by Australia, Brunei, the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, India, Hong Kong, New Zealand, and China (World Bank, 2011, p. 140) (Refer to Table 1). Australia has recorded a 2.0 thousand permanent Malaysian population (2000),

2.5 (2001), 2.6 (2002), 3.9 (2003), 5.1 (2004), 4.7 (2005), 4.8 (2006), 5.1 (2008), 5.4 (2009), and 4.9 (2010), accordingly (OECD, 2012, p. 293). With a high number of Malaysians abroad, it is useful to examine the impact of the state's single nationality policy. While several prominent studies on the topic have been done on Malaysian immigration – Devadason and Chan (2014), Hedman (2008), Jones (2000), Kassim (2014), Nah (2012), and Ramasamy (2006) – less research focuses on emigration, settlement, and citizenship involving the Malaysian diaspora. Given the limited scholarship on the Malaysian diaspora – with the notable exception of the work by Joseph (2013), Koh (2010), Koh (2014), Lam, Yeoh and Law (2002), Lam and Yeoh (2004), and Robertson (2008) – our knowledge of their identity and belonging is quite limited. The aim of this paper is to contextualise what citizenship and belongingness mean for Malaysians abroad.

In the Malaysian context, the Malaysian emigrants are: 1) comprised of highly educated and skilled migrants, and 2) made up of students-turned-migrants (Hugo, 2011, p. 227). A report by World Bank indicated that a mixture of the sending country and receiving countries' polices influenced the migration decisions of the Malaysian diaspora. Among the motivations to emigrate among the skilled diaspora include the prospect of higher wages, the opportunity of high-productivity employment opportunities in the professional field, the perceptions of social injustice particularly among the younger population, the quality of life,

the access to high-quality education, and finally, the existence of a well-established diaspora network (2011, p. 120). The World Bank in its economic report on the brain drain in Malaysia (2011, p. 121) pointed out that "economic incentives and social disincentives" played the most crucial role in determining the migration choice.

International migration "raises more complex questions about political membership" (Baubӧck, 2010, p. 297). Due to the "mismatch" between the frontiers of national territories and citizenship, cross-border movement between states has produced citizens abroad (and also foreign citizens in the state) (2010, p. 297). Barabantseva and Sutherland are right to point out that "Many of the debates surrounding diaspora and their politics also turn on the issue of loyalty…loyalty is seen as one of the duties of citizenship in return for state rights, security, and protection" (2013, pp. 2-3). If the sending state does not allow dual citizenship, citizens abroad have to choose a political membership. Being a diaspora "complicates the terms and practices of belonging" (Laguerre, cited in Esman, 2009, p. 6).

In this article, the term diaspora is used to refer to "national groups living outside an (imagined) homeland", while transnationalism refers to "migrants' durable ties across countries" (Faist, 2010, p. 9). Diasporas are made of migrants, who maintain a strong attachment to the homeland (Cohen, 2013, p. 11). Members of a diaspora share a common bond to their place of origin. In the words of Cohen, "they

retain a collective memory, vision or myth about their original homeland including its location, history and achievements" (2013, p. 6). Diasporas broadly include more settled expatriate communities, migrant workers temporarily based abroad, expatriates with the citizenship of the host country, dual citizens, and second and third generation migrants (International Organization for Migration, 2013, p. 210). Esman (2009) rightly points out that any undertaking of the studies of the diaspora need to take into consideration the relationship between their country of origin, their host country and the diaspora community. In explaining the links between migrants and the state, Esman reminded us that the different categories of diaspora have to be differentiated as "not all diaspora maintain a sympathetic attachment to their former homeland" (2009, p. 8).

In Australia, there are a considerable number of Malaysians holding Malaysian passports with Australian permanent residency (Robertson, 2008, p. 99). Not all individuals choose to give up their Malaysian citizenship and to become Australian citizens. How does the state's single nationality principle affect the choice of their citizenship? Could it possibly be explained by the strong attachment and bond, which the Malaysians have developed in relation to their home country? How do Malaysians abroad perceive their sense of belongingness? The starting point of this research is the hypothesis that there are some common experiences shared among Malaysians abroad. An interesting question to ask is how their experience

transformed them and led them to redefine what they considered "home." This study is based on the Australian case (Melbourne) because Australia houses the second largest Malaysian community abroad.

