Borders on the move: cross-strait tourists' material moments on 'the other side' in the midst of rapprochement between China and Taiwan

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Abstract

This paper forms part of an endeavour to elicit the cultural-geo-politics of rapprochement tourism between China and Taiwan from a grounded approach. It seeks to examine cross-strait tourists' travel experiences on 'the other side' through the lens of 'border', 'materiality' and 'identity' in an attempt to move beyond the often state-centric analyses of cross-strait ties. Discussion shows that travel documents that are close to the personal or those that are part and parcel of a touring experience are far from inert; they participate in the social and political lives of their owners, feature in bordering practices between the Chinese and the Taiwanese, and are often platforms through which identities are performed. Importantly too, as the various travel narratives reveal, the ubiquitous border certainly does not exist only in its physical form; imagined and perceived social borders are equally potent in (re)shaping cross-strait relations. A study that captures the often neglected field of comparative tourists' travel experiences is timely in the advent of a warming relationship between China and Taiwan and the unprecedented increase in tourism exchanges that ensues.

1. Introduction: Re-visiting the 'border'

The idea of a 'borderless' world (Ohmae, 1990) gained much popularity throughout the end of the 20th Century (See Paasi, 2005 and Bauder, 2011 for an overview of the changing discourses on the border). Yet it has also come under heavy challenge. Mobility studies remind us that passport and visa regimes continue to be limiting and discriminate against certain groups of people, rendering them immobile in an otherwise 'interconnected' world. For example, Wang (2004) reports on the immobility of Taiwanese people across certain international borders as a result of the perceived invalidity of the Taiwan passport. He discusses the humiliation and embarrassment experienced by Taiwanese travellers

whenever their visas or passports are scrutinised by immigration authorities, and the inconvenience of being mistaken as mainland Chinese. Similarly, Jansen (2009) argues that the formation of the European Union (EU) does not lead to a borderless region or seamless travel. Rather, it further excludes the 'immediate outside' as the mobility of citizens from non-member countries is heavily restricted. He describes the 'humiliating entrapment' experienced by people of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia as they attempt to enter EU countries. Such constraints on one's mobility and unequal treatment to holders of different passports by the authorities have led Wang (2004) to question the post-national genre of border research, suggesting that the old 'nation-state' model of citizenship is "being entrenched perhaps more deeply than before" (p. 371). Far from diminishing, borders seem omnipresent in a variety of forms and practices.

Whether borders are here to stay or about to wither away, what we find in the literature on borders is the predominance of a statist and static approach to this subject, meaning that it becomes difficult to capture the intricate dynamics of societal transformations (although, see Baird, 2010[1]). For example, narratives of the border are plagued by a managerial/top-down approach, assumed by the privileged observer "that makes the rest of the world an object of observation" (Mignolo and Tlostanova, 2006: 206). In contrast, this paper seeks to study the border by attending to happenings on the ground, to ask the ontological question of 'who does the bordering?' and to call for a study of borders from 'the bottom up', "with a focus on the individual border narratives and

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[1] Baird (2010) examines the negotiations of the ethnic Brao people living on the borderland between Laos and Cambodia in terms of how they utilise the international border to their advantage. In a sense, such studies go beyond the statist approach to the study of border and capture the fluidity of the concept in terms of how borders are produced in the everyday. However, it is still about how people 'get around' the border rather than an exploration of how borders are *performed* by people.

experiences" (Newman, 2006: 143). Indeed, the proliferation of borders does not stop at the limits of the sovereign state; it overflows and extends beyond political boundaries to affect personal experiences as well (Paasi, 2005).

Contributing to these debates, this paper concerns itself with the re-visiting of 'border' in the context of rapprochement tourism between China and Taiwan.[2] It seeks to elucidate the experiences of ordinary people at border-crossings, and the various material practices engaged by them during their tour. The concepts of materiality, identity and liminality will be utilised to explore the enactment of bordering practices at and across political boundaries in a variety of different ways. This emphasis on human experiences does not mean ignoring or sidelining the potency of the physical border, which can be dismissed by discussions that focus on the 'invisible' or 'personal' border. Far from being 'non-places' (Auge, 1995, cited in Burrell, 2008), spaces at border crossings and areas are 'furnished' with emotions, identity negotiation and performances. Burrell (2008) for example, explores how Polish migrants perform the 'experience of mobility' through the materiality of things like passports and laptops at international borders. She shows that far from empty 'in-between' spaces, "the physical practice of journeying and border crossing... is a highly materialised and emotional undertaking, and a real, tangible space in its own right" (p. 353). Perhaps, it is interesting to note here that the Chinese equivalent of 'border' (bian-jie: 边界), connotes a dual meaning of 'edge' and 'world'. The spatiality of the term and the infinite ways in which this space can be theorised call for a more critical interrogation. Indeed, as Shields (2006: 233) argues, "...borders and boundaries

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[2] In this paper, 'China' refers to the 'People's Republic of China' and 'Taiwan' refers to the 'Republic of China on Taiwan' (see also, Footnote 5).

have complex ontologies and spatio-temporal form as interfaces. They are not just edges." It is hoped that this paper can shed some light on the world of possibilities in border and mobility studies.

2. Setting the stage, materialising the border

The China-Taiwan conundrum remains one of the unresolved conflicts of the Cold War era. Although it can be said that both political entities are relatively at peace with each other, no peace treaty has ever been signed, and China remains ardent that it will use military action against Taiwan should the latter proclaim independence. However, the phenomenal rise of China over the last decade saw the two republics engaging each other on a totally different political game. Taiwan has increasingly come to terms that 'independence' is simply not a realistic option. Pushing for independence could only upset China and strain both cross-strait and international (US) relations.[3] China, on the other hand, is beginning to abandon the futile efforts in engaging Taiwan in non-constructive verbal disputes over the latter's sovereignty, in preference of the potential economic benefits to be reaped from a Greater China sphere of co-prosperity. Such sentiments for peaceful and mutual economic development are neatly captured in existing tourism developments in and between the two republics.

