



Editors

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**Cultural, Educational and
Social Dimensions of the Chinese Diaspora**

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SINGAPORE UNIVERSITY PRESS
NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE



World Scientific

New Jersey • London • Singapore • Hong Kong

Published by

Singapore University Press
Yusof Ishak House, National University of Singapore
31 Lower Kent Ridge Road, Singapore 119078

and

World Scientific Publishing Co. Pte. Ltd.
5 Toh Tuck Link, Singapore 596224
USA office: Suite 202, 1060 Main Street, River Edge, NJ 07661
UK office: 57 Shelton Street, Covent Garden, London WC2H 9HE

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

CHINESE MIGRANTS ABROAD

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ISBN 981-238-041-8

Printed by Fulsland Offset Printing (S) Pte Ltd, Singapore

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Acknowledgements

This volume is a result of the international conference, "Immigrant Societies and Modern Education", held in Singapore, 31 August–3 September 2000. This conference was jointly organised by the Tan Kah Kee International Society and the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences of the National University of Singapore. Over the course of 1999–2000, the preparations for the conference involved close collaboration and interaction between the Society and FASS. The success of the conference is thus due in large part to the commitment, organisational skills, and vision of those with whom we served on the organising committees for the ISME conference: Prof. Wang Gungwu (Chairman of the Tan Kah Kee International Society and Professor, East Asian Institute), Mr. Tan Keong Choon, Dr. Tong Ming Chuan, Dr. Phua Kok Khoo, Prof. Hew Choy Sin, Prof. Goh Thong Ngee, Prof. Lim Hock, Prof. Hew Choy Sin, Assoc. Prof. Lee Fook Hong, Dr. Low Hwee Boon, Assoc. Prof. Chen Kang, Assoc. Prof. Hui Weng Tat, Assoc. Prof. Lee Guan Kin, Assoc. Prof. Lee Cheuk Yin, Dr. Low Hwee Boon, Prof. Ong Choon Nam, Prof. Shang Huai Min, Mr. Han Suan Juan, Miss Tan Kuan Swee, Miss Cher Meng Chu, Miss Joelle Cheng, and Miss Kathleen Melissa Ke.

The editors of this volume also wish to thank the individuals whose assistance was necessary, after the dust had settled from the conference, for the compilation of this volume. Miss Ke and Mr. George Wong served as contact persons and organisers of incoming materials. Miss Lynsey Lee Yoke Cum compiled the reference list for this volume. The staff of the former Centre for Advanced Studies also provided various essential services during both the conference and in the year that followed. We are also grateful to Miss Karen Lai and Miss Theresa Wong for assistance with proof-reading and the checking of references. Ultimately, the editors

would like to thank the authors of the articles themselves for putting up with the various demands that we, as editors, placed upon them and for sticking with us to the completion of this volume.

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27 August 2001

Introduction: The Chinese Abroad

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As one observer noted a little over a half-decade ago, fast-paced economic growth in Southeast Asia from the late 1960s until the mid-1990s brought increased attention to the Overseas Chinese as an economically successful diaspora and their role in this economic growth (Mackie 1996, p. xii). Events that followed, such as the transfer of Hong Kong and Macao (and with them a substantial portion of the Overseas Chinese) to the Peoples Republic of China, the election of a non-KMT government in Taiwan (and the possibility of the abandonment of the "one China" principle by Taiwan), the Asian economic crisis and the plight of Overseas Chinese in Indonesia as a result, and the durability of the Singapore economy during this same crisis, have helped to sustain this attention.

The study of the Overseas Chinese has by now become a global enterprise, raising new theoretical problems and empirical challenges. New case studies of Overseas Chinese, such as those on communities in North America, Cuba, India, and South Africa, continually unveil different perspectives. New kinds of transnational connectivities linking Chinese communities are also being identified. It is now possible to make broader generalisations of a Chinese diaspora on a global basis (McKeown 1999). Further, the intensifying study of the Overseas Chinese has stimulated a renewed intellectual vigor in other areas of research.

The transnational and transregional activities of Overseas Chinese, for example, pose serious challenges to analytical concepts of regional divides such as that between East and Southeast Asia (Liu 2000).

Despite the increased attention, new data, and the changing theoretical paradigms, basic questions concerning the Overseas Chinese remain. To alter slightly the question Leo Suryadinata has asked in terms of the Chinese in Southeast Asia (Suryadinata 1997b, p. 1), should the Overseas Chinese communities be considered in their local or national context or as part of a transnational "Chinese" community? Similarly, what do we mean by diaspora and is it appropriate to use this term in reference to the Overseas Chinese? These issues will certainly remain for some time to come.

