Transnational mobility of young people from East Asia has increased massively since the 1990s, and women now constitute a considerable proportion of this cross-border flow and diasporic population. Migration from East Asia has been increasingly feminized, widespread and frequent through forms of study abroad and work, giving rise to student diaspora, global knowledge diaspora sustained by the expansion of the international education industry (Waters, 2008; Welch, 2015), knowledge-based economies, information and communication technologies in a digital age. Rapid economic growth in East Asia has shifted the patterns of international migration to the skilled, knowledge-intensive move into Western countries. There has been a rising trend of women leaving their country to experience life overseas using Western educational institutions as a contact zone in order to increase their work opportunities and the subsequent role of work in developing an emancipatory mode of identity formation – individualization (Kim, 2011). Studying abroad has become a common career move for relatively affluent women in their 20s. These new generations of women, who divert from the usual track of marriage, are markers of contemporary mobile transnationals. This mobility tends to form a prolonged temporary status or diasporic sojourner mentality – willing to go anywhere for a while – in pursuit of maximal opportunities with unpredictable consequences on women’s transnational lives. This unpredictable, temporary and transient nature is precisely one of the unique features that characterize today’s transnational mobility, diaspora and development in a digital age, calling for an understanding of the new formation of digital diaspora.

Significantly, this contemporary manifestation has been enabled and perhaps accelerated by the rise and ubiquity of the digital media, information and communication technologies. The multi-vocal and multi-directional flows of the ethnic media and digital technologies facilitate people’s transnational, nomadic, back-and-forth movements creating new and complex conditions for identity formation in digital diaspora (Kim, 2011). Since the 1990s, the mediated networks established through the Internet and the transnational ethnic media have been instrumental in facilitating these changes in contemporary movements, allowing dispersed yet networked migrants to maintain transnationally their home-based relationships and to regulate a dialectical sense of belonging in host countries. The media, mostly taken for granted, go along with diasporic subjects. These new kinds of transnational networks, connections and various capacities of mobility are now changing not only the scale and
patterns of migration but also the nature of migrant experience and thinking. The present wave of migration and diaspora differs significantly from previous waves in that contemporary trans-border movements have been intensified, diversified and feminized to some extent, and the process of digital diaspora has created new meanings of diasporic subjectivity and new consequences that are yet to be known and understood.

Providing detailed empirical data on Korean, Japanese and Chinese women, this chapter explores the highly visible yet little studied phenomenon of women’s transnational mobility and its relationship to the impact of media consumption in everyday life. It draws attention to the digital media and mediated networks that facilitate women’s transnational movements. This plausibly powerful capacity of the media, deeply ingrained in what people take for granted, should be recognized in any attempt to understand the present phenomenon of transnational mobility in a digital age. This chapter considers a pulling-effect of the media: women’s mediated symbolic encounter with the West that generates imaginations of alternative lifestyles and work (Kim, 2005, 2011). People seem to imagine routinely the possibility that they will live and work in places other than where they were born, and their plans are affected by a mass-mediated imaginary that frequently transcends national space (Appadurai, 1996). The profusion of the media, with new imaginations, new choices and contradictions, generates a critical condition for reflexivity engaging everyday people to have a resource for the learning of self, culture and society in Asia (Kim, 2008). Under social controls that deny women the ability to act on their own, the chances for individualization become smaller, and individualization can be sought in ever greater participation in media consumption (Kim, 2012). Media consumption can be understood as a key cultural mechanism creating the emergence of individualized identities, both imagined and enacted.

This chapter will argue for the potential role of the media in triggering enactment of transnational mobility – the interplay between media consumption and physical displacement towards a deliberately encouraging yet precarious movement of freedom. As the chapter will further argue, the media are integral resources that shape diasporic experiences and identities. Diasporic media space is a transnational site of contestation in which nation, race, gender, class, culture and language continuously interrelate to produce complex identities. The ethnic media are mobilized as key resources to manage the difficulties of everyday life, banal racism and marginalization. Popular media culture from national homelands is circulated transnationally, often reproduced and amplified by digital technologies and the strategic, self-determined use of the Internet generations forming ethnic online communities. Today’s ubiquitous media flows from the periphery to the West, with greater access through the Internet, create national space and identification within the transnational field, changing the dynamics of diasporic identity in an unpredictable manner (Kim, 2011, 2017).