The study offers insight into a number of important questions. Firstly, how does the 'Malaysian diaspora' makes their choice of citizenship and identity following the official single nationality principle? Secondly, how they negotiate their identity and belonging within two cultures? Thirdly, what is the perception of the Malaysian diaspora towards their national identity and belongings? Fourthly, what are the common experiences of Malaysians abroad in their search of a place called 'home'? This research suggests that the politics of belonging of the Malaysian diaspora – who are affiliated with two countries – is not decisive and may change in the future.

TABLE 1
The Malaysian Diaspora (2000 and 2010 estimates)

	Diaspora (0+)	
	2000	2010
Singapore	303,828	385,979
Australia	78,858	101,522
Brunei	60,401	76,567
United Kingdom	49,886	65,498
United States	51,510	61,160
Canada	20,420	24,063
India	14,685	18,179
Hong Kong	15,579	16,123
New Zealand	11,460	15,995
China	7,278	9,226
Taiwan	6,635	8,411
Japan	5,849	6,170
Viet Nam	4,813	6,101

TABLE 1 (*continue*)

	Diaspora (0+)	
	2000	2010
Philippines	3,991	5,059
Indonesia	3,146	3,988
Germany	2,945	3,733
Netherlands	2,739	3,471
France	1,718	2,563
Ireland	2,398	2,277
Pakistan	1,618	2,051
Egypt	1,944	1,430
Sweden	961	1,370
Thailand	1,290	1,261
Switzerland	916	1,161
Denmark	390	672
Spain	230	535
South Africa	393	487
Norway	304	468
Korea	353	447
Austria	332	424
Finland	224	362
Turkey	266	337
Italy	214	295

Source: World Bank. (2012). *Malaysia Economic Malaysia: Brain Drain*, 140

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Malaysian diaspora has been a subject of growing importance with most of the literature focusing on two countries: Singapore and Australia. The study of the Malaysian Chinese diaspora in Singapore by Lam and Yeoh (2004) found that Malaysians abroad maintain a strong transnational family as well as social ties. This phenomenon explains why the majority of Malaysian emigrants choose to retain their Malaysian citizenship. With the possession of a Malaysian passport, they venture overseas to acquire economic, educational and social capital, while regularly returning home to Malaysia. Based on conducted surveys and interviews, Lam and Yeoh concluded that the majority of Chinese-Malaysians were attached to the notion that "home is where the family is" and they look to Malaysia as "home" (2004, p. 150). For those who do not immediately relate "home" with family, they relate "home" with "their birthplace and where they had spent their childhood" (2004, p. 152). Their status of Malaysian citizens and Singapore permanent residents enable them to enjoy the best of both worlds. It is a strategy to survive in the transnational world while maintaining their much cherished childhood and familial experiences.

Examining the journey of international students-turned-migrants in Australia, Robertson (2008) also concluded that emotional attachment to the country of origin is common among her student respondents (especially Malaysians). Her Malaysian respondents are proud to be Malaysians. Maintaining their Malaysian citizenship is seen as an identification of their Malaysian-ness. In analysing how individuals negotiate their decisions about their citizenship status, she proposed that the main motivations behind their choices about permanent residence or citizenship include a personal sense of belonging, security, political rights and mobility. This sense of belonging challenges liberal-individualist theories of citizenship, which determine the choice of citizenship being based on the social, legal, or the economic benefits of citizenship (van Gunsteren,

1998). This does not mean that Malaysians abroad do not make a choice based on pragmatic reasons. Indeed, Malaysians prefer keeping their Malaysian passport because it provides greater global mobility. Malaysian passports enable its holders to travel to 166 countries without a visa. Based on the 2014 Visa Restrictions Index Global Ranking, Malaysian passports were ranked the eighth best in the world for travellers (*Malay Mail Online*, 26 September 2014).