4 July 2008 marks a historic moment in cross-strait relations between China and Taiwan. For the first time in almost six decades, mainland Chinese were permitted to visit

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[3] The United States has been and still is such a crucial factor in China-Taiwan relations that Taiwan's international relations can be seen as almost synonymous with its US relations with regards to cross-strait issues.

Taiwan via direct charter flights and vice versa.[4] Evidently, such a development goes in tandem with Taiwan's President Ma Ying-jeou's doctrine of "Economic Cooperation Before Politics". Ma, who was re-elected in January 2012 to serve his second term as President believes that "a surge in two-way trade, investment and tourism across the Taiwan Strait [has] helped Taiwan's export-dependent economy… [and] will raise Taiwan's competitiveness" (*Businessweek*, 14 January 2012). His victory has offered him a mandate to forge ahead with plans of expanding cross-strait economic exchanges. Conversely, as President Hu Jintao subtly changed the Chinese take on the Taiwan issue from the political rhetoric of 'peaceful reunification' to an economic rationality of 'peace and development', China has begun to engage Taiwan beyond conventional political platforms. In pursuing the 'peace through tourism' agenda, Head of China's Tourism Administration, Shao Qi Wei, lauded the normalisation of travel between the two politically divided territories, hailing the launch of regular commercial flights and the beginning of mass tourism from China as akin to building "a bridge of friendship" (*Morning Star Online*, 4 July 2008).

Although the normalisation of travel between the two former enemies is a welcome development, politics can never be eradicated from seemingly banal activities, and local realities challenge the global framework of 'peace through tourism'. Rather than seeing it as 'economics before politics', cross-strait engagement has metamorphosed into something that not only concentrates on macro-political issues, but micro-political nuances as well. As such, tourism activities that infiltrate into the lives of both populations become even more important to analyse. In particular, I suggest that we can grasp a more nuanced

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[4] Under the agreement signed by the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits based in China, and the Taiwan-based Straits Exchange Foundation, there is now no need for tourists from both sides to travel to a third country (usually Hong Kong) before landing.

understanding of people's negotiation with and performance of their identities by interrogating things that are part and parcel of their travel experiences. More specifically, this paper looks at travel documents like passports and entry permits, and documents that travel with cross-strait tourists such as national identity cards and tour guide licenses. More than that, 'things' here also extend to 'significant others', 'practices' and 'political causes' (Sayer, 2011). Furthermore, things matter to people, but they do not merely serve as an 'extension of self' (Belk, 1988), that is, '*what* one is'; things also contribute to '*how* one is' (Sayer, 2011). In other words, tourists are suspended amongst other things during their travels and these things are capable of affecting their feelings, emotions and values. As such, in response to calls for new experimentations with potentialities of materiality (Anderson and Tolia-Kelly, 2004), I hope to garner a more intimate understanding of Chinese and Taiwanese tourists' travel experiences through things that are close to the personal and the everyday. In other words, rather than seeing cross-strait exchanges as political rhetoric, I see them as being experienced by ordinary people.

I am also interested in how tourists behave during their tour, especially at border-crossings or border areas (e.g. immigration checkpoints) I suggest the concept of 'liminality', famously developed by Arnold van Gennep and later by Victor Turner (1969), could provide some clues. According to Turner (1979: 465), 'liminality' literally means 'being-on-a-threshold' – "a state or process which is betwixt-and-between the normal, day-to-day cultural and social states and processes of getting and spending, preserving law and order, and registering structural status." These in-between places constitute a liminal space within which normativities of the tourists' everyday lives are temporarily kept in suspension, allowing them to encounter the 'Other' in a different social structure. Utilisation of

'liminality' in tourist/tourism studies is not new. A quick reference to existing literature shows the concept being applied to society's/individuals' behaviour, activities (e.g. sex tourism; pilgrimage, etc.), and specific site/place (e.g. hotel). For instance, Wagner (1977) adapts Turner's notion of 'communitas' and argues that tourists form 'spontaneous communitas' and interact with each other based on 'the spirit of the holiday' rather than 'the home life social hierarchical system'. Gottlieb (1982) on the other hand, experiments with the inversion of the everyday identities of holiday-seekers: the upper-class tourists temporarily becoming a 'pseudo-proletariat', while the middle-class ones seek an aristocratic change when on tour. Building on this genre of 'inversionary behaviour', Lett (1983) incorporates the concept of 'play' as developed by Huizinga (1950, cited in Currie, 1997) and Norbeck (1971, cited in Currie, 1997) to explicate yacht tourists' sexual behaviour. Tourism, for Lett, is a form of play, "a stepping out of 'real' life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all its own" (Huizinga cited in Lett, 1983: 41). Such temporality of social behaviours and spaces is also captured in Rob Shield's (1991) 'places on the margin' when he discusses sex tourism in Brighton (see also Ryan and Martin, 2001; Ryan and Hall, 2000). Pritchard and Morgan (2006) bring this discussion into the hotels, seeing them as 'liminal sites of transition and transgression'. As is evident, the concept of liminality has been well adapted in studies on the social-cultural aspects of tourism especially in the realm of sexual activities. The geo-political potential of it seems to be under-theorised. Although scholars like Salter (2003) and Wang (2004) alluded to the 'rites of passage' of passport checks and the humiliating experiences of travellers as they undergo rigorous scrutiny by the immigration officers, the existential inner-workings of the travellers during such a liminal period has yet to be explored.

