

On Material Engagement with Nature: Reviewing the Construction of Diasporic Space

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Abstract

With the acceleration of globalization, studies in diaspora have increasingly absorbed geographic ideas. Research on the relationship between nature and humankind has thrown new light on discussions of diaspora. However, there are few in-depth studies addressing the construction of diasporic space in relation to the materiality of the natural world. Considering the relative absence of the natural environment as a serious subject in contemporary diaspora studies, the starting point of this article is to review the implicit understandings of the natural world in diaspora research (Clifford: *Diasporas*; Brah: *Cartographies of diaspora*; Gittins: *The diggers from China*; Ma and Cartier: *The Chinese diaspora*). This article attempts to explore the connections between diasporic experiences and the living natural environment, as presented in previous theoretical writings (James Clifford, Avtar Brah, Rod Giblett) and case studies (Anna Tsing and Cruse Beryl etc.), most notably those focusing on the relationships between space, place and people. However, in most of the existing works, diasporic-related concepts of nature, place, and space are abstractions and generalizations. In this article, I suggest that specific embodied and material engagement with the natural environment needs to be factored into notions of diasporic space. Through analyzing the cases of the matsutake mushroom in the United States and the abalone in Australia, this article argues that "diasporic space" is an ecocultural construction comprising cultural spaces and natural places, and related to a range of diasporic social practices and human experiences in different natural environments. Diasporic space is both cultural and natural, both abstract and material.

Keywords: Abalone; Matsutake; Cultural studies; Nature; Diasporic experiences

1. Introduction

"Mr Chau 'fell in love with Perth at once.' He liked its spacious streets, its bright shops, its beautiful gardens and its meandering river, its tempo"¹. These lines describe the first impression that Perth's natural environment made on a new Chinese arrival. Indeed, wherever a person migrates, there is always something natural attracting him, touching him, changing him, and communicating with him. This something in nature may be as large as a mountain or as tiny as a seed; it possesses vital importance in the formation of the migrant's new living space and the relocation of his traditional cultural values. It is clear from the above quote that a new space for diaspora is constructed at the intersection of the cultural space and the natural place, despite the relationships between nature and human beings being given only peripheral attention in paradigmatic studies in diaspora (including research into transnational identities, hybridity, attachment to

¹"Chinese Likes 'Us Blokes'," *The Daily News* (Perth: The Daily News, Saturday 28 October 1944), 29.

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motherland, and social contexts of diaspora).

With respect to contemporary research into "diasporic space", there is a need for further research into the relationships between the natural environment and diasporic groups, particularly within the frameworks of cultural space articulated by cultural studies and natural place as theorized by the environmental humanities. This is the starting point for this article in its investigation of nature's influence on the establishment of a diasporic space. The approach used in this article is to review cross-disciplinary theories to develop a definition of diasporic space that includes material engagements with the natural world. Clifford's "travelling culture" theory opens a door to a broader framework of diasporic research, in which diasporic identities and cultures are no longer exclusively studied within nation-state boundaries, and places are not regarded as static geographic areas but the dynamic sites of spatial practices. Therefore, his theory articulates the concept of "diaspora space" [sic] as observed by Brah in which a site encompasses the dialectic identities of both the diasporans and the "natives"². In regard to natural environment, this article will absorb Ma's geographic ideas of space and place in the view of diaspora while borrowing the concept of cultural studies of nature posited by Giblett, which is regarded as a fundamental perspective to explore the synthesis of the natural world with diasporic space. Moreover, the distinctive human-nature work of Tsing invites a comprehensive understanding of diasporic space constructed by cultural, historical, economic, social and also natural influences.

In contrast to the absence of nature in mainstream diasporic studies, some significant research into diaspora, particularly the Chinese diaspora, has pointed to an interest in landscape modification in the hostland by the diaspora. In particular, Chinese market gardening and gold mining have been outlined in the historical research into early Chinese immigrant experiences in North America or Australia³. However, recent studies have not contributed nuanced views of the relationships between humankind and the natural world in the reconstruction of the vocabulary of diasporic space. This article will attempt to articulate the profound influence of the natural environment on the establishment of diasporic space through the case analysis of abalone fishing by the Chinese diaspora in Australia. Not limited to the notion of spatial networks linking homeland and hostland, diasporic space involves both cultural space and natural place. The cultural space includes facets such as cultural traditions, transnational identities and local cultural experiences while the natural environment is the material, embodied place involving humans' livelihood practices.