Ziguras and Law (2006) examined the recruitment of international students as skilled migrants in Australia. Among the large pool of Asian students, Malaysian students top the list since the 1950s. The student movement contributes significantly to the steady enlargement of the Malaysian population in Australia. According to the study by Ziguras and Law, the number of Malaysian students studying in Australian universities has increased steadily since the 1950s and "a large proportion of the Malaysian students who are graduating from their studies are obtaining permanent residence" (2006, pp. 65-66). One of the reasons is the successful Australian migration policy in attracting skilled workers by offering permanent residence to international students upon completion of their studies. Graduates of Australian universities are awarded extra points in the point-based system of Australian skilled migration (2006, pp. 61-62). On the other hand, the Malaysian efforts to lure its diaspora back home have not been successful. There are more Malaysian scientists and IT professionals who migrated

to Singapore compared to those actually returning home permanently. They tend to venture into other developed countries when opportunities are not promising in Australia (2006, p. 70). Ziguras and Law suggested that "the Malaysian diaspora is perhaps better understood as a subset of the Chinese, Malay and Indian diaspora" (2006, p. 70).

The hypothesis that the Malaysian diaspora is culturally attached to their home country is supported by a study by Koh (2010). Her fieldwork conducted in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur shows the significance of "family" in the Malaysian consciousness. The familial tie is then incorporated into their citizenship and migration decisions. This is evident when some Malaysians abroad make their citizenship choice based on their family consideration and some even make citizenship decisions as a family unit. More often than not, the choice is not an individual choice. In her more recent study, Koh concluded that the concepts of insecurity and primordial belonging to Malaysia have informed the citizenship practices among Malaysian-Chinese transnational migrants in the UK and Singapore. By primordial belonging, she referred to "one's childhood memories, personal and familial social networks, and/or imagined ethnonational community" (2014, p. 14). Migrants sought to retain their Malaysian citizenship - after the acquisition of other citizenship and PR statuses - as a "security measure" within the context of the differentiated citizenship regime (2014, p. 11).

This paper aims to further contextualise the relationship between citizenship and belongingness by focusing solely on the case of Melbourne. My research is grounded on two perspectives: national and transnational. By the "national" framework, I am referring to the hierarchical citizenship regime. In contrast with the citizenship model of liberal democracies, the constitution of 1957 provides differentiated citizenship rights for the sons of the soil and non-Bumiputera (Verma, 2002, pp. 54-55). As Verma suggests, Malaysia follows a "different path of nation-building" and adopts "new principles of citizenship" in its constitution (2002, p. 58). Koh (2014) coined the term "Bumiputera differentiated citizenship" as refering to the historical legacy of the hierarchical citizenship regime.

The national factor alone, however, could not sufficiently explain the migration and citizenship choices of the emigrants. I suggest that their choice of citizenship cannot be grasped by looking at the domestic factors alone, but must be studied within the broader framework of transnational politics. The immigration and citizenship policies of the receiving countries play an equally important role in influencing the citizenship choice of the Malaysian diaspora. I proposed to employ Bauböck's theory of transnationalism to demonstrate the dynamism of transnational ties in explaining the citizenship choice of Malaysian diaspora. As a result of the expansion of international communications, globalisation and the development of the global economy, many migrants maintain economic or political ties with their home countries. Transnational citizenship is coined by Bauböck to refer to political membership in a nation-state with the citizens having social ties across state borders (2004, p. 197). Transnational citizenship allows migrants to "forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement" (Basch, Schiller, & Blanc-Szanton, 1994, p. 6). As cross border movement takes place, multiple ties between the state and the individual could not be adequately explained by the national perspective.

In this paper, I wish to suggest that citizenship trasnationalism practiced by the diaspora creates a fundamental imperative in redefining the state's migration regime. Under the existing citizenship regime, undivided allegiance is demanded and dual citizenship is not allowed. Given the exclusive citizenship regime, diasporas turn to a more flexible practice of citizenship: transnational citizenship. This practice resonates with the Malaysian state's effort in tapping diasporic talent and serves as an added impetus to the state's project on return migration. The growing importance of diasporas to the state's development programme may serve as an important element in the reorientation of the state's attitude toward emigration. Emigration is no longer viewed as an act of disloyalty. The state is now initiating diaspora engagement policies through various initiatives, which will be discussed later.[1]

