Tourism can be used to enhance social capital. Robert Putnam is credited with popularizing the concept of social capital (Putnam 1995a), which he defined as a usable resource created by open, collective and cooperative networks built on relationships of trust “that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives” (Putnam 1995b: 665). Frances Fukuyama defined social capital as “the cultural propensity for people to seek solutions by establishing horizontal links that are outside the government or the state and organized by civil society itself” (from Fukuyama 1995, cited in Association Management 2002: 75). Set in a postmodern or post-Fordist conceptual framework, social capital resources are not reduced by usage, but are instead strengthened and enhanced by greater levels of member participation (Ostrom, 2000). Unlike traditional forms of economic capital, human capital, or cultural capital (all of which relate to attributes of individuals), social capital is situated in the quality of relationships and is not easily quantifiable or measured (Mohan and Mohan 2002). Friendship and goodwill are examples of this. They are best created through face-to-face interactions and they become resources when “mobilized to facilitate action” (Adler and Kwon 2002).

Tourism can be used to enhance social capital by bringing people together in face-to-face interactions that can, in properly structured circumstances, lead to mutually beneficial relationships. Belief in this aspect of tourism underlies support for sustainable tourism approaches and ecotourism product developments, as well as broader assertions of tourism as a force for intercultural understanding and global peace-making (cf. International Institute for Peace Through Tourism; http://www.iipt.org/; accessed 2 July 2002). Unfortunately, few tourist experiences actually achieve the goal of creating social capital, even if the capital is as amorphous as understanding and peace.
What is missing from the intercultural communication and global peace scenarios is a broader embedding of tourism as a component of a larger system of social capital institution building. For most tourism, such institutions do not exist. Diasporas can provide an institutional framework within which tourism and social capital can be realized because they provide a common bond between hosts and guests upon which the face-to-face interactions of tourism can be mobilized into more significant relationships of action. Not all diaspora cultures may be conducive to building social capital in this way. The culture of the overseas Chinese, however, has developed norms of behavior and created civil institutions that may represent the best example available of how tourism can be a key component in enhancing social capital relationships to the benefit of both diasporic populations and their homelands of origin.

**Guangxi and Confucian Social Capital**

Motivation for maintaining ties to a geographically and historically distant homeland are many. For Chinese there is a racial identity that ties them to China and separates them from other racial groups in their adopted lands. While race alone can be a superficial basis for establishing identity (Chang, 1997), in the Chinese case, Han Chinese ethnic culture is so closely tied to the Chinese race, that it transcends a good portion of the great diversity of origin and life experiences among overseas Chinese (Wong, 1997). Chen (2002) reflected on being ethnically Chinese, yet raised in an English-speaking environment,

> Perhaps more so than any other race, being Chinese carries with it expectations beyond the physical. It’s a complete package: linguistic, historical, psychological as well as physical. To be Chinese and not speak the language fluently, well, the mind boggles. (p.1)

Chineseness can be denied, but it cannot be escaped (Ang 2001). Especially for ethnic Chinese living far from societies that are predominantly Chinese, a trip to China can allow an emersion in racial (if not fully ethnic) sameness that is only possible in a few location outside of East Asia. For some it can be a reaffirming experience strengthening cultural identity and providing personal meaning in life. For most it can at least address a curiosity of what it means to be Chinese.

Part of what it means to be Chinese is to carry the legacy of a long history of traditional values and obligations that are centered on the family, and extended to community and other relationships. These relationships form the basis of a formal social capital network, which has long supported migrations of Chinese overseas, and has helped to maintain their relationships with their homeland. The Chinese concept of *guanxi*, which pervades most of the cultures of East Asia, demonstrates the depth of significance that this
social capital can play in a complex network of human obligations and face saving sensitivities (King 1994; Nguyen and King 1998). Guangxi has often been considered a major difference between Eastern and Western social order, philosophy and world view (Haley, et al. 1998). New York Times journalist Fox Butterfield illustrates this point:

I began to appreciate how differently Chinese order their mental universe than do Westerners. We tend to see people as individuals: we make some distinctions, of course, between those we know and those we don’t. But basically we have one code of manners for all. . . . Chinese, on the other hand, instinctively divide people into those with whom they have a fixed relationship, a connection, what the Chinese call guan-xi, and those they don’t. The connections operate like a series of invisible threads, tying Chinese to each other with far greater tensile strength than mere friendship in the West would do. Guan-xi have created a social magnetic field in which all Chinese move, keenly aware of those people with whom they have connections and those they don’t. . . . In a broader sense, guang-xi also help explain how a nation of one billion people coheres. (Butterfield 1983: 74-5, cited in King 1994: 110)

Guangxi relationships and their associated reciprocal obligations are often used within Chinese society to leverage social resources for personal and group advantages. At the same time, they can lead to nepotism, favoratism, corruption, group oppression, and limits on one’s freedom of behavior. The latter can become a motivation for leaving home so as to more freely interact in a world of “strangers” (Fei 1967 and De Glopper 1978). Guangxi has also been credited with the allowing early Chinese entrepreneurs to succeed in places where others could not because it substituted for a weak legal and commercial system (Backman 1999: 225). The relatively recent popularity of social capital (cf. Adler & Kwon 2002; Mohan & Mohan 2002) in some ways reflects a Western re-discovery of a pervasive Eastern tradition.

Travel back to China is a traditional part of the guangxi social capital system of overseas ethnic Chinese (Lew and Wong 2002). Chinese merchants have a long history of traveling abroad, either on the Silk Road through Central Asia (to ancient Greece and Rome) or by the “Porcelain Route” by sea through South and Southeast Asia (Pan, 1990; Poston et al, 1994). By the mid-sixteenth century, European traders found ethnic Chinese merchants and communities well established throughout Southeast Asia and occasionally beyond. In 1841, the British forced China to open its doors to international trade through the first Opium War and impoverished Chinese laborers emigrated in droves to Southeast Asia and the rest of the world (Lew 1995). Unlike their merchant forefathers, most of these coolie laborers were of impoverished rural peasant origin, and most were “sojourners” whose ultimate goal was to return to China after they made their fortune overseas (Wang, 1991; Brogger, 2000).
The sojourner form of temporary migration predominated among the overseas Chinese who had left China in the 19th and early 20th century, prior to the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949. After 1949, the sojourner model was transformed into an existential tourism relationship between overseas ethnic Chinese and their China homeland (Cohen, 1979). Such travel could be considered a postmodern form of sojourning – one that is more flexible and less essential than the permanent return of the sojourner, yet still allows the traveler to adhere to expected norms of behavior within the traditional overseas Chinese society (Lew and Wong, 2003a).

In addition to the topophilic attachment to China than many Chinese feel (Tuan 1974), both sojourners and existential tourists travel back to the homeland (whether to the home village or to China in general) was a way of meeting the basic guangxi requirements of an ethical Chinese. Chinese ethics, based on Confucianism and Taoism, are primarily focused on relationships, with family relations being paramount (Haley, et al. 1998). Most traditional Chinese would agree with Putnam’s statement that “the most fundamental form of social capital is the family” (1995a:73; see also Bubolz, 2001). Chinese culture has actually codified the structure of family relationships through the social philosophy of Kung Fu Zi (Confucius, 551–479 BCE), who espoused five primary guangxi relationships. Each of these relationships has a superior and inferior role and came with corresponding loyalties and obligations:

- Sovereign over Minister - for ruling a country or a region
- Father over Son - for maintaining the economic welfare of the household and care of the aged
- Husband over Wife - for maintaining the social norms of the family
- Older Sibling/Brother over Younger Sibling/Brother - to maintain cooperation and harmony within the family
- Friendships - for maintaining social harmony beyond the family

Taoism developed a similar set of relationship rules, though they were bi-directional and only focussed on the three family associations listed above. Guangxi obligations extending beyond the family were created over time on top of these primary family relationships. This system of relationships and obligation has had a great influence on Chinese culture and language. Chinese language, for example, uses a wide range of terminology to clearly designate the relationship of family members to an individual. Different terms are used to identify mother-side and father-side relatives, older and younger relatives, male and female relatives, blood and marriage relatives, and the birth or age order of certain relatives.