Rapprochement tourism between China and Taiwan offers a fertile test bed to unleash this geo-political potential of the concept of liminality. The 'political' may refer to both the macro-politics of cross-strait relations and micro-political practices of the tourists, while the 'geo' represents the places, the in-between, the marginal or the transitional, where encounters amongst people and things happen. Having a better appreciation of the 'material moments' (Burrell, 2008) during this liminal period may have significant implications for developing a deeper understanding of rapprochement tourism between politically divided entities. As such, rather than seeing a *communitas* (Turner, 1969), which refers to a collective (consciousness) of people in a liminal space, I should like to borrow Callon and Law's (1995, cited in van der Duim, 2007: 151) idea of a 'collectif', which is "an emergent effect created by the interaction of the heterogeneous parts that make it up", to allude to a hybrid collective of tourists, locals *and* things. The rest of the paper looks at how such interaction presents itself in a series of travel narratives by both Chinese and Taiwanese tourists. These stories and encounters might be subjective and personal, "yet they are not just free-floating 'values' or expressions projected onto the world but feelings *about* various events and circumstances that aren't merely subjective" (Sayer, 2011: 1, emphasis original).

3. Methodology: Researching borders on the move

This paper originates from a larger project on the cultural-geo-politics of rapprochement tourism between China and Taiwan, and is based on ethnographic field research undertaken in 2010 and 2011. 77 semi-structured in-depth interviews with cross-strait tourists (42 Chinese and 35 Taiwanese) were conducted over the one-year period. For this piece, I concentrate on travel narratives that highlight cross-strait tourists' material moments in

order to gain a more nuanced understanding of cross-strait relations as experienced 'on the move'. In gaining access to people's experiences of cross-strait tourism, snowballing contacts proved effective. Informants who had travelled to 'the other side' were introduced through my existing contact networks and asked to share their encounters. However, I was careful to use 'multiple initial contact points' to prevent having a limited circle of like-minded respondents (Valentine, 2005: 111).

My positionality is of importance when carrying out fieldwork in China and Taiwan. According to Star (1991, cited in Thrift, 1997: 135), "people inhabit many different domains at once…and the negotiation of identities, within and across groups, is an extraordinarily complex and delicate task…; we are all marginal in some regard, as members of more than one community…" (see also, Narayan, 1993; DeLyser, 2001). As much as I am interested in the concept of 'border' in this paper, I was very much involved in the process of 'crossing borders' myself during the fieldwork as I adopted different identities at different places and time, with different people. My positionality as a Singaporean researcher was substantiated by my identity as an 'Overseas Chinese' 'returning' to conduct research. Existing contacts with relatives in both China and Taiwan further 'legitimised' my work. Being simultaneously an insider and an outsider proved to be effective in eliciting more sensitive insights from local respondents. On one hand, they were more forthcoming during discussions as I have a lineage relationship with them. Conversely, because I am a Singaporean, they felt relatively at ease to disclose more sensitive sentiments as they knew that I would not be entangled in their much complicated socio-politics. My experience was thus different from DeLyser's (2001) definition of insider and outsider. For her, those who are 'adopted' by their communities and who 'go native' "begin as outsiders, whereas those [like her] who study

[their] own communities start as insiders and are 'natives' before the research begins" (ibid: 442). For me, it was something that is 'in-between'. Due to my Overseas Chinese identity, I was neither a complete insider nor a total outsider. Therefore, careful threading in and between my positionalities to maintain a kind of 'identity equilibrium' during the fieldwork process, contributed significantly to a fruitful learning journey.

Furthermore, my positionality is a critical asset when differentiating the contribution of this research from that of others. Most research done on China-Taiwan tourism seems to focus on just one side of the border. I suggest that this is largely due to methodological impediments faced by the researcher. In other words, he or she is bounded by methodological limitations (e.g. positionality; access to resources; time factor; etc.) to carry out research on the 'other side', preventing useful and important comparative analyses to be achieved. For instance, Chinese and Taiwanese researchers are more often than not burdened by their own positionalities. The researcher's national identity hinders her/his accessibility to resources on the 'other side'. In this respect, my positionality as a Singaporean with lineage connections to both China and Taiwan has substantially facilitated my access to resources and interviewees on both sides of the Taiwan Strait.

In terms of language, proficiency in the Chinese language and the Hokkien (South Min) dialect gave me an added advantage in establishing commonality and rapport with my respondents, and gaining their views and concerns. Indeed, "[g]iven that the goal of ethnographic and related qualitative research is to understand something meaningful about the lives of other people, the language(s) within and between which this understanding develops requires some detailed thought" (Crang and Cook, 2007: 23). I have always

believed that being able to communicate with one's informants in their own language is a prerequisite for a more 'grounded' research as one would be able to appreciate the more nuanced expressions.

As Doreen Mattingly and Karen Falconer-Al-Hindi (1995, cited in Rose, 1997: 308) remind us, it is necessary "to make one's position vis-à-vis research known rather than invisible, and to limit one's conclusions rather than making grand claims about their universal applicability." Indeed, the data collected and the interpretations made in this paper were context-based and the result of 'situated knowledges' (Haraway, 1991, cited in Nightingale, 2003). Therefore, they are by no means representative of the entire spectrum of views. Also, the method employed and perspectives adopted were but some of the many angles from which the research objectives may be fulfilled. It is with this in mind that I now turn to the empirical findings.