In what follows, this chapter will offer insights on the nature of women’s transnational mobility, the media and digital diaspora with the data drawn from an ethnographic project. Personal in-depth interviews were conducted with 60 Asian women (20 Koreans, 20 Japanese, 20 Chinese) who had been living and studying in the UK/London for three to seven years. The women’s ages were between 26 and 33 years – single women of middle-class and upper-class positions. They were recruited by the snowball method of sampling, based on friendship networks of the participants, and several snowballs were used to ensure that interviews were conducted with women from different universities. A panel of ten diarists were recruited from the women interviewed; they were asked to write/email diaries about their experiences and to express in detail key issues raised by the interviews. This method was designed to generate biographical material accounts from the women and incorporate a reflexive biographical analysis.
Female individualization

Education guarantees nothing. In Korea, the more women are educated, the more we would find it difficult to get a job. Not just any kind of job that doesn’t need a university degree or just a low-paid secretary… There was no job future, no hope to make my own life. It’s the only exit.

If work life is not fulfilling, mothers’ generation would choose marriage. We try to find an alternative, such as studying abroad, hoping to find better work. Work comes first, marriage later.

“Education without a guarantee” is illustrated in gendered Korea, where the dualistic labour market, with non-regular workers accounting for a third of employment, and the under-employment of women remain labour market challenges (OECD, 2014; Kim, 2016). The low female employment rate (53.5%, the tenth lowest in the OECD) in contrast to women’s high level of tertiary education (64%, the second highest in the OECD), and the gender gap in female earnings (64%, the largest gap in the OECD) reflect Korea’s under-utilization of its human capital. A contradiction of female individualization lies in the gap between the growing expectations of education and the reality of work inequality. There has been a remarkably impressive increase in educational attainment for middle-class women in Korea, and with universal access to education historically being regarded as a crucial means of national development and upward social mobility, gender inequality is generally thought to be diminished or non-existent at the educational level of the middle class. However, women equipped with work knowledge are often confronted with male privilege that has been perpetuated within the labour market system and corporate culture. While marriage is not repudiated but postponed temporarily, women’s socioeconomic status has not been improved enough to operate individualization through work. This disjuncture between education and labour market conditions, the persistence of gender inequality and the women’s desire to develop a self-determined life politics are some of the main forces that have led to growing transnational mobility. Similarly in Japan, it is increasingly common for women to quit their unsatisfying jobs and move to a Western destination.

Education is consumption. We pay for it without expecting economic returns, because there is no guarantee for a job or a better salary. It’s not easy to get a good job even with a top university degree. Job recruitment works favourably for men… I disliked the ordinary office job. The salary was low, though I had a materially good life living with my parents.

I am not sure if a MA or a PhD overseas will help me find a fulfilling job in Japan. It’s like a gamble. Without knowing the chance of success, I try it.

The perception of education has become “consumption”, a thing to be consumed by women without expected consequences. Japanese women are among the world’s best educated but most under-utilized (Mukherjee, 2015; Japan Times, 2019). High school education has reached equal levels for men and women (97%), and 49% of the women advance to higher education. However, Japan’s male-dominated labour system divides recruits into career track positions and general clerical work, in which many women are hired in the second category. Unlike their parents’ generation, many younger workers get part-time or temporary employment and experience delayed marriage and increased singlehood (Japan Times, 2007; Dales, 2014). This inequity has caused the phenomenon of “parasite singles”, referring to
Japanese who continue to live with their parents for a longer period of time than in previous generations. Women are willing to be risk-takers of a de-normalization of gendered roles at a transnational relocation to develop an individual and independent self. The search for the individualized self is a kind of gamble. Rather than wanting to live in a particular Western country, women often feel trapped within Japan, and have an urge to leave (Fujita, 2009) or escape it for a while. Similarly in China, a new desire has emerged among young women making a Westward journey to redefine a work identity and pursue self-development.

We all know it is difficult to get a job for women, and extremely difficult to get a satisfying job in China. After graduating university, luckily I got a job but a very ordinary one that could not expect self-development, so I quit.

It is hard to find a job when you have just graduated from university, though you are so ready to work! Just a BA degree is not sufficient to get a good job in the competitive market. An overseas MA degree with English and work experience is preferred. We call it a golden certificate.