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research is based on a survey conducted among eight Malaysian diaspora in the city of Melbourne, Australia. The survey was carried out through an online questionnaire between June and October 2013. The diaspora members in the respondent pool are engaged in professional occupations such as engineering, medicine, auditing, marketing and programme coordinating. All of the eight respondents have stayed in Australia for three years and above. Seven out of the eight respondents are Malaysian citizens holding Australian PR status. The respondent pool also showed that all, except for one respondent, have stayed for four years and above, and are thus qualified to apply for Australian citizenship, yet none of them has given up their Malaysia citizenship – Malaysia practices single nationality. Among those surveyed, four of them are student-turned-migrants, while four other respondents migrated to Melbourne as skilled migrants (Refer to Table 2). The author acknowledges that the small sample size precludes the formulation of hypothesis for testing. There are limitations on online surveys, which do not allow probing and free open discussion. The research findings presented here aim to serve as a preliminary study based on a selected case study, rather than to offer a firm conclusion.

This article is an attempt to understand the common characteristics shared by the respondents in terms of their sense of belonging. Both open-ended and close-ended questions are utilised to elicit information about their sense of belongingness and citizenship. The questionnaire was formatted into three sections. Section A contains respondents' information. Section B (the path to Australian PR or citizenship) aims to examine how the Malaysian diaspora makes their choice of citizenship following the official single nationality principle. Section C (a place called home) evaluates the common experiences of Malaysians abroad in their search for "home." (Refer to Table 3). Based on the survey, two themes emerged: the path to Australian PR (and citizenship) and defining a place called home.

RESULTS ANS DISCUSSION

The Choice of Citizenship

Changing one's PR status is often considered a very difficult decision. An important question to ask is when they start to think about the possibility of applying Australian PR. The results of the analysis showed that all the four respondents who are student-turned-migrants had not thought of Australian PR prior to their emigration (often being viewed as a temporary move) to Melbourne. It was only when they had eventually settled down that they started to consider the question. The questionnaire managed to elicit responses such as "when I have graduated," "when I need to get a job," or "during my study in Australia" prompting their future decision. For the four skilled migrants, their decision-making process took place much earlier; as one Malaysian (34 years old) commented, "After working

TABLE 2
Research Participants

Occupation	Age	Duration of stay in Australia	Current national status	Pathway to Australian residency	Family status	Ethnicity	Gender
Program Coordinator	34	3 years	A Malaysian citizen holding an Australian PR	Skilled migrants	Single	Chinese	Female
Geotechnical engineer	27	9 years	A Malaysian citizen holding an Australian PR	Student-turned-migrants	Married	Chinese	Male
Auditor	30	7 years	Returned to Malaysia with an Australian PR	Skilled migrants	Single	Chinese	Male
Engineer	27	8 years	A Malaysian citizen holding an Australian PR	Student-turned-migrants	Single	Chinese	Male
Marketing	28	5 years	A Malaysian citizen	Student-turned-migrants	Single	Chinese	Female
Engineer	25	5 years	A Malaysian citizen holding an Australian PR	Skilled migrants	Single	Malaysian	Female
Engineer	35	8 years	A Malaysian citizen holding an Australian PR	Skilled migrants	Single	Chinese	Male
Doctor	29	10 years	A Malaysian citizen holding an Australian PR	Student-turned-migrants	Married	Chinese	Female

in Malaysia for 3 years, I have thought of moving out from Malaysia to experience a different working culture."

The path to securing an Australian PR is not an easy one at all. The respondents stated cultural differences and employability as the main challenges. For one of them, who had returned to Malaysia with an Australian PR (30 years old), "securing a decent job in Australia seems more challenging than securing an Australian PR." Another Malaysian, who has yet to obtain PR status, lamented that PR is "limited to those with desired skills in Australia." For one respondent, who managed to obtain PR, the process is "getting tougher to apply as

TABLE 3
Questionnaire Items

Items
1. When did you start thinking about the possibilities of applying Australian PR?
2. What are the challenges in securing an Australian PR?
3. What are the factors affecting your choice of PR?
4. What do you hope to obtain most from your new PR status?
5. What are your aspirations as a Malaysian Diaspora member in Australia?
6. In your humble opinion, what are the opportunities and constrains offered by a Malaysian passport?
7. For those who are Australian PR (and do not intend to apply Australian citizenship), could you share with us why you are not considering Australian citizenship?
8. As a Malaysian diaspora member, what are the dilemmas faced when making the choice of citizenship? For example: benefits of Australian citizenship versus a sense of attachment to the country of birth.
9. How do you define a place called "home"? Which country that you see as your home?
10. In your opinion, what does citizenship mean to you?
11. How do you describe your sense of belonging in Australia?
12. As a Malaysian diaspora member, what would you like to share with the newcomers, who have are still considering which citizenship to be taken?
13. How do you/your family maximise your own interests in both countries without the benefits of dual citizenship?
14. As the Malaysian government is luring back its overseas nationals, is there any possibility that you will return to the country as an expatriate?