4. Crossing the border: Checkpoints, travel documents and the performance of identity

One of the recurring themes in my conversations with Taiwanese and Chinese tourists on their travel experiences is that of their interactions with personal documents like passports and entry permits. Such travel documents, the application for them, the possession of them, and their usage often evoked affective moments at border crossings. I suggest that by listening to their travel narratives and plotting the moments when their travel documents remind them (and others) of their identities and in the process facilitate or impair their mobility we can gain a better understanding of cross-strait relations at a more intimate level. I shall tap materials garnered through a series of semi-structured in-depth interviews with both Taiwanese and Chinese tourists to explicate.

For Taiwanese tourists travelling overseas, the Taiwan (Republic of China – ROC)[5] passport can prove to be a hindrance. Although it can be said that Taiwan has *de facto* independence, it is not recognised as a sovereign state by the United Nations. Both China and Taiwan of course claim to be the 'true China'. The China-Taiwan conflict has never been resolved but a compromise was reached under the somewhat ambiguous 1992 Consensus, where both China and Taiwan confirm that there is only 'one China' albeit each having a different notion of what that 'China' is. However, most countries adopt a 'one China policy', recognising the People's Republic of China (PRC) as the official China. The validity of the Taiwan passport is thus questioned at immigration checkpoints and has impeded mobility rather than facilitated flow. Wang (2004) writes about the Taiwan 'passport problem' in terms of misrecognition of Taiwanese tourists as Chinese by immigration authorities, and the difficulties in obtaining visas from other countries. While he focuses on the experience of Taiwan passport holders as they travel to and across Europe, I choose to bring discussions to the Taiwan Strait. Moreover, Wang seems to lend his ears to the more economically privileged (i.e. those who can afford to travel to Europe); and by referring to publications and travel notes by popular writers, he tends to focus on the literate or those who can/want to be heard. However, by adopting a cross-strait tourism perspective in this paper, I focus on the ordinary – ordinary people who can afford ordinary trips to mainland China/Taiwan as opposed to the more expensive and infrequent tours to Europe.

Needless to say, the Taiwan passport is not recognised by the Chinese authorities. Instead, an entry permit – the Mainland Travel Permit for Taiwan Residents, commonly

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[5] The Republic of China (ROC) was established in 1912 and it governed mainland China until 1949, when it retreated to Taiwan during the Chinese Civil War, and was replaced by the People's Republic of China. However, the ROC on Taiwan has always maintained that it is the legitimate 'China'. The cover of a Taiwanese passport carries the words: 'Republic of China (Taiwan)'.

referred to as the Taiwan Compatriot Permit (TCP), is issued to the Taiwanese tourist by the Chinese Ministry of Public Security. The TCP has been in existence since 1987 when the then Taiwan President, Chiang Ching-kuo lifted the travel ban across the Taiwan Strait. A typical Taiwanese crossing the border to mainland China would use the Taiwan passport at the Taiwanese checkpoint, and present the TCP to the Chinese authorities upon arrival in mainland China. I am interested in how the possession of the TCP affectively interacts with the Taiwanese tourist at the checkpoint and how the checkpoint itself creates a liminal environment between home and away. One of my interviewees, Ben, who has recently been to Shanghai, offered his 'border experience'. The following is an extract of our conversation:

B: When my friend and I reached the border control at Shanghai airport, I actually wanted to queue at the 'International Arrival line'...I asked, 'Why should we queue at the 'Domestic Arrival line'?

J: So your friend naturally went to the Domestic queue?

B: No, that's because he had travelled to Shanghai many times, he said we had to go to the Domestic line. Then I asked, "Shouldn't we go to the International one?' He answered, "No, we *have* to go to the Domestic line."

B: As for the TCP...I got hold of this thing as I need to go to Shanghai...I treated it as merely a document.

J: Just like a visa?

B: Yes... and I have nothing against it. But I would think about where to queue at the immigration. Why should we queue at the domestic line if people from Hong Kong and Macau are allowed to use the international one? Hong Kong and Macau… they are China, not us.

But in the end, I still went to the Domestic line so as not to get into trouble. It's different in China. In Taiwan, you can scold the government, but in China, you need to be more reserved.

(Personal interview)

This extract is infused with politics and with questions about struggles of identity and mobility. Even in the context of rapprochement tourism, both sides are cautious not to grant each other *de jure* sovereignty. As such, instead of stamping directly on the passport, tourists from either side are issued travel permits to be shown to immigration authorities upon arrival. A Taiwanese tourist will be issued the TCP as mentioned earlier, while the Chinese counterpart will be issued the Exit and Entry Permit for the Taiwan Area of the Republic of China. Stamping on such a document thus allows both sides to temporarily avoid the sensitive issue of state sovereignty, on paper at least. In practice, this is not the case. A TCP holder is identified as someone who resides in Taiwan, but who is essentially a fellow countryman hence 'compatriot'. However, as Ben's narration clearly explicates, the material significance of this travel document and the identity it represents do not correspond to the holder's self identification.

As is evident, the affective moments between Ben's TCP and himself did not happen before the traveller reached the Chinese checkpoint. Ben did not have any 'problems' with it until the "immigration part…when entering/when crossing the border…about where to queue." The problematisation of where to queue shows that he was well aware of the identity politics of cross-strait tourists, and reflects the identity struggle he had to engage with. To be queuing in the domestic line, was to admit that Taiwan is part of China. Choosing the international line, however, was a performance of his national identity as Taiwanese. However, this struggle and resistance was short-lived as he was reminded of his friend's 'fate' in Beijing. Moreover, his travel companion, who had more experience in crossing the border, advised him against it. Overwhelmed by the stringent mobility regime and fear of "get[ting] into trouble", in a place that was neither here nor there, he made a

calculative decision to follow the 'rules' and joined the domestic arrival line. The word 'Compatriot' in the TCP may not be enough to infer the 'belonging' of Taiwan to China. The Chinese authority's strict enforcement at the checkpoint ensures that the reclamation of this final frontier is also observed in practice, no matter how superficial it is.