This authors in this volume take a local approach. The papers in this volume, in other words, seek to understand the Overseas Chinese migrants not just in terms of the overall Chinese diaspora *per se*, but also local Chinese migrants adapting to local societies, in different national contexts.

Part One focuses upon questions of the national, cultural, and gender identities and identifications of Chinese migrants in Southeast Asia and Australia. Jamie Mackie (Chapter 1), for example, warns us against the temptation to overgeneralise and essentialise "Chineseness" among the Overseas Chinese, especially the frequently assumed cultural determinants of Chinese business success. Using five case studies of Chinese empire-builders, Mackie demonstrates that entrepreneurial successes of certain businessmen from the Chinese diaspora cannot be tied to shared "Chinese" characteristics. That is, factors beyond their "Chineseness" must be considered if one is to understand Chinese migrant entrepreneurs and their successes. As Mackie finds, differences more than similarities were critical to the success of the business tycoons he examines.

Ray Hibbins (Chapter 2) turns to the special situation of gender identity among Chinese male migrants in a European-dominated society, that of Australia. Hibbins uses data collected from interviews with Chinese male migrants in Australia and finds that Chinese males in Australia perceive masculinity differently than do their Euro-Australian counterparts. While Euro-Australian men mark masculinity with engagement in physical sports, cars, drinking, and women, Chinese male

migrants in Australia see masculinity in terms of hard work, being a strong guardian and the sole provider for the family, educational and occupational achievement, the accumulation of wealth, and sexual conservativeness. As Hibbins explains, consciously or unconsciously, the influence of tradition on attitudes toward masculinity remains strong among Chinese male migrants in Australia.

Yao Souchou (Chapter 3) examines the “othering” of the Chinese in Malaysia and how this process is partly reflected in the provisioning of Malay politicians with Chinese women by Chinese businessmen. This process has also involved the creation of an image of the competitive Chinese migrant as a threat to the uncompetitive Malay, an image created for use by Malay politicians and encouraged in Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir’s *The Malay Dilemma*.

Chinese who return from migrant communities in Southeast Asia to live in mainland China, Hong Kong, Macao, or Taiwan face additional challenges to their identity and identification as Chinese. James Chin Kong (Chapter 4) examines the unusual place held by members of return migration of Chinese from Indonesia to mainland China, and then on to Hong Kong. As Chin explains, despite initial self-perceptions as native Chinese among these migrants, these migrants were still viewed as foreign guests or at least as a different kind of Chinese by local mainland Chinese society. At the same time, they were not allowed to return to the Southeast Asian countries they had left, where they were also now seen as outsiders. Not fully accepted in China nor welcome in Southeast Asia, many returned Overseas Chinese moved on to Hong Kong. As Chin demonstrates, the way identities are formed and identifications are constructed has changed in recent years and new forms of organization and community formation have produced additional challenges and new opportunities for assimilation and accommodation by the host society.

Part Two looks at the important cultural role of education in Chinese migrant communities and how these reflect both cultural and economic choices. In either case, they have a decisive impact upon understandings by the Chinese of tradition and modernity. Chinese culture also places special emphasis both on success and respect for education, which helps to increase the importance of education to, and thus the impact on, Chinese migrants.

Using the case study of Kobe's Chûka dôbun gakkô (Tongwen Chinese School), the largest Chinese school in Japan, Ng Wai-ming (Chapter 5) examines the role of Chinese schools as sites for the mediation of changing Overseas Chinese identities and of equally dynamic Sino-Japanese relations. Ng first examines the transition from regional identities to a national Chinese identity among Chinese migrants in Japan in the early days of the Chûka dô bun gakkô and then turns to the identity crisis among Chinese migrants in early postwar Japan. As the Chinese communities in Japan have themselves changed, so too has role of Chinese schools, as they continue to change to meet new demands and to serve a new kind of Chinese migrant community. As Ng demonstrates, these schools continue to play a significant role in easing the transition among Chinese migrants from Chinese residents (*kakyo*) to Overseas Chinese (*kajin*) in modern Japan.

Wee Tong Bao (Chapter 6) illustrates the extensive development of Chinese vernacular education in prewar Singapore as a foundation block for the emergence of Singapore's Chinese community. A major problem in trying to assess the place of Chinese vernacular education in the history of Singapore's Chinese community is that while the primary sources have been used extensively, there was either little attempt at a comprehensive historical narrative for Chinese vernacular education in Singapore or the narrative was framed by non-educational factors and interests. In Wee's analysis of the discussion of Chinese vernacular education in Singapore, for example, she found that English accounts tended to look at Chinese vernacular education in the context of colonial administrative and political developments. Chinese-language accounts similarly constructed their narrative of Chinese vernacular education around political events in China. As a result, local social factors critical to the emergence of Chinese vernacular education in Singapore are overlooked.