Australia is one of the better places to live." Similarly, a respondent who recently got her PR, described the process as follows:

Back then, obtaining Australia PR for me right after university (2010) without working experience was not easy due to the immigration policy changes for Skilled Migration. My qualification does not fall directly in the Skilled Occupation List (SOL). I had to submit a complicated engineering assessment to be assessed as one that is under the SOL. That required writing career episodes of 2000 words with supportive documentations. And yet that does not guarantee you'll get it. But I did.

Nonetheless, only one respondent stated "money" as the main challenge. For the others, cultural barriers (or gaps) present the most important challenge as "most Malaysians working and living in Australia will have to cope well with local culture and environment." Half of the respondents agreed that one of the key motivations behind PR choices is the desire for mobility and flexibility. For them, better education and scholarship opportunities for their children are decisive. They hope to secure the future of their children from their new citizenship status (though the respondents are not married yet). There are also two respondents indicating the right to stay permanently and the right to vote as the important criteria behind citizenship choices. In terms of their

aspiration as a Malaysian diaspora member in Australia, they are longing for "a peaceful living in Australia", "life stability", "better environment", "work life balance", "further training", "better working opportunity and fairer treatment" and other reasons that are "political." It is evident that the Malaysian political regime does not constitute the sole reason to migrate. Rather, the emigrants tend to look for a "work life balance."

Mixed reactions were obtained when the respondents were asked about the opportunities and constraints offered by a Malaysian passport. More than half of the responses (five of the respondents) received are negative, citing restriction to travel to certain countries as the reason. Travelling overseas, according to one of them, requires foreign visas, which can be costly and time consuming. They saw minimum opportunities and more constraints, particularly in getting a visa to travel abroad. There are "more complications" in getting a visa (for example to the US) compared to Australian passports. The negative perception mostly stemmed from the belief that Malaysia is "wrongly perceived as an Islamic country that is associated with terrorism" resulting in unnecessary questioning at foreign customs. Another assumption made by the outside world is the perception of Malaysia as a "third world and poor country." However, not all the respondents agreed with the above-mentioned responses. Some appreciate their Malaysian passport as one firmly attested, "There is no [constraint] as I see. The Malaysian passport gives me flexibility

to be employed to the world." For some, the questions of cost and benefits (of their Malaysian passport) are not important as long as Malaysian passports provide the indefinite right to return whenever they choose to do so.

Nevertheless, the research found that all the respondents were actually not aiming to apply for full-fledged state membership in Australia. Though they were not planning to get Australian citizenship at that moment, they might consider it a future prospect. The following statement accurately recapitulates the mind of Malaysians abroad:

I currently have no plan to take Australian citizenship and will maintain my PR as long as I live and work here. Thus I also have the convenience and flexibility of returning to Malaysia if I decide to do so in future. However if it means better stability and security for my future children I will strongly consider to apply for Australian citizenship.

In order to be eligible to gain an Australian (or any other) citizenship, immigrants have to go through three processes. According to Hammar (in Robertson, 2008), firstly they need to obtain a temporary residency through a student visa or a working visa. This is then followed by the process of applying permanent residency. After fulfilling the residency requirement, emigrants proceed to apply to naturalise as an Australian citizen.

However, not all individuals choose to complete the whole process. Some choose to remain as Australian permanent residents and maintain their original citizenship. Hammer defines this category of person as denizens, i.e. "persons who are foreign citizens with a legal and permanent resident status" (2008, p. 99). In Australia, there is a considerable number of Malaysian 'denizens' holding Malaysian passports with Australia permanent residency. Why do Malaysian denizens not apply for Australian citizenship?