The political overtone in something that is as personal as a passport or a travel permit should be interrogated further. In contrast to the feeling of humiliation reported by Wang (2004) of Taiwanese travellers when their passports were deemed invalid at international checkpoints, my informants do not seem to allude to any form of mortification when using the TCP. Indeed, it was "only a document". I suggest that at liminal spaces like immigration checkpoints tourists tend to keep their values or beliefs in suspension; the 'tourist identity' allows them to be in a state of political numbness, to compromise to the institutional requirements, even to the extent of using a travel document that recognises indirectly that Taiwan is part of China. In fact, the Taiwanese tourists seem to avert the political implications of using the TCP in a playful manner. I became aware of this after my presentation at the Centre for Chinese Studies in Taipei in which I had a stimulating discussion on passport and identity with the participants. One of them came up to me and asked, "Do you know what we [Taiwanese] call the TCP?" I did not. "Dai bao zheng," the lady replied ('Permit for idiots'), before bursting into laughter. The interesting play with words and pronunciation (from 'tai bao zheng' to 'dai bao zheng' – a near-homophone to *tai bao zheng*') represents a self-humiliation but at the same time is a way to avoid politically sensitive sovereignty issues. As idiots, they do not need to fuss over issues of national identity; their objective is simply crossing the border to the other side. This resonates with Jansen's (2009: 820) recollection of his conversation with a Serbian woman who lamented

that the visa for Serbians to enter Hungary is widely referred to as 'Porez za budale' – 'Tax for idiots'. However, the sentiment of such a referral is rather different. In Jansen's case, it is born out of a lamentation of a helpless entrapment and humiliating treatment by the mobility regime. In the case of Taiwan, it seems to me that people have come to terms with their country's ambiguous identity and instead of being offended by the visa regime as suggested by Wang (2004), there was a denouncement/deprecation of the self in a playful yet politically informed manner. Such playfulness does not connote a foolish or naïve gesture, but I suspect a kind of soft yet powerful resistance to the institution. Indeed, in retrospect, if 'dai bao zheng' literally means 'idiot compatriots permit', does it not mean that those who issue them are idiots themselves?

Let us return to the Chinese checkpoint. I want to know further what goes on in the Taiwanese tourist's mind even after coming to terms about having to queue at the domestic arrival line. In other words, what are the impressions of the tourist during such a liminal period at the checkpoint? One of my interviewees, Chen, who has made several trips to China for holiday and work, gave an interesting account of her psychological and 'bodily' 'transformations' when queuing up and crossing the Chinese immigration checkpoint:

 C: At the immigration point, you are already in mainland China, but you are not really in the country… Whenever I reached the place, it seems like I am changing to another person. Because I will always imagine that I was about to enter a uncivilised place… a place where people spit freely everywhere…haha…This is what we imagine Chinese people to be. And their low level of civilisation… how they always jump the queue, and push their way around… I was about to enter such a place…So whenever I was there, I would start to think of myself as becoming another person.

J: To be like them?

C: No! Haha… Just that I have to pretend to be detached/unconnected/indifferent. You'll start to feel that you ought to equip yourself with arms and armour.

J: Oh I see… to protect yourself.

C: Yes…

J: Because you felt uneasy?

C: Hmm… No. Just act nonchalant…Moreover, Taiwanese are always being cheated in China. I felt that we are like idiots. My friends and I were cheated several times and the feeling wasn't good. For example, the porters will ask for a certain fee and later charged higher. So once you reach the immigration point, you have to start to be a little different…you'll have that feeling.

(Personal interview)

The Chinese checkpoint is indeed a threshold for Chen. She felt that she was neither here nor there; not in Taiwan, but not quite yet in China. This liminal space created a kind of anxiousness in her while she prepared to encounter the other side. It was a transitional period during which her social imaginations of China and its people materialised in her 'transformation' to become "another person". Chen's narration of how she had to transform herself before officially entering into China was akin to changing into a 'tourist mode' (Currie, 1997). This was not any ordinary mode, but one in which she became detached/unconnected/indifferent and equipped with "arms and armour". Chen's border crossing experience reminds one of the 'rites of passage' that act as both "indicators and vehicles of transition from one sociocultural state and status to another" (Turner, 1979: 466). To illustrate, Van Gennep introduced the three phases of "(1) separation (from ordinary social life); (2) margin or limen (meaning threshold), when the subjects of ritual fall into a limbo between their past and present modes of daily existence; and (3) re-aggregation, when they are ritually returned to secular or mundane life – either at a higher status level or in an altered state of consciousness or social being" (Turner, 1979: 466-467). Juxtaposed onto the border crossing process, Chen left her ordinary life and everyday social

structure when she embarked on her travel to China. She then enters the liminal period at the immigration checkpoint where she felt that she was becoming another person. Finally, when she was granted entry and crossed the checkpoint, she would have been in a different sociocultural state as she began her journey under a new social structure. The fact that Chen goes through this ritualistic process "whenever" she is at the Chinese immigration checkpoint confirms her border crossing experience as not dissimilar to Gennep's 'rites of passage'.

From the narration above, it is evident that the inner-workings of the tourist's mind do not cease even after coming to terms about having to queue at the domestic arrival line. Notions of identity performance and behaviour, and preparations for the encounter with the 'other' continue to be worked through while waiting for or going through passport/travel permit inspection. These inner-workings constitute a kind of identity performance, albeit not expressively executed. Such emotions and mode-changing contribute to the "'furnishing' of journey and border times and spaces" (Burrell, 2008: 353).