Chinese ethics even extend into the grave, as children have a filial piety duty to regularly pay respects and remembrances to both immediate and more distant ancestors, including tending to gravesites. Related to
this, is a strong tradition of genealogical record keeping, which dates back in China some 3000 years. Most Chinese villages maintained detailed genealogical records that followed the male line of village members back to the legendary periods of Chinese history (Lim, 2002). Many of these original genealogy books or tablets, which also kept track of individual migrations out of China, were destroyed during China’s Cultural Revolution (mid-1960s to mid-1970s). Many, however, survived in alternative forms and are still available.

The ultimate goal in defining and regulating relationships is the maintenance of social harmony. Networks extending beyond the family unit typically use guangxi to incorporate and extend family-type relationship duties. Thus, the village, the township, the county, the province and the country of China become incorporated into a single family-guangxi ethic. (Business relationships with non-Chinese may also take on similar roles and patterns, though only after a well established personal rapport is established.) Relationships that fall outside of this family-guangxi ethical realm are generally considered insignificant and may even be subject to unethical (or a-ethical) treatment (Haley, et al., 1998).

The early Chinese sojourners evolved their own set of values that applied traditional Confucian relationships to their special circumstances in being away from China. These values allowed them to lead an ethical life outside of China, while still maintaining their Chineseness for when they returned. Woon (1989) identified the following as paramount among the earlier sojourner migrant population:

1. The importance of the extended family and a feeling of insecurity in a place without the extended family reference group
2. Filial piety pressures to return home to care for elderly and ancestral graves, and acceptance by villagers upon returning home, despite having left
3. The presence of an open, class society in southern China, allowing upward socioeconomic mobility
4. Increased prestige among fellow expatriate sojourners through donations and home visits prior to retirement

Existential travel back to China was, therefore, an integral part of the more prosperous sojourner’s life, and many returned to China on a frequent basis. Traditional sojourner values, including existential travel, continue to influence contemporary overseas Chinese, even though the sojourner model is rare today.

Contemporary Travel Back to China

Extended family relationships remain strong for many Chinese, though today this can result in many of the extended relatives migrating to the same region overseas. Some relatives typically remain behind for
personal reasons and they then provide reasons for overseas Chinese to travel back to China for VFR (visiting friends and relatives) objectives, though existential tourism is likely to play at least a subliminal motivational role.

A major reason for turning individual migrations into an extended family migration is filial piety. Family migrations enable care of aged parents, as well as provided assistance in such care by extended family members. Ancestral graves are a more difficult proposition. More traditional overseas ethnic Chinese will pay to have the ancestral graves in China enlarged and upgraded, and will make a visit to the gravesites a central part of their home village visit.

Expectations in visitor behavior vary considerably between earlier immigrants and later generations, and between first visits and subsequent visits. Overseas Chinese who migrated during or prior to the 1950s are expected to participate in filial piety rights and guangxi obligations to a greater degree, especially as part of their first visit back to the home village. This often includes providing red envelopes (hung baos) with money to all relatives, which could include an entire village, providing roast pigs for the grave visit, hiring lion dancers and setting off fire crackers for the house and grave visits, and providing a feast for the extended village family. Of course, the more elaborate these festivities are, the higher the prestige of the visitor.

While some traditional overseas Chinese will specifically travel to their home village for special ancestral ceremonial days (Lim, 2000), others will include such events as only one part of a broader range of considerations in their travel planning and motivations. Either way, for these overseas Chinese, this aspect of filial piety continues to serve as a motivational element in the decision to travel back to China.

