

THE CHINESE
OVERSEAS

ROUTLEDGE LIBRARY OF
MODERN CHINA

Edited by
HONG LIU

華文

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Conceptualizing and Historicizing
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FOREWORD

Wang Gungwu

It may be overstating it to say that China began reaching out to a globalizing world several centuries ago through its people overseas. Many other peoples contributed to the limited globalization that took place during the eleventh to fourteenth centuries of Central Asian expansions that began with the Turkic and Khitan peoples and reached its first climax with the Mongol invasions. As with many other peoples, the Chinese were deeply affected by these developments. But the connections with the Euro-Asian land mass did not lead them to migrate overland along the routes opened up. The steppe lands and nomadic life did not really attract them. Instead, large numbers of northern Chinese migrated southwards and the population of the more peaceful provinces south of the Yangzi expanded quickly. This led to increased pressure for coastal Chinese to go to sea to trade and work in East and Southeast Asia and seek a maritime outreach.

There had been at least a thousand years of such overseas contacts earlier on, but the number of Chinese involved was small. The earlier initiatives had come mainly from merchants from Southeast Asia, India, Persia and the Arab world. It was not until the Song dynasty (960–1279) that the Chinese and the sinicized Yue peoples of the southern provinces became increasingly active in the seaborne trade. This was encouraged by the Mongol Yuan dynasty and, by the time the Ming dynasty was founded in 1368, large numbers of Chinese were involved in that trade. The conditions at that time favoured even greater Chinese involvement, although the sources we have for that period suggest that they rarely ventured beyond the littoral ports of Southeast Asia. Similarly, there were Chinese who traded by sea to Korea and Japan, but never in large enough numbers to form Chinese communities there. The Ming rulers from the fourteenth century onwards reaffirmed that China's destiny should remain continental in orientation. The prevalent political and popular culture also did nothing to encourage overseas trade. Thereafter, it was left to coastal merchants and local officials to support whatever commerce existed. Despite the official ban on private overseas trade, however, the traffic grew. We begin to have regular references to Chinese who had been settling down

in the lands they traded with. By the time the Zheng He expeditions of 1405–1433 were brought to an end, it was left entirely to venturesome merchants themselves to take the initiative. But the conditions for establishing significant Chinese communities overseas were not yet in place. The bulk of the trade was still managed by various maritime peoples of the Malay Archipelago, together with traders from the Indian sub-continent and the Perso-Arab world.

This was the position before the first Europeans reached the China coasts. After the Portuguese captured Melaka in 1511, it was not long before the small Chinese fleets and trading groups had to decide whether to link up with Western trading powers or cooperate with local polities to compete for commercial advantage. The challenge for the Chinese merchants was that they would have to do this without official help from the Ming authorities back in China. This disconnect with their home base meant that their experiences of this stage of globalization were not appreciated by the government, and China did not develop an active and robust response to the emerging maritime power structure in the world until the end of the twentieth century.

I have made the above introductory remarks to highlight two questions concerning the Chinese overseas today. Firstly, it is not surprising that some 80 per cent of all the Chinese who reside overseas are found in Southeast Asia. The conditions favouring the movement of Chinese into a region that was the crossroads of a large intra-Asian trade had long been there. It would have been surprising, when globalizing forces were still weak and limited, if Southeast Asia had not been where most Chinese seafaring merchants chose to go. Secondly, had the Chinese continued to trickle southwards and settled in the region in small groups over the centuries down to the present, it is likely that most of them would have been steadily integrated into the local populations. Official policies within China had limited the numbers who were allowed to leave. As long as those policies remained, integration and assimilation would have been normal. It was the European powers who began to undermine these restrictive attitudes during the eighteenth century, and they finally overturned them after the two Opium Wars in the middle of the nineteenth century. In particular, the industrial revolution and the end of African slavery led to a transformation of the world economy which revolutionized the market for labour and manufactures. Following this, it was not long before it became very profitable to recruit large numbers of Chinese men for a wide range of work beyond mere commerce in that overseas market. For the first time, the Chinese went out in large numbers. Still, for another century or so, the bulk of them eventually went home, rather like contract labour today. But the conditions that enabled, if not encouraged, settlement in the European colonies, whether in Asia or the Americas, made it easier for distinct Chinese communities to form.

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In short, the overseas Chinese story is essentially part of the post-Enlightenment Project emanating from Europe that everyone in Asia has had to face for the past two centuries. What recent studies have done is to integrate that story with the story of modernization, which was extended to every continent with the expansion of Western trade and development. The carefully selected essays brought together in these volumes by Liu Hong represent the growing efforts during the past century to document and explain the phenomenon. Liu Hong's scholarly introduction outlines the major research trends that have enabled us to understand the different strands in the larger story. He has not only included historical essays that have summarized the community formation experiences so far but also key studies of the migration process itself, most notably the new migratory patterns reflecting evolving market conditions, different push-and-pull factors and, not least, modern technologies in transportation and communication. The impact of all these on how migrant Chinese can now organize themselves in competitive economic conditions, as well as on their growing social and political participation in their countries of residence outside China, alert us to likely shifts of emphasis in the way these communities will be studied in the future.