²Avtar Drab, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 209.

³Marilyn Dawsor, "Gardening: Chinese Vegetables Successful." *The Globe and Mail* (Apr 22, 1982): T.S.

Jean Gittins, *The Diggers from China: The Story of Chinese on the Goldfields* (Melbourne: Quartet Books Australia, 1981).

Tom Maccubbin, "Flavors from the Far East Exotic Veggies Find a Home in Local Gardens." *Orlando Sentinel* (Nov 17, 1990): G15.

Barry McGowan, "Chinese Market Gardens in Southern and Western New South Wales."

Australian Humanities Review, no. 36 (2005),

<http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-July-2005/10McGowan.html>.

Jan Ryan, *Ancestors: Chinese in Colonial Australia* (South Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Center Press, 1995).

2. Diasporic Space and Natural places

The word "diaspora", stemming from the Greek words "*speiro*" (sow) and "*dia*" (over), referred to migration and colonization in Ancient Greek thought⁴. In the histories of earlier diasporic movements, such as those of Jews, Africans, and Palestinians, the term encompasses ethnic exile and collective nostalgia for mother countries. However, in recent transnational studies, diaspora is also applied to the people who voluntarily migrate in globally spatial flows, with no colonizing purposes or other reasons, such as fleeing persecution. Accordingly, diaspora is studied variously as "a process, a group of people, a geographic area and a spatial network"⁵.

It is widely accepted by geographers and many other researchers that space and place are the pivotal concepts in the understandings of the ideas of diaspora. Following Harvey, Reiph, Massey, and Silverstone, Barker⁶ argues that in contemporary social and cultural studies, the absence (relations between absent others)-presence (face to face) distinction between space and place is rigid. Instead, "space and time constitute each other" in which human interaction is infused with various social meanings. Meanwhile, the places are not only geographical locations but also focal points of "human experience, memory, desire and identity". From the perspective of human experience, Tuan argues that "place is security, space is freedom: we are attached to the one and long for the other"⁷. Thus, despite its conceptual incompleteness in diaspora research, a diasporic space is a "place-centered and network-based" space⁸. Echoing Clifford's argument for "culture as a site of travel", Brah⁹ claims that "diaspora space" is an "inhabited" site in which a diasporan is constructed and represented as indigenous. The cultural point of "place", for Giblett, is not so much the geographic meaning, as it is about nature, which is a cultural construction involving "biological processes that make life and culture possible"¹⁰. Intertwining the existing concepts of diasporic space with the notion of culture of nature, a diasporic space can be understood as both a conceptual space and a material place hybridising culture and nature.

Although close relationships between diaspora and nature have not been figured into the theorisation of diasporic space, some implicit descriptions lie in varied relevant studies. One established principle is the idea of space and place in the application of diaspora research. Even though Clifford does not explicitly discuss the notions of "place" and "space", in terms of spatiotemporal practices, he distinguishes diaspora from travel, which he defines as a practice only undertaken in a short period. Diaspora "involves dwelling, maintaining communities, having collective homes away from home"¹¹. In addition, he argues that diaspora has a dialectic relationship with "the norms of nation-states", the "indigenous", and the "especially autochthonous"¹². The terms of dwelling, home, indigenous, and autochthonous implicitly point to

⁴Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (Florence: Routledge, 1987), ix.

⁵Laurence J. C. Ma and Carolyn Cartier, eds., *The Chinese Diaspora: Space, Place, Mobility and Identity* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 7.

⁶Chris Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice* (London: Sage Publications, 2003), 347-350

⁷Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), 3.

⁸Ma and Cartier, eds., *The Chinese Diaspora: Space, Place, Mobility and Identity*, 9.

⁹Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*, 208-209.