Overseas Chinese migrants are welcome in their home villages because they have a known blood relationship, and because they view them as wealthy relatives who can benefit the home village. Oxfeld (2001) emphasized the role of “face” and money in driving both overseas Chinese tourism motivations and village reactions to visiting overseas relations. These can lead to beneficial outcomes, but can also lead to self-aggrandizement and manipulation when abused. Meetings with local government and school officials center on talks of charitable donations and economic investments, and can seem to overly heighten the visitor’s potential contributions. Donations to schools, in particular, can considerably enhance the visitors social standing in the community.
Subsequent visits after the first one are generally less elaborate, although a range similar activities are typically included. Visits by second and later generations of overseas Chinese, as well as those who have been disconnected from China for a long time and have lost knowledge of proper behavior, are far less elaborate. For these “bananas” (yellow on the outside and white on the inside) only a few of these elements may be included, such as a meeting with local government or school officials and a few red envelopes for only the very closest relatives.

Thus, Confucian values and norms of behavior have evolved into sojourner values, which in turn have been modified into contemporary overseas ethnic Chinese values. They are widely recognized among overseas Chinese, and practiced by many, though clearly not all. Confucian values experienced considerable attack during the Cultural revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, and the more heterogeneous Chinese immigrant populations that have emerged since 1960s are much less endowed with the older sojourner values (Wong, 1997). In a survey of overseas ethnic Chinese visitors to Hong Kong, for example, Lew and Wong (2003a) found that home village connections were about twice as common among ethnic Chinese residing in more distant, non-Asian countries (59% to 86% for Australia, the U.S. and Western Europe) than for those residing closer to China (38% to 42% for Malaysia, Taiwan and Singapore). Furthermore, the survey results found that overseas Chinese averaged 53 percent of visitors from the surveyed countries/regions, with every country having a larger proportion of ethnic Chinese visitors to Hong Kong than was present in their general populations. These data support anecdotal and case study evidence that overseas ethnic Chinese still consider the value of maintaining close ties to their home village region very important. They also suggest that existential travel to China is a significant part of the China’s tourism market, and plays an important role in local economic development for many areas in southern Coastal China.

An Institutionalized Network of Ethnicity

A key component of Putnam’s (1995a) concept of social capital is the role of voluntary associations in expanding the strength found in family-based systems of social capital to larger social groups and communities. Such voluntary associations are widespread within overseas Chinese communities where they often became a forms of extended family, or extended village, for immigrant Chinese. Because migration often fragments and disperses family units, immigrant Chinese modified their traditional family-based relationship values to develop a system of guangxi support through formal voluntary associations. These associations played a vital role in enabling, supporting and maintaining migrant ties to their home village areas, including existential visits back to China. Thus the overseas Chinese developed a way of upholding traditional Chinese cultural and ethical responsibilities through overseas voluntary association.
When most Chinese migrate overseas they follow a long established “network of ethnicity” (Mitchell 2000). Most ethnicity-based networks are voluntary and have evolved as part of the informal economy (Sassen 1989). Earlier migrant cohorts create a structured which inculcates and influences the experience of newer immigrants (Castle and Miller 1998). In this way they create social capital both informally and formally (Portes 1994). The overseas ethnic Chinese, in particular, have developed a highly formalized system of social capital through a variety of voluntary social associations that provide support for new immigrants, while at the same time strengthening the immigrants’ ties to China. This was a characteristic of both the merchant and coolie migrants and these structures of overseas Chinese social capital have continued to play a major role in overseas Chinese society even in the modern era of more permanent migration. Although there are many ways that overseas ethnic Chinese voluntary/social associations are formed, these can be summarized into three types (based on Lim 2000):

1. **Lineage, Clan or Surname associations.** These could be based on actual blood relations, with members coming from a paternal lineage region where all villagers are related through male lines. More likely, however, they are surname associations that generally welcome overseas Chinese who share a common surname, but typically are associated with a geographic region. They may be also be combined in a surname-dialect focus, and they can include multiple surnames, such as Liu-Guan-Zhang. These three names that were closely associated with one another during the Warring States period of Chinese history (3rd century CE) and continue to share “sworn brotherhood” relations among their descendents to this day (cf. [http://3kingdoms.net](http://3kingdoms.net) and [http://www.threekingdoms.com](http://www.threekingdoms.com); both accessed 18 June 2002).