Although modern women have learned to seek and embrace “self-development” through increasing education, the Chinese labour market impedes such possibilities. Education in China has witnessed a rapid development since the 1990s. The enrolment rate for women in higher educational institutions is more than 50% (Xinhua News, 2017). Despite the large expansion in educational access, educated women lack egalitarian labour market opportunities due to persistent gender norms, while the rise of unemployment in the urban labour market discriminates and removes women out of the workforce to control surplus labour problems (Liu, 2012; Mukherjee, 2015). Though “so ready to work”, new women graduates in cities have a hard time in locating their first job. Urban women tend to postpone marriage for the sake of a career, independence and personal freedom, seeking opportunities in Western higher education which would allow them to access international jobs outside the Chinese labour system. There emerges a desire for what they call a “golden certificate” to access a “global career” and a life of a “global woman” effectively moving out of the constraints of domestic work environments. It is against this context that Chinese women manifest an emerging attitude towards individualization, construction of a self-responsible life politics that is embraced as a positive yet anxious expression.

**Media consumption and transnational mobility**

Despite the paradoxical outcomes and anxieties of where women actually stand in a move towards individualization, multiple ways of imagining such a possibility are widely open in mediated cultural domains with proliferating resources for the mobilization of self. The women’s desire to move is constituted by the contradictory socioeconomic relations, as well as by the cultural-symbolic forms by which everyday life is lived out, re-thought and re-articulated in its intersection with the emergence of precarious individualized identities. This is frequently figured in their imagination of the West through the everyday media. The seemingly unachievable idea of individualization is endlessly played out in women’s “imagination” and “media talk” and thus remains an unresolved identity in everyday life (Kim, 2005, 2011, 2012).

In Western society, people choose any kind of life they want. The more I see it on the media, the more I think (in Korea). If I go there, wouldn’t life be free? I imagined such a possibility.
My job might be OK, my life might be OK compared to my mother’s. But I didn’t feel happy, couldn’t be satisfied with just that! I have bigger desires… The more I got to know bigger things through the media, the more I thought about them. I asked myself, am I having a happy life? Why can’t I live like that?

The media are implicated in the imaginative pull towards mobility and the emergence of fledgling individualized identities within women’s socio-cultural landscape, where the multitude of quotidian constraints and expressions for a not-yet-realized-self take place in their lack of choice and control. While the Korean society does not encourage women to pursue different ways of being, notions of a new self, an individualized individual, are effectively discovered and articulated within their mediated experience. A yearning for a new identity and a new mode of life is expanding in the globalizing, mediated world of everyday life, which stimulates a high degree of reflexivity in relation to lived experience and interweaves its relevance structure into an ongoing process of the self (Kim, 2008, 2011). Young Korean women appear to have more choices and capacities in life – higher education, more knowledge and better material provisions compared to past generations – yet this does not necessarily translate into greater happiness. Expectations of satisfaction have risen, affected by what other people have or an insatiable endless desire to have, which occurs through the intrusion of global cultural Others into everyday consciousness via the global media and has the consequence of causing both rising expectations and rising frustrations. The self-conscious engagement with, and symbolic exploration through, the media develops resources for self-imagining as an everyday social project that has a potential to transform everyday discourse of subjectivity and to mobilize the imagined self in actuality. This imaginative social practice as mediated by cultural consumption is grounded in deliberate agency and lived experience, generating multiple points of everyday reflexivity, self-monitoring, self-confrontation and self-analysis (“am I having a happy life?”). Younger generations of educated women today, more knowledgeable than ever previous generations, can be characterized by a growing reflexivity and the imagining of more choices or a “choice biography against a normal biography” (Giddens, 1991), constantly choosing, changing and constructing an identity, albeit predicated upon structural constraints, thereby a sense of happiness is heavily driven by the situation of imagined global Others and a “heightened desire to keep up with other people” (Layard, 2005). Young Japanese women, too, become increasingly aware of differences and changes in the socio-cultural position of women elsewhere in a wider world, while the process of their self-reflexive imagination in mediated culture can cause a sense of unhappiness and a prolonged decision to act upon.

I have gathered bits and pieces of images from TV, magazines, websites. Something you like always affects you somehow… You wait for that moment and go, at least once, to fulfil an endless desire to go.