¹⁰Rod Giblett, "Nature Is Ordinary Too." *Cultural Studies* 26, no. 1(2012), 12.

¹¹James Clifford, "Diasporas." *Cultural Anthropology* 9, no. 3 (1994), 308.

¹²Clifford, "Diasporas", 307.

the context of the natural world.

Another indication of the relationships between nature and diaspora comes from Clifford's research into specific diasporic groups. While discussing diaspora's resistance to the hostland, he refers to the examples of "anti-Zionist Jewish writing" and the "religion of the land" in Jewish tradition¹³. He states that autochthonous people "stress continuity of habitation, aboriginality, and often a 'natural' connection to the land", which contrast to the considerable practices of travel and settlement of diaspora¹⁴. The influence of the natural world does not appear in his discussion, yet it is vividly implied through the concepts of land, habitation, and aboriginality.

Similarly, as a geographer, Ma integrates geographic principles into research on Chinese diaspora. He contends that geography means "dynamic spatial and place-based processes"¹⁵. For Ma:

Diasporas are functional spaces, characterized by the movement of people, capital, goods and information between homeland and hostland or among the places where a diasporic population is settled. A diasporic place is a located context for spatial interaction, and various interconnected places give rise to a diasporic activity space.¹⁶

His definition implies an interconnection between motherland and "settleland". The natural world is a part of both motherland and settleland, and influences the construction of human memory, experience and desire. Indeed, these relationships between diaspora and the natural world are the precise foundation for diasporic processes, peoples and spaces. Yet, the natural environment has been largely left out of diasporic research (although implicit references to nature do exist in various forms, as I have shown), and has largely been overshadowed by abstractions of space and place.

A further example is in Brah's work *Cartographies of Diaspora*. For Brah, who has had 'homes' in Asia, Africa, America, and Europe, the key point for the understanding of diaspora and "diaspora space" is politics. Despite the absence of the idea of the natural world in her new concept of "diaspora space", she outlines her memories of home in Uganda with a detailed description of nature:

The hours spent as a child combing the Shamba at Naviwumbi; monitoring with incredible patience every detail of the metamorphosis of a pond of tadpoles into frogs; playing in the warm rain that would begin to beat down in huge bursts, quite out of the blue, and dry up just as suddenly; the aroma of the red soil after the first rain drops, and the sheer pleasure of climbing trees to pick mangoes or jamuns; the gentle murmur of the Nile as it springs out of Lake Victoria; journeys through the lush green forest lining the road from Jinja (my hometown) to Kampala; the trials and tribulations, as well as the joys, of adolescence ...all this and much more was part of my very being.¹⁷

¹³Clifford, "Diasporas", 307.

¹⁴Clifford, "Diasporas", 307.

¹⁵Ma and Cartier, eds., *The Chinese Diaspora: Space, Place, Mobility and Identity*, 7.

¹⁶Ma and Cartier, eds., *The Chinese Diaspora: Space, Place, Mobility and Identity*, 8.

¹⁷Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*, 2.

She regards these memories as an important part of the political character of "nation", one of the driving forces to construct "the multiaxiality of power"¹⁸. However, the diasporan's sense of the natural environment, not only contributing to the formation of politics of location, but also having profound influence on everyday practice in both homeland and hostland, is essential for distinguishing a diasporic space.

Other examples that support the argument of the implicit influence of the natural world in diasporic space can be seen from some studies of diasporic Chinese. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, escaping from wars or poverty, Chinese laborers (also known as Coolies) and tradesmen immigrated to almost every continent of the world in search of a better life. "Mining was still their main pursuit but thousands of other Chinese were laundrymen, hotel cooks, fishmongers, furniture makers, and pastoral workers'. Gittins depicts the general living conditions of the Chinese diggers in the Australian goldfields. Besides a complete difference in physical appearances from Europeans, particularly in relation to diet and eating habits, Chinese workers did not always make use of the local food resources of the hostland despite there being plenty. "Mutton was cheap and plentiful, but as they found its odor offensive, it was seldom included in their diet. They lived instead on beans and vegetables — they were past masters in the cultivation of all vegetables"²⁰. Following this, Gittins²¹ presents a very interesting case of how Chinese count their lunar calendar through planting lotus lily roots to remind themselves of necessary agricultural activities:

If planted before the birthday of the Buddhist goddess Kwan Yin, which falls on the sixteenth day of the second month of each lunar year, the flowers will rise above the leaves in the pond, but if for some reason the day is missed and the planting delayed, the flowers will form and open under the large, round leaves...so that they would know when to sow which vegetable seeds and when to expect the harvest.²²

In this case, connected to the natural environment, the diasporic group of early Chinese in Australia experienced alienation in the new place-based space. Researching Chinese diaspora in Perth, Western Australia, also during the era of cheap labor (the earliest Chinese worker came to Western Australia in 1829, even before the gold rush), Ryan sketches how enterprising Chinese gardeners modified the landscape along the South Perth foreshore, "how the land was crisscrossed with hand-dug canals, and pitted with wells. Vegetables, varying seasonally, made a changing kaleidoscope of color, their organized rows contrasting starkly with the unruly bamboo which flanked the gardens"²³. Ryan argues that the attraction of this area was the natural conditions of "moderate weather" and "Western Australian waterways", which were suitable for "traditional Chinese farming methods"²⁴. The adaptive and intimate relationship between diaspora and the nat-

¹⁸Brah, *Canoraphies ofDiaspora*. 16.

¹⁹Gittins, *The Diggers from China: The Story of Chinese on the Goldfields*, v.

²⁰Gittins, *The Diggers from China: The Story of Chinese on the Goldfields*, 113.

²¹Gittins, *The Diggers from China: The Story of Chinese on the Goldfields*, 114.

²²Gittins, *The Diggers from China: The Stan al-Chinese on the Goldfields*, 114.

²³Ryan, *Ancestors: Chinese in Colonial Australia*, 11.

²⁴Ryan, *Ancestors: Chinese in Colonial Australia*, 11.

ural world provides an insight into the understanding of diasporic space. In terms of the existing concepts of diaspora space, material practices of living and livelihood ought to figure more prominently in conceptualizations of the diasporan and the indigenous person.

3. Cases of Matsutake in the U.S. and Abalone in Australia

Reflecting the perspective of the environmental humanities, Tsing's research into mushroom foraging by Japanese Americans and Southeast Asian Americans is an exemplary study of the intersection between diaspora and the natural world. Matsutake, a special kind of aromatic wild mushroom, is a precious ingredient in Japanese traditional dishes. Through the large demand of Japanese consumers, it has been foraged from forests across the northern hemisphere. In the forests of the US Pacific Northwest, compared with Caucasian commercial pickers such as Vietnam veterans and loggers, Japanese American pickers are a distinct group that harvests mainly for the purposes of maintaining cultural heritages and for personal enjoyment and family bonding. The mushroom harvest history of the diasporic Japanese community has lasted for a century. Today this tradition has developed as a symbol of Japanese culture through sharing the mushrooms among community members. One of their favorite picking sites is Oregon's Mt. Hood, "a volcanic cone whose dramatic shape reminds the community of Japan's iconic Mt. Fuji"²⁵. Tsing concludes that for the Japanese Americans, "matsutake builds a sense of pleasure and community"²⁶. Further, "all of this history is layered on the landscape, threaded in and out of the spots we check for new life emerging"²⁷. In her work, another group of families, war refugees from Lao, had entirely different experiences of American citizenship. Without the cultural history of mushroom picking, their foraging work is "both a livelihood and a vacation" because living in the mushroom camp is "a chance to re-create village life" while "hiking the Oregon forests reminded them of the hills of Laos"²⁸. These cases offer an instructive model of diasporic lives intertwining with the natural environment, including the memories of the homeland nature and the communal landscape in the hostland. It is the recognition of common diasporic life that forms the foundation of a diasporic space in the natural world. In the Southern hemisphere, over ten thousand miles away from the United States, abalone fishing narrates comparable relations between Australian Chinese and nature, just as mushroom foraging does in the Pacific Northwest.