The tough admission procedure, however, may not be the main consideration in the decision-making process. The rationale of them maintaining their Malaysian citizenship could be explained based on emotional and subjective grounds as well as pragmatic considerations. A sense of attachment to their birth country is related to having family and friends back in their hometown. In a particular case, a respondent's mobility is deeply influenced by his/her partner's choice to remain in the home country. Pragmatic considerations such as benefits associated with their Malaysian citizenship (the ability to inherit Malaysian properties and to return to Malaysia to live and work) are also important. This is also indicated in the study by Koh (2014, p. 15). This article suggests that it is relatively easy for the Malaysian diaspora in Australia to make the decision to retain Malaysian citizenship and remain Australian permanent residents.[2]

Surprisingly, all the surveyed participants (except two) were not considering Australian citizenship although they cited their sending country's (Malaysia) policies as the factors affecting their choice of citizenship [as well as migration]. The reasons given are "unwilling to give up Malaysian citizenship," "attachment to home," "planning to go back to Malaysia when the time is right," "haven't settled down yet," and "still have family assets back in Malaysia, so it's more convenient to keep my Malaysian citizenship to ensure the assets are secured." A 27-year-old engineer, who has been staying in Australia for 9 years, made the following remarks:

> *We still believe Malaysia is our home. We do not see the future in Australia because the education does not fit to the Malaysia moral beliefs. We also believe that our future generation is better for them to be in Malaysia because Malaysia will prepare them to be more competitive and also Malaysia is the center point between East and West, and hence they may have a brighter future…*

Home and Belongingness

The following section of the conducted survey aims to examine the relationship between the Malaysian diaspora members and their home country. Two central questions were asked. First, "how do you define a place called "home?" Second, "which country do you see as your home?" Surprisingly, all the respondents [single or married] shared a similar notion of

belongingness: where there is the family, there is a home. It seems that family ties are treasured by the respondents. Accordingly, their answers are outlined as follows:

1. "Home is where my family members live and my home country will be Malaysia."

2. "Home is a place where my culture belief fit into local communities. I still call Malaysia home."

3. "Currently I still see Malaysia as home. However this may change in future due to: settle down in Australia for children's education and social welfare has not improved in Malaysia."

4. "A home is where I find comfort and sense of belonging. It is where my blood families are and where I still find familiar languages, cuisine and cultural practices. For these reasons I still see Malaysia as my home."

5. "A place which I choose to stay permanently."

6. "Home is where my families are. In this case, they are all in Malaysia, so home is still Malaysia. For now, until I settle-down and start up my new family. That then, will be called home."

7. "Safe to stay and have future prospects for next generation."

8. [simply] "Malaysia."

The respondents were also asked about what citizenship meant to them. Six of the respondents chose "individual identity and cultural belonging" rather than "rights" or "obligations and moral responsibilities" or "a matter of convenience." The importance of citizenship as a shared identity is highly valued by the Malaysian diaspora in my study. Their conceptualization of citizenship is framed within the understanding of national belonging. A sense of identity with the Malaysian communities was chosen rather than a rational calculus of the costs and benefits derived from one's citizenship status. This finding corresponds with the previous research of Robertson who found that emotional attachment to the country of origin is common among her student respondents (2008, p. 103). The research of Koh also informs a similar conclusion, i.e. "their negotiations of citizenship, identity, home and belonging, shaped simultaneously by institutional and everyday life processes, subsequently inform their citizenship and migration decisions. In other words, these decisions are not purely based on cost-benefit balances as economic-based migration theories suggest" (2010, p. 3).

Though "a sense of national belonging represents one of the key sources of legitimacy and loyalty for states," we must be careful to delineate the differences between loyalty to the state and loyalty to the family (Barabantseva & Sutherland, 2013, p. 1). Vanessa Fong reminded us that "filial nationalism" or "family loyalty" plays a more decisive role in explaining the "subjective loyalty" of the Chinese diaspora. In research conducted among her Chinese students in the U.S, Chinese diaspora members treasure their home country's citizenship and are "loyal"

to their ancestral home. Loyalty in this context refers to family loyalty, rather than political loyalty (Fong, 2011, p. 52). There is a need to differentiate between loyalty to the state and loyalty to the family. In the Malaysian context, citizenship is perceived as loyalty and belongingness to Malaysia and "insecurity" towards the Malaysian government. These two factors combined to explain why citizenship is "primarily interpreted and practised culturally, and not politically" (Koh, 2014, p. 1).