So sick and tired of office work, one day I decided to do nothing and watched this (Western) film. Romance, freedom, laugher, London parks are so green! I felt, go there! It makes you feel something good can happen there… You know that is an illusion but you want to believe that illusion and go.

Bits and pieces of media cultures, self-constructed collage effects of images have been elaborated in mediated memory in order to contain pleasure, an element of possibility or an “endless desire to go”. The media play an important role in inducing transnational mobility for many young Japanese (Fujita, 2009). They have grown up much exposed to Western
architecture, landscapes of cities, cultures and lifestyles, while re-configuring a preferred view of the world and an ideal lifestyle they desire. The West is idealized in a desire for cultural diversity, an unfixed heterogeneous self and a greater range of possible lives, which marks a contrast to their own living conditions as constrained by gender. The significance of media consumption cannot be separated from the particular socioeconomic and cultural contexts within which they are embedded and called into. A desire to move away is an outcome of mediated relationships to the plurality of individual lifestyles and the process of dis-embedding from the nation. The aestheticization and romanticization of Western cities is known to be false but felt to be true or suggestive of possibility, “something good can happen there”. A general awareness of the link between media consumption and physical displacement exists in the women’s emotional investment in the media at a level of utopian sensibility. It is intertwined with good feelings the media embody and evoke – “utopian feelings of possibility” (Dyer, 1992) acting as temporary answers to the specific inadequacies of society and showing what solutions feel like. The media certainly construct an illusion or an image of something better that women’s day-to-day lives do not provide. But it is the intelligently detectable illusion that is put to work by knowing individuals. Media culture is a powerful pull factor in stimulating mobility, but this symbolic power is certainly recognized and intentionally allowed by educated women. This intentionality is at centre stage in the way the media are used and the meaning is mobilized by the knowledge class, including young Chinese women.

Life in China is so competitive, crowded and stressful. People work so hard, try to survive and win in competitive society… Bus is so crowded that you have to squeeze in. There is no space for your self. I started the everyday with this crowded bus… A bus ride in the West seemed fun, pleasant (on TV), people easily got on and got off. Wouldn’t it be nice to live in that environment? I saw this empty bus on TV a long time ago but still remember… Here, London bus is not crowded, most of time I can sit down and think. There is a space for thinking about my self.

The significance of media consumption can be understood as a dynamic and transformative process, often involving active and intended engagement. The construction of transnational subjectivities among the Chinese is facilitated by the mobility of media images and the media images of mobility (Sun, 2006). The flow of the media is a significant mediator of knowledge and an extension of social imagery from which women reconstruct their conceptions of self in comparison to global Others. The media present the prisms of possible lives through which women reflect on their life conditions in a critical way. This mediated experience can powerfully create and allow a space for the self to emerge in the fluidities of transnational imagination, while engaging with a newly found curiosity and a search for a new self that can be played out and actualized. Different ways to imagine the self are emerging in more individualist terms marked by an outward-looking reflexivity. Such self-reflexive imagination in an increasingly mediated world may not always lead to immediate action, but it is a historically accumulated quality through long-term exposure to the everyday media that potentially forms a powerful yet taken-for-granted, staging ground for the conduct of physical movement or a very firm orientation towards mobility. Media consumption is constitutive of the process of transnational mobility, female individualization and identity work, not to be seen as an entirely determining force but to be understood as a mediating cultural experience within an imaginative, seductive, yet highly selective and intentional, everyday social project of the self (Kim, 2011, 2012).
**Banal racism**

Migrant women may use a transnational space as a rare and effective way to avoid conformity to normative gender roles and obstacles to their individualization, in an effort to create self-identity in an extended process of reflexivity and a seemingly open and seductive culture of a world city. Dis-embedded from the everyday regulatory practices, migrant women try to negotiate their way around out of the initial familial and social position, and hope to find opportunities for a more self-fulfilling and independent lifestyle. Diasporic consciousness develops a new capacity to consider many cultural differences in everyday encounters and to reflect on who they are in relation to cultural Others, while the increasingly self-steered phenomenon produces the disproportionate cost making them remain vulnerable to the unpredictable and constraining aspects of diasporic conditions. The world city of the multiplicity of Others is a place that is “open to everyone who has their own caravan and money to pay the rent” (Bauman, 2001) but also a highly ambiguous place where every decision becomes a personal risk and the state of transnational existence is far from liberating.