Abalone, named *Baoyu* in Chinese, is mentioned in Chinese literature two thousand years ago as an expensive delicacy for the nobility²⁹. Hitherto, it has been one of the most luxurious ingredients (the others are sea cucumber, shark fin, and bird's nest) of Chinese cuisine, which is usually prepared for lavish banquets³⁰. Inheriting the thinking of their ancestors, Chinese people believe that abalone meat provides abundant nutrition while abalone juice has been shown in the oldest medicine textbooks to be an effective treatment for some blood diseases³¹. According to an

²⁵Anna Tsing, "Dancing the Mushroom Forest," *PAN: Philosophy, Activism, Nature* 10 (2013), 7.

²⁶Tsing, "Dancing the Mushroom Forest," 10.

²⁷Tsing, "Dancing the Mushroom Forest," 10.

²⁸Tsing, "Dancing the Mushroom Forest," 11.

²⁹Gu Ban, *Han Shu* (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1962), Vol. 99.

³⁰Tong, Zhou, "Baoyu: Meishi, Fugui Yu Quanli [Abalone: Delicacy, Wealthy and Powell]" *Chinese National Geography* 519, no. 1 (2004).

³¹Zhou, "Baoyu: Meishi, Fugui Yu Quanli."

article in *Chinese national geography*, there are over seventy species of abalone known in the world and eight of them are found in Chinese marine areas, in which the species *Haliotisassimilis*, *Haliotisroei*, and *Haliotisdiversicolor* are the three with highest market value. Although since the late 1980s, abalone farming along Chinese coastlines from the north to the south has been successfully increasing to supply the gap between consumption and harvesting, only a small percentage of the Chinese population has tasted this delicious mollusc. Even some seaside inhabitants have had no opportunity to try it during their lifetime³². In Chinese history and culture, the uncommon dishes prepared with abalone symbolize an elite social, economic and political status.

For centuries, abalone has been widely used by Indigenous people living by the seas, mainly in Australia, New Zealand, East Asia, and North America, as an important food resource. In the book *Mutton Fish*, the Australian Aboriginal authors mention that abalone is "easy to find and harvest, extremely rich in energy and accessible for as long as the beaches are freely open to all, this has always been a subsistence food"³³. Certain Australian Aboriginal cultures have a strong attachment to the coastal environment. In the south coast of New South Wales, the oldest archaeological find of walkun shells in a midden of the ancient people may be traced back to about 3700 years ago³⁴. The authors point out how the name of abalone changed as Aboriginal people progressively engaged with modern society on the south coast of New South Wales. In 1844, George Augustus Robinson recorded that abalone was called walkun by the Nullica people of Twofold Bay. This period in Australian history was of "the pre-contact story of the Aboriginal use of shellfish resources"³⁵. The second period in this book is presented as the "mutton fish" section covering a phase from the earliest contact between the Aboriginal people and the European arrivals in eighteenth century to the 1960s, when large-scale abalone fishery for commercial purposes started increasing³⁶. In the second period, the early European explorers and settlers named the mollusc "ear shell" by its shape or "mutton fish" because its smell and taste resemble mutton flaps. "Mutton fish" is also regarded as a name that originated from the Aboriginal tribe Koori's language because these people still use the term today. Since the 1960s, under fervent worldwide demand for the mollusc, the Spanish American name "abalone" has become Popular in international trades.

It is quite difficult to specify the exact year when ancient Chinese people and Australian Aboriginal people began to use abalone in their diet. However, there is no doubt that far beyond the range of food resources, abalone acts as a cultural metaphor for the both cultures and their histories. Chinese people introduced abalone into the recipes of Eastern Asian countries before the 6th century and later this ingredient became globally popularized by Asian immigrants, even to some areas where it had not been eaten previously³⁷. Despite the abundant distribution of abalone along Chinese coastlines, due to its slow growth cycle and overfishing for years, abalone is still a

³²Zhou, "Baoyu: Meishi, Fugui Yu Quanli."

³³Beryl Cruse, Liddy Stewart and Sue Norman, *Mutton Fish: The Surviving Culture of Aboriginal People and Abalone on the South Coast of New South Wales* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2005), xi.