There are three main definitions of citizenship based on three different citizenship theories. Liberalism sees citizenship as a matter of rights; republicanism views citizenship as practice; while communitarianism regards citizenship as identity (Schuck, 2002; Dagger, 2002; Delanty, 2002). The participants in my study do not perceive citizenship as a matter of right or a matter of practice, but tend to see citizenship as a matter of identity. They think of citizenship in relation to "home." From the author's personal observation of the Chinese diaspora in Melbourne [during her stay in the city for four years], the sense of "Malaysian-ness" is very strong in their post-migration experiences. In some ways, they are engaging within two different cultures, yet seeing themselves as "Malaysian first." Strategising their citizenship choice meant negotiating their sense of belongingness across their experience with their homelands and host lands. The findings suggest that there are common experiences of the respondents in their search of a place called "home."

This construction of home informs their choice of citizenship and their perception of national belonging. For them, "citizenship means much more than gaining a passport" (Barabantseva & Sutherland, 2013, p. 5).

They chose to identify themselves as "Malaysians." This situation is only normal taking into consideration of the next survey question: "How do you describe your sense of belonging in Australia?" Half of the participants have great intricacy in blending with the Australian cultures [amidst the multicultural notion of the state]. All the respondents wished to be able to identify with both cultural entities; they share the Malaysian way of life and at the same time, wish to assimilate into the Australian cultures. However, the respondents expressed difficulty in assimilating into Australia cultures when they were asked to describe their sense of belonging in Australia. Their responses ranged from "I do not feel that I belong here" (two respondents), "Being treated as a second class citizen" (two respondents), "I could blend in with the rest" (three respondents) and "I feel I am part of them" (one respondent). What happened is the presence of the sense of alienation when they are away from their self-defined construction of "home." Thus, the author suggests that Malaysians abroad are still attached to "Malaysian" made substances [tangible or intangible alike]. A research on Malaysian culture reported that identification with Malaysian culture is higher among Malaysians abroad compared to local Malaysians. Malaysians abroad look for "Malaysian" food and "share

a distinctive spoken English Language derogatively called 'Manglish,' which may sound horrible but is easily understood by all" (Ang *et al.*, 2015, p. 78).

Next, this article surveys the suggestions of the existing diaspora if they have any advice to share with the newcomers, who are still considering which citizenship to be taken. Their replies are outlined as follows:

1. "It's important to know what one wants in life in order to determine which country to choose to be a citizen."

2. "Don't forget what make you today. Australia may not be the way you have seen or heard from somebody else. Working in a big corporate like Rio Tinto, I strongly believe that my Malaysian background has made [me] to be a better person among other nationalities."

3. "Well, go for a place that happiness is found."

4. "Make use of their time here to understand themselves and what they really want. They can do it through studying, working or travelling here. Take as much time as they can because it can be a decision that brings the major changes to their lives."

5. "Choose what you like to do."

6. "I think Permanent Residency of 5 years is quite sufficient for any newcomers. Some Malaysians have been here over 30 years with their new family, but still remained as a PR, as they cannot take idea of simply applying Visa to go back to your home-country."

7. "Political stability of a country is very important factor for the country prospect."

8. "No difference."

As a result of the state's single nationality principle, the Malaysian diaspora is strategising their citizenship rights across national borders. Without the benefits of dual nationality, a Malaysian diaspora member in Australia can still enjoy their current status: maintaining Australian PR whilst keeping Malaysian citizenship. For them, the issue of dual nationality does not affect their [as well as their family's] mobility. As expressed by one respondent: "I travel frequently back to my family and they would do the same so we can share the best of both countries." The others also enjoy travelling between Malaysia and Australia for holidays and visitation. Australian PR is considered good enough: "Permanent Residency will do for me at this stage." For the moment, the respondents seemed to be satisfied with the status of Australian PR and Malaysian citizenship which both offer flexibility for them (and their family as well). Coining Aihwa Ong's notion of "flexible citizenship," the diaspora members in my study preferred to stay flexible by selecting different countries for residence, work, investments, family reunions, and retirement.