5. Political border as personal boundary: Cross-strait tourists' experiences

The Taiwanese tourists are not the only ones to encounter mobility restrictions. For the Chinese people, ability to go abroad for a holiday is not something taken for granted. Government officials and military personnel must have their passports detained by their employers, and only under special circumstances are they granted permission to travel. One of my informants travelled for the first time to Taiwan only after he retired from his job as an official in the Chinese Communist Party. He shared, "It was not convenient for us to go overseas for holiday. I have been to most Chinese scenic spots, but never overseas. So the

very moment I retired, I brought my wife to Taiwan" (Personal interview). Such 'inconvenience' is experienced by another interviewee, who currently works for a national bank. She lamented that she has to surrender her passport to her company and needs to seek permission before she can travel abroad. Such control and close surveillance of one's movement even to the extent of detaining the passport, which is supposed to facilitate one's mobility, might seem absurd in our part of the world, but is an everyday reality that people in China live with.

Even for the majority who are not involved in military or government jobs, applying for a visa to travel overseas might not be easy or even possible. Take the recent opening of Taiwan to tourists from China as an example. Although tourism exchanges between the two sides are often hailed as a way to forge a 'bridge of friendship', this bridge is unfortunately not extended to everyone in China. In other words, the opportunity to participate in rapprochement tourism is not equal to say the least. To illustrate, in 2008, only residents from thirteen provinces and cities in China[6] were allowed to travel (on group tours) daily to and from Taiwan (*Central News Agency*, 8 September 2008). Three years later in June 2011, Taiwan began to allow entry of independent Chinese tourists, but only 500 are given permission to enter each day and only residents of Beijing, Shanghai and Xiamen are eligible to apply for such a travel permit (*BBC News*, 28 June 2011). My conversations with tourists or would-be tourists in China on their travel documents thus very much evolved around the themes of mobility restrictions caused by the absence of a readily available passport or not having the 'right province of residence' on their passports. This reflects the 'unequal

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[6]The 13 administrative districts are Liaoning, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Fujian, Shangdong, Hubei, Guangdong, Yunnan and Shanxi provinces and the cities of Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai and Chongqing (*Central News Agency English News*, 7 September 2008).

degrees of mobility' experienced by people from the same country. Indeed, the ""mobile

subjects," as conceptualised by theorists such as Scott Lash and John Urry (1994), may not

be as "mobile" as they imagine" (Wang, 2004: 370). Respondents in China explained that

people from Beijing, Shanghai and Xiamen are deemed more cosmopolitan and of a higher

social status and integrity, and thus seen as more suitable/reliable to be admitted as

'independent tourists'. A traveller with a passport that shows the 'right province of

residence' is thus deemed to possess a more desirable character than one who does not.

This causes the production of 'collective hierarchies' as travel documents are "experienced

as becoming part of persons by classifying them into collectives" (Jansen, 2009: 821). It is

evident that bordering practices in terms of tourist profiling by the Taiwanese authorities

are already taking place even before the tourists step into Taiwan. Such an invisible border

and how it is being experienced through the materiality of a personal identification

document is a quaint example of how the effects of macro-political circumstances have

come to be borne by individuals.

Collective hierarchies continue to be at play even after the Chinese tourists have

crossed the border into Taiwan. I recollect an observation when I attended the inaugural

Pacific Asia Student Seminar (PASS) organised by the Taiwan Japan Student Conference and

the Social Science Student Association in National Taiwan University (NTU) in August 2009.

The PASS was an international forum where undergraduates and postgraduate students

came together to discuss the "history, development, present situation and the future

progress and prosperity" of the Pacific Asian region (PASS website). Students from leading

Chinese institutions like Peking, Qinghua and Renmin Universities were invited to participate

in this seminar. Such academic visits appear to be the dominant 'method' of entering

Taiwan for the younger generation. Chinese respondents often revealed that they do not

wish to participate in group tours as they claimed that those are for their parents'

generation and are generally boring and restrictive.[7] Therefore the best way to travel

Taiwan is to go for an academic conference or student exchange programme. They often

have ample time to travel around Taiwan during their stay there, which may last for a few

days to a few months. A student identity card, thus, supersedes the validity of the Chinese

passport when applying for a Taiwan travel permit and is deemed to be 'more useful' per se.

For this example, I shall refer to these forum participants as student tourists as indeed, they

did engage with touristic activities other than the conference itself. Upon arrival at the

seminar venue, I became aware that the Chinese student tourists were asked to surrender

their Taiwan travel permits to the organisers. It was not long before I overheard some

dissent amongst the Chinese as apparently they were the only ones that had their personal

documents detained by the organisers. It was explained that this was an administrative

protocol from 'above' and there was nothing the organisers could do. However, other

participants from countries like Singapore (where I am from), Japan, Republic of Korea and

the United States, and even Hong Kong[8] were not required to do so. I could understand the

discontent about the unequal treatment and perhaps the absurdity of the organisers'

actions, but would like to gain a more nuanced insight into the affective interactions

between the travel permit and the student tourist under such circumstances. So, during my

fieldwork in China in 2011, I visited one of the fellow participants, Shen, to interview him on

his Taiwan travel experiences. When asked on his views of having to surrender his Taiwan

travel permit, he shared:

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[7] Tour groups need to follow a fixed itinerary and tourists are not allowed to travel alone.
[8] Hong Kong is now a Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China. Tourists from Hong Kong are generally deemed by the Taiwanese to be of a higher social status than those from mainland China.