³⁴Cruse, Stewart and Norman, *Mutton Fish*, 8.

³⁵Cruse, Stewart and Norman, *Mutton Fish*, xii.

³⁶Cruse, Stewart and Norman, *Mutton Fish*, 15.

³⁷Zhou, "Baoyu Meishi, Fugui Yu Quanli."

scarce resource only accessed by the privileged class according to centuries-old tradition. Unlike the role of abalone in Chinese culture, which is usually recognized as a ritual of eating in the social life, for modern Australian Aboriginal people, the culture of walkun inscribes the development and the alteration of their lifestyle while walkun also symbolizes their history, and their heritage. From this perspective, these two cultures provide convincing evidence to demonstrate that the local material resources of the natural environment have profound influences on the formation of a unique culture.

Interestingly, the history of this little mollusc encompasses Chinese and Aboriginal people, as well as European settlers, especially with the arrivals of large numbers of Chinese gold miners after 1855:

In New South Wales, Chinese entrepreneurs set up fishing and fish drying operations in the 1860s just north of Sydney to supply the goldfields. Aboriginal people were employed to collect mutton fish for these traders. At this time, Chinese Entrepreneur Ah Chouney was reported to have owned up to twenty boats, employing mainly European crews.³⁸

These Chinese fish factories provided not only a delicacy to China and other Asian countries, but also the buttons made of abalone shells for widespread use in the clothing industry. It is said that the reason for the extinction of abalone in the area of Palm Beach was the sky-rocketing interest in muttonfish for Chinese trade. After the gold rushes, some Chinese living in South Australia continued lucrative muttonfish trades. "Aboriginal people were able to use their traditional diving skills and their extended family labour in their beach camps to work with the Chinese, right along the south coast"³⁹. Afterwards, some Aboriginal employees who had learned the skills to dry and preserve fresh abalone from their Chinese workmates started their own family manufactures to trade with Chinese⁴⁰. From this case study of abalone, it is obvious that cultures, such as Chinese, Australian Aboriginal, and also European, which had introduced ideas of modernization to China, are closely involved with everyday practices related to the living materiality of the natural world.

Abalone, a treasure of nature, is a bridge joining the cultures of Chinese motherland and the nature of Australia. On this bridge, traditional Chinese culture brought by Chinese diaspora has relocated in the embrace of the Australian natural environment. Meanwhile, the abalone is an agent of the combining of Chinese and Australian Aboriginal cultures, as well as local cultures of various regional backgrounds. The interdependent relationships between ethnic cultures have lasted for centuries via the communication in abalone exploration. Furthermore, abalone is a carrier to assist the passing of Chinese traditions to diasporic generations, particularly to the Australian born Chinese who are increasingly alienated from Chinese culture and heritage. All these dimensions of abalone demonstrate the importance of the natural environment in the construction of the living space for the diaspora. Rather than focusing on confusing transnational identities, the consideration of the materiality of nature in the conceptualization of a diasporic

³⁸Cruse, Stewart and Norman, *Mutton Fish*, 29.

³⁹Cruse, Stewart and Norman, *Mutton Fish*, 29.

⁴⁰Cruse, Stewart and Norman, *Mutton Fish*, 31.

space offers a more specific perspective in relation to the everyday aspects of diaspora.

3. A Cultural Construction

In contrast with the original sense of exile, contemporary knowledge of diaspora broadly involves transnational travel, resettlement in a new place and everyday experiences during the process of geographic relocation. In the establishment of a diasporic space, one of the basic components identified by theorists is the travelling culture. Clifford remarks that cultures are travelling in terms of "cosmopolitanisms" "by tourists, by oil pipelines, by Western commodities, by radio and television signals"⁴¹. He insists that if culture is the "representable whole form" of an organizing set of time and space, culture "comes to resemble as much a site of travel"⁴². For Clifford, travelling culture is also a distinction between immigration and diaspora:

Immigrants may experience loss and nostalgia, but only en route to a whole new home in a new place. Such ideologies are designed to integrate immigrants, not people in diaspora. Whether the national narrative is one of common origins or of gathered populations, it cannot assimilate groups that maintain important allegiances and practical connections to a homeland or a dispersed community located elsewhere.⁴³

From his perspective, a definition of "immigrant" relates to groups of people who are in the process of relocation while the concept of diaspora is tightly connected to the reconstruction of the original cultures in a new environment, within which the process intrinsically includes travelling. Applying the concepts of cultural site and cultural travelling to the category of diaspora, a diasporic space might be regarded as not merely a site for the transferable identities between the diasporan and the native as Brah argues. Diasporic space is also the convergence of traditional cultural experiences and the hostland's cultural influences, as Clifford identifies that "diaspora culture" is "maintained and transformed by the new environment". In addition, constructive memory is crucial to retain a collective sense in the diasporic community, and to transmit "a relatively continuous, if rearticulated, cultural substance"⁴⁵. The terms "new environment" and "cultural substance" are precisely manifested by the "mushroom" for the American Japanese diaspora or "abalone" for the Australian Chinese diaspora. However, Clifford only highlights that "cultural dwelling cannot be considered except in specific historical relations with cultural travelling", marginalising the importance of material engagements with the natural world, which are also included in the cultural substance, in the formation of memories and the dwelling of diasporic cultures.

Nature features in the categories of diasporic cultural studies. In previous studies it has featured as a conceptual framework; in my study it features as a material category focusing on

⁴¹James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 28.

⁴²Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, 25.

⁴³Clifford, *Routes*, 251.

⁴⁴Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, 44.

⁴⁵Clifford, *Routes*, 44.

everyday experience and use of nature. Giblett⁴⁶ critiques previous cultural research approaches that exclude cultural studies of nature. Despite its absence at the beginning of "cultural studies" in the late 1950s, nature should be included within the cultural construction because it is regarded as "the biological processes that make life and culture possible, and the nature as a surface of inscription for the culture"⁴⁷. He contends "culture and nature as ordinary"⁴⁸ from the perspective of ecocultural studies, echoing Williams' argument that culture is ordinary and "a whole way of life"⁴⁹.

Demonstrated by the "mushroom case" and "abalone example", these views are also relevant to studies of contemporary diasporans. Mushroom and abalone are natural materials, as survival food resources for the first peoples or traditional diet ingredients for diasporans. The initial purpose of mushroom foraging and abalone harvesting for the diasporans is earning a living, regardless of personal or commercial use, in the process of resettlement in a new environment, as part of "a whole way of life". In addition, in developing Habermas' argument that the "objective environmental nature" is constituted through "processes of social labour", Giblett advocates that these processes should include domestic labor in the house, ecological work in the earth-household, and "multi-sensory engagement and enjoyment" in our own bodies". Thus, he concludes that "nature is constituted as the ordinary stuff of work and everyday life"⁵¹. Life is ordinary in the discourse of geographic place and daily living. As Ma argues the diasporic space is "place-centered"⁵², a diasporic space is also ordinary as a cultural construction in constant relation to the local nature of a new place.

Following this line of thinking, natural materials are also cultural substances in the construction of a diasporic space, which definitely is a "network-based" space⁵³. The "network" may be understood in several phases. The first one is embedded in the fundamental meaning of connections between the members of dispersed groups from the same original homeland. The second meaning is associated with the global spatial practices of capitals, trades, labour forces, and information. The third sense of the network takes root within "intra-diasporic contexts and events"⁵⁴. These diasporic contexts and events, based in everyday life, decide the cultural substance inherited from diasporic generations through constructive memories. Reflecting on the mushroom and abalone cases, on one hand, they represent memories of traditional foods in particular cultures gained from the senses of sight, smell, and taste in the dishes. On the other hand, the processes of foraging and fishing add a new sense of touch, a fresh embodied memory

⁴⁶Rod Giblett, *Landscapes of Culture and Nature*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

"Nature is Ordinary Too." *Cultural Studies* 26, no. 1 (2012): 12.

People and Places of Nature and Culture. Bristol and Chicago: Intellect, 2011.