Finally, the article surveys the willingness of the diaspora to return home. All the respondents replied a definite "yes" (one respondent had already returned to Malaysia after staying overseas for seven years) when asked about the possibility

that they would return to the country as an expatriate as the Malaysian government is luring back its overseas nationals. What does this suggest for the government's effort to resolve the brain drain? Since 2001, Talent Corporation Malaysia Berhad has sought to encourage return migration of Malaysian professionals working abroad (under the so-called "Returning Experts Programme"). The REP facilitates the homecoming of Malaysian professionals (including their foreign spouses and children) in order to transform the state to become a developed nation by 2020. Among the incentives offered include fast-track approval of permanent resident status for foreign spouses and children, tax exemption for all personal effects brought into Malaysia, tax exemption on cars, and an optional 15% flat tax rate on chargeable employment income (TalentCorp, 2011).

TalentCorp's sessions in Melbourne recognised the fact that "ninety-nine per cent of the Malaysians living overseas that TalentCorp encounters in its drive to get professionals to return are still patriotic towards Malaysia" (*The Malaysian Insider,* 7 October 2012). Recognising the strength of the Malaysian diaspora in Australia, the state launched the Malaysian Scientific Diaspora Network (MSDN) in Gold Coast to promote collaborative research between non-Malaysian researchers working in Australia and researchers in Malaysia and between Malaysian and non-Malaysian researchers working in Malaysia (*The Malaysian Insider*, 15 November 2012).

A report by the World Bank (2011) suggested that Malaysia could take more action in encouraging the contributions from the diaspora community. It is a known fact that the global diaspora community has been contributing to trade, foreign direct investment and transfer of knowledge in their home country. Considering that the Malaysian diaspora comprises highly skilled migrants, Malaysia is advised to pursue a more extensive set of diaspora policies. According to Hugo, "the diaspora is predominantly non-Malay, and this discrimination will remain a barrier to return just as it has been a factor encouraging the emigration of many in the first place" (2011, p. 238). Meanwhile, Ziguras and Law pointed out that "one possible reason for Malaysia's lack of apparent success in luring its diaspora back home is that the diaspora chiefly consists of ethnic Chinese and Indian Malaysians, many of whom have left Malaysia because of limited options available to them in employment in government and public educational institutions, including universities" (2006, p.70). Although such policies would seem less likely to succeed given the dynamic communal politics in Malaysia, there are some prospects considering that the diaspora maintains a sympathetic attachment to their homeland.

CONCLUSION

This article offers two explanations for the citizenship choices of the Malaysian Chinese diaspora. First, the idea of a place called "home" informs their decision.

Second, they understood the citizenship strategies that would enable them to maintain their flexibility and mobility across the two countries. Many of them would keep the option open as to facilitate the entry and exit to both countries. Enjoying the best of both worlds, for most of the diaspora members in my study, does not necessarily mean obtaining two citizenships. As Cohen advocates, diaspora members are highly mobile in a global age. New forms of international migration do not result in "permanent settlement and the exclusive adoption of the new citizenship of a destination country." Instead, international migration is taking the form of "intermittent stays abroad and sojourning." (Cohen, 2013, p. 141).

While economic incentives and social disincentives have been identified by the World Bank (2011, p. 121) as the factors of Malaysian skilled migration, these factors do not sufficiently influence the change in national status. "Malaysianness" remains a key consideration in shaping the citizenship choice. It is relatively flexible for the respondents to stay permanently in Australia while choosing to return to Malaysia. The preservation of home country citizenship serves as bridges to facilitate their return for family visitation and reunion. Diasporas' transnational practices in the Malaysian case study demonstrated that the state has strong collective identities and the diaspora reconfigures their senses of belongingness in the post-migration period through the shared "Malaysian" identity. The state timely responded to the diasporic imaginary in its effort to tap overseas talent.

ENDNOTES

[1] Notes:
The author is grateful to one of the reviewers for pointing out the need to explore the implications of the Malaysian case for migration studies at a broader theoretical level.

[2] This idea is suggested by the similar reviewer, who carefully checked the manuscript and made numerous very helpful comments.

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