I will be always a foreigner, though having lived here (London) for 7 years… I often moved room because of fleas, noisy neighbour, water leakage, blocked toilet that never got fixed. Nobody cares… People think moving is a good thing, freedom. But why bother to move if life is so good? I cannot articulate this repressive feeling but feel clearly… It’s the everyday little things that matter. Racism is not like hitting but staring or just ignoring. Is it because we are Korean, Asian? We imagined England would be a country of gentlemen.

It’s like proud B&B culture – people will always come to the city of Buckingham Palace and leave. It signals to foreigners, “If you don’t like it, go back to your country”. I will never belong… I do all on my own, feel so alone.

Korean women’s transnational lives are often described in terms of a struggle for articulation as a tool for progressive practice and emancipatory politics. This experiential lack of articulation with the yet-to-be-heard voices precludes the deeply felt tensions, while repressing a complex and many-sided translation of how the banal experience of the everyday (“little things”), thoughts and sentiments shape and define the meaning of marginal discourses, different conditions of being and becoming. Ambiguous and subliminal forms of banal racism (“not like hitting but staring or just ignoring”), inferiorization and alienation at an interpersonal level can be shocking when England was imagined to be different, cultivated. Racism is a sign of rejection that one will never belong (“always a foreigner”). In a changing Europe built on economic models of mobility and integration, mobile transnationals appear to face none of discrimination; however, seductive world cities are also national capitals which exclude even the most privileged of foreigners at a “human dimension” (Favell, 2008). Diasporic space is not primarily a sociable space to valorize, connect and exchange with Others, but a space of struggle to deal with societal insecurity and a tacit acceptance of individuated practice (“all on my own”). While women may enjoy greater autonomy in a newly found place, they also suffer in silence greater burdens, dilemmas of choice and personal responsibility, as revealed by Japanese women.

People’s knowledge of Japan is narrow. When I first met a British family, they said, “You don’t look like a Japanese woman”. What did they expect? Geisha in kimono? I just showed a smile … I cannot complain about life here because it is my choice, my responsibility.
Youna Kim

No quality food, no caring for others’ feelings… I stop fighting because it was my choice to move here, because my English is not good enough. I cannot even express frustration to outsiders as they say, “You live in attractive London!” My friend depressed in Paris hears the same, “You live in beautiful Paris!”

The choice is burdened by responsibilities, ambiguities and hidden pains that cannot be expressed in the dominant language; not being able to articulate is not liberating. Disarticulation and unsympathetic response is the predicament that they never fully resolve in daily struggles of living in the lure of world city, its glorified myth and (mis)perception to outsiders. Problems and anxieties of exclusion and foreignness are often experienced as individual faults or weaknesses (“because my English is not good enough”) and individual responsibilities (“because it is my choice, my responsibility”). This tendency shapes a diasporic consciousness that individuals are responsible for their own choices and any unspeakable situations they happen to face and inhabit. Some are concerned with politeness and avoidance of conflict by constructing a careful tactic (“smile”). Many reflect on why Japanese women are seen as exotic, docile subjects, “paragons of femininity as in the geisha”; perhaps this is because the image of Japanese and East Asian communities is one of invisibility or “sub-humannity”, in the absence of their diverse representation, in the voyeuristic obsession of the UK media culture (Aoki, 2006). While inhabiting in the new ambit of freedom of individual choice, women’s choice often confronts tensions and contradictions in struggling to achieve a certain level of self-expression and fulfilment, as indicated by Chinese women.

I still cannot express my self in English. This hurts me … I don’t fight racism, though it happens, because I’ve got a new habit of thinking it’s always my problem, always blame me, because of the language.

People have very low expectations of Chinese women. Working part-time I hear, “You’ve done a brilliant job!” It’s a too simple task for me with an MA degree … A top-class Beijing woman is suddenly a second-class.

I live with my boyfriend (white British). His mother says, “Take care of my son, you are so lucky!” His friends are similar. From their views, I am so lucky to marry a British man, I should feel happy, not complain about anything.