> I thought it was very strange for them to do that. How could you detain an identification document? No matter whether it is a passport or anything else, this is a thing of my personal identity. Such things have never happened to us in China. They had detained something that is personal. It does not belong to them; it is none of their business. In China, no one will detain your personal document at a conference. But they were students, and maybe by doing that, it was easier for them to organise and manage. I can understand that, but I still think this is a strange method.

<div align="right">(Personal interview)</div>

A 'strange' way of management and control indeed, but the unequal treatment received by the conference delegates just goes to show that "relations between different passports are hierarchical and that they are experienced as such" (Jansen, 2009: 817). Although "identification is not reducible to identity" (Butler et al., 2000, cited in Amoore, 2006: 344), identity is still essentially not just about self-recognition, but also recognition by others (Beger and Luckman, 1967; Calhoun, 1994, cited in Wang, 2004). Apparently, the trustworthiness of a person is determined by the type of passport/permit s/he is issued with. I could sense Shen's feeling of injustice during the interview, but he had kept his response in a rather 'politically correct' manner by describing the entire saga as merely 'strange'. However, we should not trivialise his affective material moments with the Taiwan travel permit when he questioned the authority of the organisers to detain such a "thing of … personal identity" and 'material object of mobility' (Burrell, 2008). This echoes Navaro-Yashin's (2007) call for an analysis of "interactions between documents and persons", that is, "the way documents are perceived or experienced as affectively charged phenomena when produced and transacted in specific contexts of social relation" (cited in Jansen, 2009: 816). In this case, the effects of an 'administrative protocol' from 'up there' has triggered down through the materiality of the Taiwan travel permit to affect the student tourist personally. Shen's 'imagined mobility' was clearly not in sync with his 'corporeal mobility' (Burrell,

2008), which was restricted by the mobility regime. This is quintessential of how borders are not just found at the immigration checkpoints, but are erected, practiced and experienced at the personal level as well.

Discussion hitherto has somewhat focused on the more, for want of a better word, serious aspects of self identification or identification by others. Here, I suggest that in the context of rapprochement tourism between China and Taiwan, there lies an element of 'play' involved in the performance of tourist identity. I shall draw on the usage of identification documents other than passport or travel permits by Taiwanese tourists in China, and the circumstances under which they experimented with and straddle identity boundaries. For the Taiwanese tourists, material moments with their identification documents do not occur only at the immigration checkpoint. The interaction continues throughout their travel on the mainland. These are not necessarily travel documents per se, but are documents that travel with the tourist and at times enable her/him to negotiate macro-political structures to her/his own advantage. One of my Taiwanese respondents told me about her friend's routine performance of identity to the Chinese locals through his Taiwanese Identity Card:

> My friend is very funny. Whenever he goes to China, he would show off his Republic of China [Taiwan] ID card to people there and quipped, "We belong to the same country right? In that case, I should be able to use this here!" Haha… He just felt that with his effort, he could influence the Chinese people to think that Taiwan is a sovereign country. He's always like that and ended up in long and funny debates with shop owners. We'll just leave him alone to enjoy himself.

> (Personal interview)

As Turner (1979: 466) reminds us, "Liminality is full of potency and potentiality. It may also be full of experiment and play. There may be a play of ideas, a play of words, a play of

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symbols, a play of metaphors. In it, play's the thing." Such playfulness can be extended to this tourist's performance of identity through his Taiwanese Identity Card. Although Taiwanese tourists in China are required to use their Taiwan Compatriot Permit (TCP) for identification purposes, he chose to do otherwise. In the liminal state of touring, he put forward his views on Taiwanese sovereignty in a playful and light-hearted manner that might not be possible under the host country's normal social structure. He would not go so far as to mock the Chinese state, but still found liberties in the way he expressed himself and interacted with the locals. Conversely, in the spirit of tourism, the locals were happy to engage him in friendly debates on cross-strait relations.

Taiwanese tourists I spoke with sometimes boasted of their triumphs over the 'system' when their Taiwanese identification documents were accepted by tourism authorities. This is an extract from my interview with Lin, a Taiwanese tour guide:

> L: Whenever I go to China, I'll bring my tour guide license along. In China you need to pay to enter most tourist attractions. But tour guides enter for free or are at least given huge discounts when you show your tour guide license.
>
> J: They recognised the Taiwanese tour guide license?
>
> L: Not really. Some attractions do acknowledge, but others don't.
>
> L: There was once we went to a scenic spot at Nanjing. The entry fee itself was already CNY$120 (£12). Fortunately I've got my tour guide license with me. I depended on it to help me save lots of money!
>
> J: So what were you thinking when using the Taiwanese license on Chinese soil?
>
> L: Mine was very simple: to save money! Hahaha. I don't care about national identity. It's all about saving money.
>
> J: So when you were using the pass, what did you actually want the person at the ticketing counter to think?
>
> L: Hahaha...very interesting! Of course I want the person to think that "ok you can use this, you are a tour guide". And I will presume that the person was thinking, "Good, you

acknowledge that Taiwan belongs to us"… Hahaha… If they don't accept, it means that they don't recognise that Taiwan belongs to them. It will be interesting if I were to probe further in such a situation, but normally if they don't accept my Taiwanese document, I'll just take it back, because I'm in a foreign place.

J: So it's a win-win situation no matter what. If they accept the pass, they are happy, because they will feel that you think Taiwan belongs to China. On the other hand, you'll be happy as you have saved some money.

L: Haha… but you'll feel that you've done something wrong…hahaha…

J: If they don't, it means that they do not recognise that Taiwan is part of China. In that case, you'll be happy too!

L: Haha…Taiwan is not part of them at all…just that we wanted to take advantage! If they don't accept, we can say "hmm…I think there's some problem with your notion of national identity"…hahaha…this method is great…I'll have to use it next time!