2. **Geographical, Place and Dialect associations.** Geographical associations generally range from those based on a province, such as Fujian or Guangdong, to a city or county region. They rarely extend to townships below the county level, and they are often closely associated with dialect associations, which also tend to be associated with political boundaries. The ability to easily communicate with others formed a natural basis for the formation of voluntary social organizations. Southern China, below the Yangtze River, contains at least major 200 dialect groups, many of which are mutually unintelligible (Seng 2002). These dialects were more distinct a century ago, when transportation and communication were more difficult and communities more isolated. Dialect speakers are sometimes considered to form a type of sub-ethnicity within the larger Chinese ethnic group. In recent decades, dialect groups have weakened considerably as Mandarin (putonghua) has come to be the lingua franca dialect of China.

3. **Special Interest associations** including **Trade, Guild and Business associations** and **Culture and Sports associations.** Business associations include more general Chinese Chambers of Commerce, as well as more specific trade groups, such as coffee or rubber producers in Southeast Asia. Cultural and sporting interests
include Chinese music and opera associations, poetry and calligraphy groups, and martial arts clubs. All of these special interest groups can also based on geographical or dialect regions and may be closely tied to larger associations of those types.

Versions of the first two of these association types actually work to replicate the village social organization typical of southern China, where members of entire villages and groups of villages are often related to one another in one way or another. They offer opportunities to develop guangxi relationships and to reaffirm Chinese traditions. They also work to maintain relationships between migrants and their home village area. As such, overseas Chinese voluntary associations are among the longest continuing civil institutional structures created largely for building and using social capital. Though their organization is based largely on traditional Chinese social values, they can also offer lessons for more modern efforts to create structures that both strengthen social capital and develop the existential tourism market segment.

In addition to these overseas-based institutions of social capital, there are also a range of organizations in China that serve similar roles. The most prominent among these are the Overseas Chinese Affairs Offices, which were established immediately after the PRC’s founding in October 1949 (Huang, 2000). From the start, their objectives were to implement policies passed by the Communist Party of China (CPC) related to overseas Chinese. In the 1950s, these included the “Protect Overseas Chinese Policy,” the “Method of Setting Up Education and Schools by Overseas Chinese,” and the “Favored Treatment to Overseas Chinese and Compatriots for Investment in National Companies” policy. (The term “compatriots” is used on China’s mainland to refer to Chinese residing in Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan. For the purposes of this chapter, compatriots are included in the definition of overseas Chinese.) The second major task of the local Overseas Chinese Affairs Office was to strengthen relationships between overseas Chinese and China (Douw 2000).

From the 1950s to 1970s these offices fought a major propaganda battle with similar governmental bodies on the island of Taiwan in efforts to win the political support of overseas Chinese (Tuo 1994). Tourism played a significant role in these efforts as Taiwan would provide almost free trips to visit the island for overseas Chinese around the world, and China would use visits by overseas Chinese to display the great successes of Maoist communism (Lew 1987). The cultural revolution, however, proved to be a low point in China’s relations with overseas Chinese as they and their relatives in China were accused of being rich landlords and farmers who exploited the poor (Huang 2000). By the early 1980s, however, virtually all of these individuals were rehabilitated and confiscated lands were returned.
Overseas Chinese Affairs Offices today exist at every level of government in China, from the national to the sub-county township, though local level offices only actively exist in major immigrant source regions. Example of their work include publishing magazines and websites with news items of interest to overseas ethnic Chinese, assisting overseas Chinese in establishing claims to ancestral village property, and helping overseas Chinese find their home village if ties have not been well maintained over the years (Lew and Wong 2003b; cf. the Guangdong Overseas Chinese website, with links to other provinces; http://www.gdoverseaschn.com.cn/; accesses 8 June 2002). Most of their publications are highly propagandistic in style, boasting of local achievements and the great qualities of overseas Chinese who contribute to their homeland. Overseas Chinese Affairs Offices also organize trips abroad, primarily to Southeast Asia and to North America, to encourage home visits and investments by members of overseas Chinese associations.

