

Chinese travellers of all sorts have become ubiquitous

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China's decision to let its people travel abroad freely is changing the world. James Miles argues that it is changing China, too.

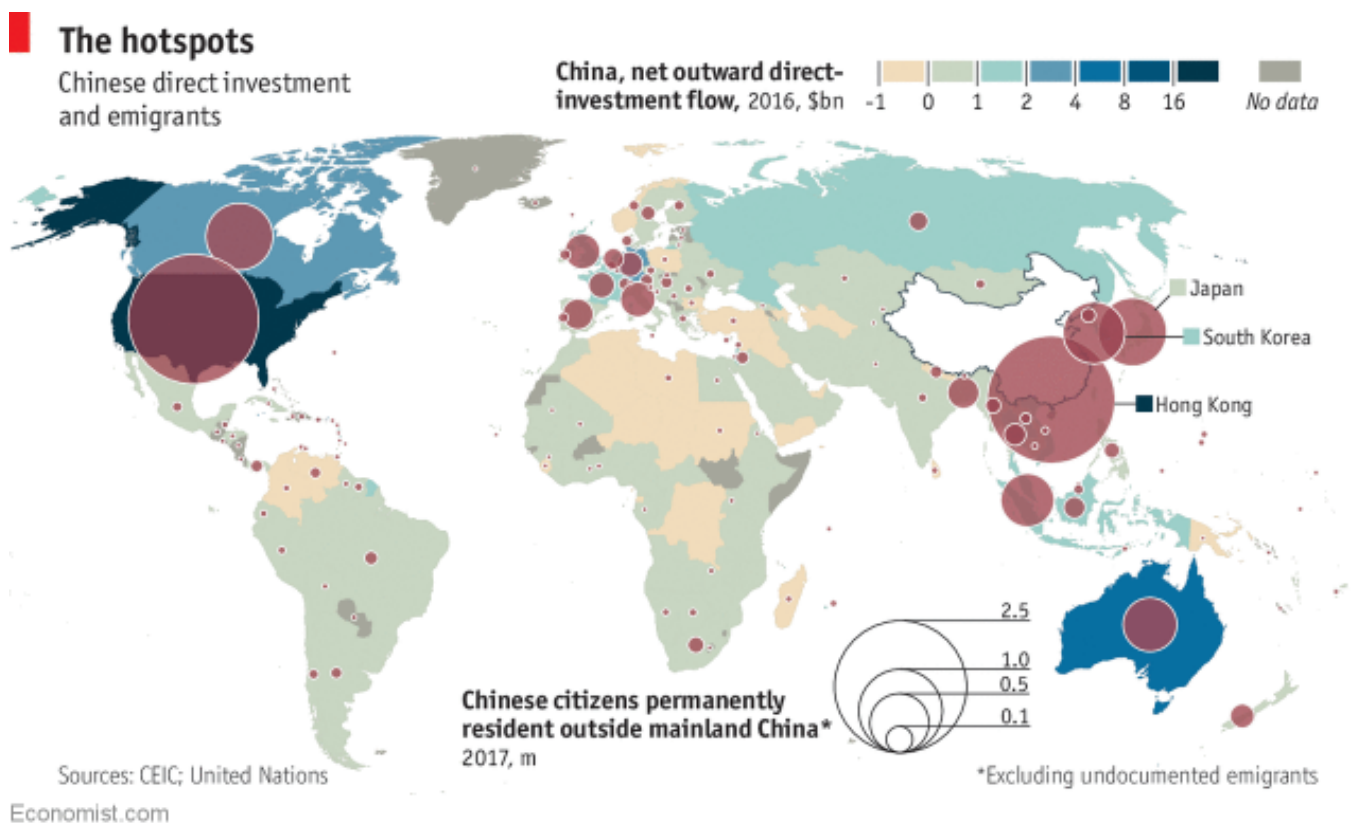


Since the 1980s people have been moving around the globe in ever-growing numbers. The reasons have ranged from the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the opening of borders in the European Union, and the growth of middle classes across the developing world. But China's contribution to this mass movement has eclipsed all others.

China's gamble was to open the country's gates and allow people to leave. The exodus steadily gathered pace. Since 2007 the number of visits abroad made by Chinese people has more than tripled. To cash in on China's tourism boom, many countries have greatly eased their visa requirements. Some have also opened their doors to rich Chinese migrants by giving them permanent residency, at a price.

Bonanza back home?

Once returned home though, politicians in the West might show more enthusiasm about this wave of Chinese visitors if they thought that the travellers would transform their country with liberal ideas they had picked up abroad. But evidence of this is difficult to find. As Xi Jinping, China's leader, clamps down ever harder on civil liberties, flexes his muscles in the South China Sea and squeezes foreign firms for intellectual property, a more global China does not seem to be getting any easier for the West to deal with.



Travellers returning from abroad, and the ideas they bring with them, have played a crucial role in the country's tortuous history, especially since the 19th century. The recent flow (of tourists) has been greater than anything seen before.

(Heavily edited from: <https://www.economist.com/special-report/2018/05/17/chinese-travellers-of-all-sorts-have-become-ubiquitous>)