Wee draws attention to the role of different dialect groups (the Hokkien, Cantonese, Teochiu and other Chinese dialect groups) within the "Overseas Chinese" label in the establishment of Chinese vernacular schools in colonial Singapore. As Wee explains, a variety of social factors identified in the sources, but generally ignored in the secondary accounts, were at work in the emergence of these schools. One of the most important of these was the role of dialect bangs in coming together to

found and support schools for the children of their communities. Dependence upon policy- or politically-oriented historical narratives for education in Singapore, however, hides such factors.

Yen Ching Hwang (Chapter 7) gives an overview of the emergence of modern education among the Chinese in Malaya. He ties this development first with educational reforms in the late Qing period in China, and follows through with the continuing influence of educational and other developments in Republican China that had a serious impact upon Chinese education among Chinese in South China and Southeast Asia. Yen is mainly concerned with the experiences of one particular dialect group, though, the Hokkiens. As the first of the dialect groups to migrate to and settle in Southeast Asia, and as the most economically successful of the dialect groups among Chinese migrants to Southeast Asia, the Hokkiens were able to sponsor modern Chinese schools earlier and more intensively than other dialect groups within the Chinese diaspora. While many Chinese, especially businessmen, were involved in promoting Chinese education in Malay, Yen's case study, one visionary, Tan Kah Kee, merits special attention due to his commitment and sponsorship of educational enterprises in both South China and in Malaya.

Danny Wong (Chapter 8) examines a different Chinese dialect group, the Hakkas, in Sabah, where they form the overwhelming majority of the Chinese population. Wong's Hakka Christians sought English education and English schools, by contrast with Yen's Hokkiens and their pursuit of Chinese education. According to Wong, the Hakkas developed connections with Christian missionaries in the middle of the 19th century in China, and these connections were developed further when Hakkas migrated to Sabah later in the Qing period. As a result, many Hakkas were Christian and sought out English education in mission schools, giving them an advantage in competing for white-collar jobs in the employment of the British Chartered Company, which governed Sabah. As Wong explains, changes from the 1970s, such as the shifts in Malaysian government policy in the independence period and the replacement of English with Malay as the language of government, has brought an end to the advantage of an English education and thus to the Hakka domination over white collar and government jobs.

Part Three turns to other factors involved in the Chinese migrant relationship with host societies, including economic, occupational, and national integration. Li Zong's (Chapter 9) case study focuses upon Chinese-Canadian and Polish-Canadian professional immigrants in Toronto, Canada. As Li explains, foreign-trained immigrants face special challenges in gaining work in their professions. These challenges go beyond poor command of English on arrival, poor networking, and lack of prior Canadian work experience.

A more significant barrier is that it is difficult to get employers in Canada, or the professional gatekeeper associations in Canada to recognize their education and credentials gained outside of Canada. This problem is more acute, Li finds, among Chinese migrants than among Polish migrants who are otherwise very comparable as immigrant professionals. This has led to very different occupational choices, especially by Chinese migrants, often in stark contrast to their personal qualifications. Furthermore, more Chinese believe that their situation is a result of being visible minorities (due to skin colour). Li clearly illustrates the social impact of this aspect of immigrant integration into one host society.

Siew-Ean Khoo and Anita Mak (Chapter 10) provide an analysis of the factors that encourage permanent settlement of Asian migrants, mostly Chinese, in Australia. As Khoo and Mak explain, the degree of retention of Asian immigrants as permanent settlers in Australia varies depending upon the country of origin, migrants being broken up into China, Hong Kong, Korea and Taiwan, Malaysia and Singapore, and India and Sri Lanka countries of origin. As Khoo and Mak indicate, factors that encourage permanent settlement include whether or not the immigrant has found employment and the level of satisfaction with that employment, their level of English proficiency, whether or not the immigrant already had relatives in Australia, the degree to which having the goal of a better future for their family was a reason for migration in the first place, and whether or not the immigrant had school-aged children. Differences, such as those between Chinese migrants from the PRC and Hong Kong also depended upon whether or not returning to the place of origin was a realistic option. Ultimately, traditional Chinese values including providing educational opportunities for one's children has clearly remained strong among migrants of the Chinese diaspora.