Other organizations exist in China that relate to overseas ethnic Chinese in various ways. There are associations of “returned overseas Chinese,” consisting of Chinese who were born and raised for at least part of their lives in a foreign country and then returned to China (cf. Xiamen Returned Overseas Chinese Association; http://www.xmqs.xm.fj.cn/; accessed 2 July 2002). Large numbers of these return migrants settled in China in the early 1950s, when the CPC was still relatively open in its administration of China; in the 1960s when minority ethnic Chinese in Indonesia faced political and military persecution; and in the 1970s when the Vietnam War ended and persecutions in Vietnam lead to large numbers of Chinese refugees fleeing that country by boat. Members of these associations feel a special tie to other overseas Chinese and offer them assistance in much the same way that Overseas Chinese Affairs Offices do, but with less of an emphasis on economic investments and legal matters. Returned overseas Chinese are represented as a group in local, provincial and national political assemblies, as well.

Various other groups, both overseas and in mainland China, are involved in overseas Chinese-related affairs, include private business associations (like Chambers of Commerce), some museums (such as the Overseas Chinese Museum in Xiamen City, Fujian Province), educational institutions from local schools to major universities that have developed relationships with, and research interests in, overseas Chinese. These other organizations are especially prominent in Fujian and Guangdong Provinces. Private businesses and general travel agencies seldom involve themselves in the general overseas Chinese market, which they consider too small to be significant (however, cf. Taishan People’s Website, http://www.taishan.com/english/; accessed 24 June 2002).

Thus, there exists a wide range of institutions that build upon and support the traditional Chinese cultural values of overseas ethnic Chinese, and which continually beckon them to return home as existential tourists.
These are clearly institutions that work to build social capital, which members can then tap into to achieve a variety of personal objectives. Many of these organizations conciously work to build and utilize social capital networks by extending the existential tourism role of overseas Chinese to one of philanthropic benefactor and economic investor. The issue of social capital become less clear in these instances as many such organizations are Chinese government sponsored and clearly have ulterior (economic and political) motives that can damage the sense of trust that is at the core of pure social capital building institutions. While originally intending to strengthen trust in relationships, the traditional Chinese cultural values that have fostered the range of institutions cited above may actually make it more difficult to maneuver the complex minefield of trust, obligation and face in seeking an existential relationship with one’s home village or homeland.

Conclusions: Building and Using Social Capital the Chinese Way

There are at least 60 million ethnic Chinese who reside outside of the People’s Republic of China (Poston, et al. 1994; Ma 2002). That number has been grown considerably since China opened its doors in 1978 (cf: huaren.org/diaspora/; accessed 24 June 2002). Overseas Chinese tend to be among the wealthiest ethnic populations in the world, with estimated liquid assets of close to US$2 billion (The Economist 1992). Together, overseas Chinese and compatriot Chinese account for close to 80 percent of China’s total foreign direct investment (FDI) (Tefft 1994; Cheong 2000). Compatriot Chinese are responsible for about two-thirds of Chinese FDI, while other overseas Chinese (primarily from Southeast Asia) comprise the second largest leading source of FDI in China at about 15 percent. Clearly the overseas and compatriot Chinese comprise a valuable resource which mainland China has turned into a form of social capital that has been tapped into in a variety of ways to enhance the country’s economy and improve the lives of the Chinese people.