⁴⁷Giblett, "Nature Is Ordinary Too," 4.

⁴⁸Giblett, "Nature Is Ordinary Too," 4.

⁴⁹Raymond Williams, "Culture Is ordinary." In *Resources of Hope: Culture. Democracy Socialism*, ed. R. Cable (London: Verso, 1989), 4.

⁵⁰Giblett, *People and Places of Nature and Culture*, 50-51.

⁵¹Giblett, "Nature Is Ordinary Too," 6.

⁵²Ma and Cartier, eds., *The Chinese Diaspora: Space, Place. Mobility and Identity*, 9.

⁵³Ma and Cartier, eds., *The Chinese Diaspora*, 9.

⁵⁴Ma and Cartier, eds., *The Chinese Diaspora: Space, Place, Mobility and Identity*, 9.

developed in the new land. Therefore, cultural substance, involving the natural materials of places, combines two phases of memories from the homeland and the hostland. Through memory clusters of this kind, a diasporic space is built on the networks between diasporic experiences and embodied places

Tuan's argument about the close relationship between the natural environment and world view is creditable, notwithstanding his insistence on ocularcentrism in human's perceptions of the environment, which is unsuitable for an overall understanding of diasporic experiences through all the senses. He sums up that the *world view* is "constructed out of the salient elements of a people's social and physical setting"⁵⁵ and "space and place are basic components of the lived world"⁵⁶. In this vein, contemporary diasporic space is conceived as a cultural construction by cultural spaces and natural places, involving social experiences with the dual identities as both diasporic and local, and continuous living practices in the context of nature.

In other words, a diasporic space is both natural and cultural. It is erroneous to divide the natural from cultural components because a diasporic space integrates all cultural and natural substances during diasporic processes; a diasporic space is ecocultural. Furthermore, unlike the existing concepts, a diasporic space should be regarded as, simultaneously and always, abstract and material. According to Tuan, space is open, free and dynamic while place is secure and stable. "If we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place"⁵⁷. However, in diasporic stories, which are inherently involving movement and dislocation, the meaning of place is, as Edward Casey describes, gathering things with "various animate and inanimate entities", and "experiences and histories, even languages". Doreen Massey suggests "space might be something abstract that might be mapped out, flattened or occupied by places"⁵⁸. Pink comments that, for Casey and Massey, space is primary in the relationship with place while both Casey's and Massey's approaches "acknowledge the human and non-human elements of place and suggest how place as event is constantly changing through social and material relations and practices"⁵⁹. Pink concludes that Ingold's definition of place constructs a sense between the former two approaches. If places are "occurring through the intersections and proximities of pathways as they are entangled", then they are events constituted in "a meshwork of paths"⁶⁰. This argument demonstrates the construction of a diasporic space as a "place-centered" and experience-based network. In the frame of space, the sense of diasporic space is abstract; in the context of place, associating with natural materials, the diasporic space becomes physical and embodied. A diasporic space, comprising natural and cultural substances, crosses between material experiences and abstract conceptualisations.

This understanding of diasporic space is not intended to supersede or render obsolete previous theories. On the contrary, this approach to reinvestigating the definition of diasporic

⁵⁵Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1974), 79.

⁵⁶Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, v.

⁵⁷Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, 6.

⁵⁸Quoted in Sarah Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (Melbourne: SAGE, 2009), 30-31.

⁵⁹Quoted in Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography*, 32.

⁶⁰Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography*, 32-33.

space shares common ground with existing ideas, which, when brought together provide more comprehensive insights into studies of diaspora. Clifford stresses that "specific histories of population movement, exile, and labor migration require new approaches to the representation of 'diaspora cultures'"⁶¹. Since the last few decades, established theories have gradually absorbed cross-disciplinary ideas, notably "space and place" from geographic research, into the studies of diaspora. However, these notions of space and place are still abstractions, removed from the material, embodied and ecological basis of nature. With new diasporic phenomena appearing in recent years it would be worthwhile to inspire more exploration into diasporic studies that traverses the environmental humanities, particularly through the perspective of the relationships between humankind and nature.

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⁶¹Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, 27.