Everyday encounter and communication in the dominant language sometimes disturbs ontological security and confidence (“always my problem, always blame me”), intensifying women’s vulnerability to social marginality and ambiguous forms of alienation. Employment conditions and interpersonal relations with unbearably low expectations tend to confine them to a socioeconomically and psychologically inferior status (“second-class”). Those in wage labour often experience the racialization of global economy, low job positions by devaluation of place-bound ethnic identity, which does not have a potential of liberating migrants but widens transnational inequality. Racialized dimensions of labour inequality intersect with other structures of subordination to shape the lived experience of gendered global subjects in interracial intimacy with hierarchical world views associated with a particular national culture that generate the new regulation of race and romance. While interracial marriage emerges as an important means of producing transnational networks and relationships, it also produces unarticulated forms of gender inequality and gendered global subjects to be negotiated as normative constraints. It is the dialectical engagement wherein women position themselves and understand both the limited social reality and the limited symbolic, mediated relations.
Ethnic media and diasporic nationalism

The UK media can help migrants gain some knowledge of the host society, and users try to make sense of mediated culture in the first years of arrival; however, their sojourner mentality and how they think about belonging to the society (“always a foreigner”) are a crucial determinant of the modality of disengagement with the media. In the condition of being foreign, some media images are seen as disturbing the familiar and taken-for-granted character of migrant predisposition and modes of appreciation. Instead, quotidian experience of their national home is sustained through their ethnic media, seeking a sense of familiarity and inclusion that they rarely experience in a new disrupted place. Engagement with the ethnic media and communicative activities is a logical choice and determining resource gaining a special meaning “suddenly”.

I am suddenly addicted to our Korean media. I rarely watched TV in Korea as my social life was busy, colorful … Through website Naver I get all information, how to make food, kim-chi, do everything myself as everything in London is expensive.

It’s all there! Through the Internet I watch Korean dramas, download movies, music every night. I keep in touch with friends, express what I am doing, how I feel, what made me angry today.

Displaced subjects can find social ontological security in their own communication channels and become attached or even more (“suddenly addicted”) to the inclusive mediated community, while becoming less interested in or connected to the host society. The new connection to the ethnic media from the national homeland and its substantial impact can promote disengagement and further distance from the mainstream. New ways of being and feeling at home are created and sustained by means of virtual engagement. The “Korean Wave” media culture in a digital age (Kim, 2013) and variegated ritualistic links – via Korean social networking websites, infotainment online portals, food, drama, film, music as a constant background – are established in the structure of everyday life. This mediated experience away from home has multiple purposes; it is a response to the loss of belonging, a self-determined need to seek symbolic inclusion, a desire to connect with significant others back home and a pleasure to expand the space for self-expression, understanding and articulation in the language of home. The habits and strategies for experiencing home in the routines of diasporic lives develop into the Internet resources.

I get a headache for concentrating so much on English … Relax! Through the Internet I get all Japanese content, write diaries to friends in Japan, my English is not improving!

At the end of the day I email to my family and friends to express what happened, how I feel, to release frustration. I’ve got a new habit of confessing my self … They ask, “What do you eat? What sort of people do you meet?”

In conscious distance and anxiety (“my English is not improving!”), a culture of relaxation is built around the Japanese language media providing the capacity to participate in routine communicative activities and cultural spaces where talk and reflection allow for more pleasurable, self-referential modes of identification. The Internet with multifaceted infotainment and active networks, including Japan’s social networking sites, music, drama, comedy and variety shows, plays a key role in amplifying the pleasure of a shared sphere of familiarity and connection, a unity of constructed styles and practices that can create a temporarily effective
psychological comfort and directedness. Women on the move may be particularly avid users of the Internet as this resource is mobilized to deal with unresolved tensions and intricacies of interpersonal dynamics and relationships within the transnational social field. The Internet use is not a practice of mere communication but of active articulation and significance. The self is made visible, presented and understood in narrative (Giddens, 1991). The narrativization of the self – enacted through ritualistic and microelectronic engagement in the language of home – is an effective strategy and apparatus through which identity is produced and reaffirmed. What is significant here is not just the sheer availability of the Internet, but the self-determination of users and the consequences of how they use it.

If I have time to watch UK television, I would rather watch Chinese through the Internet. That’s why my English has not improved … The Internet is super! Every day, the first thing I do is to open the Chinese website and read news.