At the local level, overseas ethnic Chinese have made major contributions to enhancing the livelihood of their home village regions (Lew and Wong 2003b). In Taishan County (Guangdong Province), one of the more prominent source areas of overseas ethnic Chinese to North America, the strength of the social capital built upon traditional Chinese values and maintained through voluntary associations can be seen in the level of donations recorded by the Taishan Overseas Chinese Affairs Office from 1978 to 1998, which included some 16,550 projects amounting to US$14 million (these figures do not include remittances sent to individual family numbers) (Huang 2000). Major areas of donations included: 577 school related projects; 40 medical related projects; 282 technology, culture and sports projects; and the constructions of 19 residential building blocks, 118 bridges, and 1,040 kilometers roads.
These numbers, however, do not show how the social capital of overseas Chinese relationships has been built upon cultural traditions (such as *guangxi*) and formal and informal social relationships (such as those created through voluntary associations). Lew and Wong (2003b) examined magazines for overseas Chinese readers published by township and county level Overseas Chinese Affairs Offices in China. Figure 1 shows the model of social capital formation which they used to explain the number and types of articles that these magazines included. They found that the first step, and dominant area of emphasis, in the process was creating a foundation built on a sense of shared, common origin. Once this was done, face-to-face contacts through existential tourism, sometimes connected with philanthropic donations, was the crucial next step toward building supportive relationships between overseas Chinese and their homeland relations. In describing traditional business relations in a coastal Taiwan community, De Glopper (1978: 297) noted that

The very first thing to say about the structure of business relations in Lukang is that one does not do business with people one does not know. No one deals with strangers.

Although Chinese society has changed some over the past couple of decades, the importance of faceto-face interactions is still high. When properly structured, tourism can allow interpersonal relationships to be created upon which social capital can evolve to benefit the home village area. This is also the type of activity which voluntary overseas Chinese associations have facilitated. While economic investment was found to be a major goal of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Offices, only a few magazine articles actually covered this topic because it represents a level of commitment that can only be secured after the more basic levels *guangxi* relationships have been firmly established in face-to-face meetings.

>> Figure 1 About Here >>

The importance of face-to-face relationships in the building of these social capital resources is what made travel and tourism a significant part of the lifestyle of early sojourners, and continues to do so among more recent permanent migrants. Driven by the remnants of *filial piety* and supported by ongoing activities overseas support organization and government agencies within China, overseas ethnic Chinese tourism today has become a crucial link in building social capital and moving it from a sense of existential comradery among co-ethnics to a form of economic and social development.

The shrinking time-space economy of the 1990s, with economic globalization, the expansion of the Internet, and cheaper and more accessible travel will probably further transform the traditional sojourner and existential tourist experience, and could create new means of building social capital for local communities in China. In his original conceptualization of social capital, Putnam emphasized the importance of face-to-face
relationships and largely open and democratic associations (Mohan and Mohan 2002). That original concept, however, has been greatly expanded over the years, as many and more varied forms of associations have been shown to developed forms of social capital. The creation of virtual communities may make face-to-face interactions, such as those which tourism enables, less significant (Rich 1999). Though this is questionable, given the rapid growth of the Internet in China (Greenspan 2002), there is probably a significant role that the it can play in helping to maintain social capital relationships once these have been established through interpersonal contact. This could also help to address the much greater heterogeneity of recent Chinese emigres, since websites can vary to meet the needs of different market segments.

Given the large, and ever increasing, numbers of migrants worldwide (Zlotnik, 1998), the Chinese experience could serve as a model for how other developing countries can maximize the social capital of their global offspring. Social capital has often been looked at as a community building and economic development tool for less developed areas (Wilson, 1997). Even the World Bank has become a strong proponent of social capital (cf. www.worldbank.org/poverty/scapital/index.htm; accessed 24 June 2002), though it has also been criticized for using social capital to diverting the responsibility for local development from governments to civil society – especially the voluntary sector (Mohan and Mohan, 2002). Social capital in China was born at least 2500 years ago, it was used among overseas Chinese to structure their society when no orderly government structures existed (in early Southeast Asia and in ethnic Chinatown enclaves around the world); and it continues to play a role today in the economic development efforts by government agencies in China (Lew and Wong 2003b).

The Chinese experiences shows that voluntary associations can have a significant role to play in creating new resources that bring benefits back to the homeland. Such associations can be form in a variety of ways, from traditional social groups to the World Wide Web. But throughout, only some form of travel and existential tourism can overcoming the geographic space of diaspora, to enable the face-to-face interactions that can convert shared interests to actions that lead to development and enhanced quality of life for all.

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Figure 1. Social Capital Building Model.

Source: Based on Lew and Wong, 2003b.