(Personal interview)

The producing of Taiwanese documents at ticketing counters of Chinese scenic spots is a quintessential example of 'play' in a liminal period of travelling. Lin claimed that it has got nothing to do with national identity as she was very clear of her political allegiance, but this does not prevent her from wittingly taking advantage of the ambiguity of the macro-political notion of 'belonging to China'. Indeed, such 'conversation' of who and what belongs was unspoken but amazingly took place via the materiality of the tourist pass. The usage of the Taiwanese document was interpreted as a submission of the holder to the sovereignty of the People's Republic of China. Indeed, documents "take the shape of or transform into affect and become part of their handlers in that way' (2007, cited in Jansen, 2009: 816). Furthermore, this interview extract is interesting as it does not only reveal the tourist's material moments with her tour guide pass in China, but also hints of her enthusiasm in experimenting with new 'techniques' to take advantage of the current political climate in cross-strait relations. It shows that such performance of identity is not just talked about in the aftermath of travel, but is constantly in the making, and constantly becoming scripted in the tourist's mind. This performance would be rehearsed and staged in future encounters with the hosts in China. Butler (1993, cited in Sofaer, 2007: 3-4) reminds us that "people can hold multiple

or plural identities which may spring to the fore in different circumstances, times, and places." Although I do agree on the plurality of identities and their temporal and spatial properties, the multiple identities at play in this example exist on rather abstract planes of reality. In other words, the allegiance of Lin to the People's Republic of China (PRC) was derived based on a double assumption. Lin assumed that by producing her Taiwanese tour guide pass, the authority at the ticket counter would assume that she was recognising and submitting herself to the PRC's sovereignty, and would then grant her a discount. As such, her clear allegiance to the Republic of China (Taiwan) co-exists with her willingness to be assumed as having a sense of belonging to PRC. However, as is evident from the conversation, Lin might be haunted morally when she returned to her home social structure as she felt that she has 'done something wrong' in terms of betraying her own national identity. Yet, in the spirit of tourism, at the liminal stage at which she 'plays' with her identity and the other's identification of her, the ultimate aim was not about making macro-political statements, but a personal triumph of being able to save some money. This economic rationale in the political life of things might seem trivial but nevertheless plays an important part in Taiwanese tourists' tour experience.

6. Conclusions

By bringing 'materiality' to the study of 'border' and vice versa, this paper has aimed to provide a more grounded approach to the understanding of cross-strait tourism between China and Taiwan. From the various tourist travel narratives, I have attempted to locate and highlight the confluence of the political and personal at both the real and imagined borders. As is explicated throughout the paper, the ubiquitous border certainly does not exist only in its physical form; imagined and perceived borders are equally potent in (re)shaping cross-strait relations. Furthermore, it is evident from the discussion that things that are close to

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the personal or those that are part and parcel of a touring experience are far from inert;

they participate in the social and political lives of their owners, and are often platforms that

connect "macro structures (the state) and micro actors (individuals) to each other" (Wang,

2004: 355). More than that, things like travel permits also engage in affective material

moments with their holders at border crossings, influencing how they see themselves and

how they feel about how others are treating them. Other than travel permits, personal

documents like the Taiwanese tour guide license and identity card were also explored.

Through these examples, I elucidate that there is an element of 'play' in tourists' negotiation

and performance of Taiwanese tourists' identities during the liminal period of travel. Instead

of a feeling of 'humiliating entrapment', I suggest that there was a voluntary engagement

with the 'border'. Moreover, just like in the animal kingdom, play is an excellent way to

learn how to deal with the world. In addition, contrary to traditional analysis, the identity of

a tourist during this liminal period is not merely inverted. Rather, I suggest a kind of

diversion at play as s/he chooses to perform different identities at different social settings.

Indeed, liminality provides a fertile conceptual ground to explore and explain the behaviour

of cross-strait tourists, and opens up potential trajectories of how cross-strait relations may

develop. As such, rapprochement tourism between China and Taiwan is not merely a

political rhetoric, but is something that is experienced at the personal level. However, I

suggest that in engaging with ephemeral or ubiquitous imaginations of the border, there is a

risk for researchers to take the physical border for granted. In other words discussions on

border crossings in their   own right might be seen as passé and thus not academically

rigorous. In this respect, the identity negotiations undertaken by the Taiwanese tourists at

the Chinese immigration checkpoint illustrate how in-between places are not empty, but

charged with vitality and emotions. Additionally, as the dynamics underlying the usage and

acceptance of the Taiwanese tour guide license has shown, cross-strait tourists communicate with the locals in simple economic terms based on self interests rather than nationalistic or patriotic sentiments.

We now see entirely new but ever evolving cross-straits relations that span a wide spectrum of people's everyday lives and lived environments that include but are not limited to cultural activities, popular culture, tourism, and so on. In other words, cross-straits engagement has metamorphosed into one that not only concentrates on macro-political issues, but micro-political nuances as well. We need to ask ourselves, "How can a re-conceptualised 'border' escape from the cannons of 'national security', 'war on terror', 'control/surveillance', etc., and concern itself with something that is as banal, as mundane, as innocuous as tourism?"; "How can this process of re-conceptualising inspire further epistemological and ontological re-theorising of the 'border'?" This paper has sought to provide some potential lines of inquiry. As such, tourism activities that infiltrate into the lives of both populations become even more important to analyse. In departing from the mainstream academic writings that focus primarily on the macro (international) politics of the China-Taiwan conflict, such analysis has the potential to garner a more nuanced understanding of cross-strait ties through everyday cultural-geo-political processes that are constituted by and at the same time constitutive of wider political issues.

Acknowledgements

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