Anytime I can access through Chinese websites, all information, fashion, travelling, Visa advice, sharing life experience abroad, diaries of Chinese women married to Western men … While preparing Chinese dinner, eating alone, watching Chinese dramas on computer, I am home! I am feeling good, though Western flatmates mock, “Why do Chinese say yeng yeng yeng?”

The Chinese media, due to the de-territorializing Internet, are viable socio-cultural resources to open up channels of information and pleasure, self-expression and communicative encounter, to be sustained in the routinized activities of daily life. Media consumption becomes a ritualistic cultural practice in securing a character of communal life from home and abroad through rich, eclectic and multifaceted content, whether news, online forums with the Chinese diaspora or dramas from the national homeland, affirming a sense of connection through habituation. The Chinese language Internet is a regularly shared resource for diasporic difficulties and the expressive emotional repertoire – from anxieties about interracial relationships, visa troubles, food interests, to the meanings of home in the midst of displacement. Home is invented in the diasporic imagination and is sometimes secured through its familiar sounds and familiar smells (“Chinese dinner”) as mediated and experienced by the diasporic media in the humdrum of everyday lived culture. For mobile women, the simultaneous absence and presence of home is in the making. The sites of media consumption remain central to the home-building project and the pursuit of livelihood (“feeling good”), identity and status when threatened or challenged. Migrant women tend to affirm a sense of continuity, self-esteem and deliberate nationalism that is emotively marked and powerful.

Watching TV back home I imagined life here, but living here I become indifferent. Never felt my essential self as Korean so strongly before. I become more Korean, unique while living abroad… I don’t fit quite here or quite there. I can live anywhere in the world if there is a good job and the Internet connection for all Korean stuff.

I am solid Japanese. Never thought about this identity in Japan… The fact that I’ve lived in foreign countries for 7 years and speak English does not mean I am changing, it just means a physical move… What is the quality of living and actual experience motivates whether or not you want to change.

I feel like a woman warrior of China. I feel the wall, whether that is racism, invisible hostility, coldness, or superiority in culture… I am becoming more Chinese while living abroad. This feeling grows.
Digital media and East Asian diaspora

For many women who are acutely aware of the reality of foreignness, how much they differ from the majority, their transnational lives do not easily result in emancipation. The imagined West becomes a problem after their migration as the media back home represented desirable images of the West without signalling actual conditions and banal racism. Women’s diasporic experience suggests an emotional struggle and a hidden fight to create a representational space and a defiant voice that can speak against inferiorization. This impedes or denies them the possibility of becoming transnational, transcending the national and existing boundaries, and instead compels them into ethnic particularism and its reified identity positions within a transnational field. A paradox is that the more physically close, the more they try to remain different, distinct. Far from moving beyond nation-defined ethnic markers, the tendency is to foster distinctly national identity (“becoming more Chinese while living abroad”, “solid Japanese”, “more Korean, unique”). The search for uniqueness becomes intense and dependent on the ethnic media space where the symbolic construction of internal and external boundaries is regularly sustained. Although some aspect of lifestyle change can make women feel incompatible with lives back home, there is a strong denial of association or influence from the West host society, finding themselves located neither “quite here” nor “quite there”; indeed, neither place is desirable any longer. To resist a Western influence is a quality that manifests itself in lived relations of difference, often as a reaction to the hegemonic racial order, as a conscious way of re-claiming their status. The ethnic media use proliferating through the Internet is mobilized to sustain diasporic nationalism in the trajectories of women’s nomadic voyaging (“can live anywhere”) as there is no yearning for returning home. The ethnic media are at the centre of the process of national identification reclaiming bounded yet vital identity in the wired transnational world.

An unintended consequence of the new connectivity and meaning of being in a digital world is a revitalization of national subjectivity, perhaps more than ever, often expressing nationalized difference and uniqueness in the midst of massive transnational flows and reconfigurations. Transnational identification is not available to all migrant subjects. Nations are inevitably in the making; transnational mobility can work to reinforce diasporic nationalism in a digital age (Kim, 2011 and 2017). Diasporic nationalism emerges within a larger transnational framework, reinstating a territorial space for revitalized national perspectives and reifying the taken-for-grantedness of essentialist identities. Ironically, the choice to live in the world does not necessarily lead to an expanded world view or enlargement of self, but rather a constrictive one that is an inevitable consequence of the lived experience of social closure.

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