

ABSTRACT

With the implementation of economic reforms in the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the relaxation of restrictions on foreign travel, a new wave of overseas migration from mainland China has taken place. Compared to the earlier waves of Chinese emigrants who were semi-literate peasants and craftsmen, many new Chinese migrants are highly educated professionals and are extremely mobile. While the earlier Chinese migrants were mostly from southern provinces in China and organized their voluntary associations based on native-place or blood ties, new Chinese migrants hail from different regions in China, and would build social organizations of different configurations. Besides setting up voluntary organizations offline, these new Chinese migrants are also forming cybercommunities on the Internet. This article investigates whether virtual communities formed by new Chinese migrants also offer identity options to migrants in terms of ethnicity and national belonging, as offline immigrant associations do. It does so by examining the varieties of Chinese national identities articulated in cyberspace and in the offline activities of two virtual communities formed by new Chinese migrants who are working and studying in Singapore. I argue that virtual communities formed by migrants may or may not offer distinct identity options to their members in terms of ethnic or national belonging. Virtual communities with very diverse user profiles may offer more distinct identity options for their members as a strategy in attracting and retaining members, compared to virtual communities with a more homogeneous membership.