About two decades ago, I was struck by the way scholars, notably sociologists and demographers, were able to record the precise conditions under which new migrants from Hong Kong were leaving for Canada and Australia. The amount of information available was unprecedented. It was a great opportunity to chart the formation of Chinese migratory communities. This would not only enable us to compare and contrast our descriptions of how the primary communities of the past were established, but also help us to observe and analyze the new migrants while they are in the process of affecting and reshaping the communities they have joined. We still do not have enough specific studies of this kind. The range of research interest, however, has grown so rapidly that many ethnographic reports on contemporary changes may indicate how Chinese communities are likely to develop in the future. There are considerable challenges in an increasingly globalized world. But the fundamental issues of adaptation, integration and assimilation will not go away. What the Chinese overseas face most directly are, on the one hand, the pull of China as it rises as an economic power and, on the other, the powerful market forces which have weakened the national borders traditionally holding back the migration of labour and skills.

These volumes provide a valuable background to what has become a phenomenon of universal interest – migration and community formation. The Chinese experience is not unique, but it is an enriching one when studied in parallel with various groups of Europeans who had migrated in even larger numbers to the Americas and Australasia. Until recently, however, there was one region where the Chinese provided distinctive

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characteristics. That was Southeast Asia. That was so because of three factors: the European colonial control of trading and labour markets; the weakening of indigenous polities; and the presence of a neglectful, though proximate, China. All three conditions have changed or have been greatly modified during the past two decades. What calls for attention now is whether these changes will produce new integrating or disintegrating conditions among the Chinese communities and for the future of relations between China and the region. Those of Chinese descent who have adopted local nationalities will have new roles to play in the shaping of that future.

I would like to draw special attention to the essays collected here that perform two important tasks. Firstly, those that alert us to what is likely to remain peculiar to Southeast Asia and what will not. Secondly, those that also point to directions of change that will make Chinese overseas communities more like one another and ready to conform to the patterns common to other migratory communities elsewhere. When read together, these essays contribute to our understanding of one of the most dynamic phenomena of our times, the large-scale movement of peoples around the globe. I congratulate Liu Hong and the publishers for making these scholarly contributions available to a wider audience.

30 May 2005

East Asian Institute, Singapore

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1940	Ta Chen	Livelihood	Ta Chen, <i>Emigrant Communities in South China: A Study of Overseas Migration and Its Influence</i> (New York: Institute of Pacific Relations; reprint: New York: AMS Press, 1978), pp. 58-85	IV	54
1950	International Labour Organization	A survey of Chinese emigration	<i>International Labour Review</i> 60, pp. 289-301	I	6
1953	Tien Ju-Kang	Clanship	Tien Ju-Kang, <i>The Chinese of Sarawak: A Study of Social Structure</i> (London: London School of Economics Monographs on Social Anthropology, no. 12), pp. 21-35	II	20
1957	Paul C. P. Siu	The Sojourner	<i>American Journal of Sociology</i> 58:1, pp. 34-44	I	2
1957	G. William Skinner	Chinese assimilation and Thai politics	<i>Journal of Asian Studies</i> 16:2, pp. 237-50	I	9
1960	Maurice Freedman	Immigrants and associations: Chinese in nineteenth-century Singapore	<i>Comparative Studies in Society and History</i> 3:1, pp. 25-48	II	24
1968	Sen-dou Chang	The distribution and occupations of overseas Chinese	<i>Geographical Review</i> 58:1, pp. 89-107	I	7
1967	Lawrence W. Crissman	The segmentary structure of urban overseas Chinese communities	<i>Man</i> 2:2, pp. 185-204	II	25
1970	Stephen Fitzgerald	China and the overseas Chinese: perceptions and policies	<i>The China Quarterly</i> 44, pp. 1-37.	IV	64

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1975	C. Y. Choi	Chinese migration 1901-47: under the Commonwealth Immigration Restriction Act 1901	C. Y. Choi, <i>Chinese Migration and Settlement in Australia</i> (Sydney: Sydney University Press), pp. 36-54	III	47
1975	Michael R. Godley	The late Ch'ing courtship of the Chinese in Southeast Asia	<i>Journal of Asian Studies</i> 34:2, pp. 361-85	IV	58
1978	Bernard Wong	A comparative study of the assimilation of the Chinese in New York City and Lima, Peru	<i>Comparative Studies in Society and History</i> 20:3, pp. 335-58	I	10
1979	Peter S. Li	A historical approach to ethnic stratification: the case of the Chinese in Canada, 1858-1930	<i>Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology</i> 16:3, pp. 320-32	III	43
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1987	Kay J. Anderson	The idea of Chinatown: the power of place and institutional practice in the making of a racial category	<i>Annals of the Association of American Geographers</i> 77:4, pp. 580-98	II	35

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1989	Evelyn Hu-DeHart	Coolies, shopkeepers, pioneers: the Chinese of Mexico and Peru (1849-1930)	<i>Amerasia Journal</i> 15:2, pp. 91-116	III	50
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1997	Chan Kwok Bun	A family affair: migration, dispersal, and the emergent identity of the Chinese cosmopolitan	<i>Diaspora</i> 6:2, pp. 195-214	II	22
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1997	Leo Suryadinata	Ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia: overseas Chinese, Chinese overseas or Southeast Asians?	Leo Suryadinata, ed., <i>Ethnic Chinese as Southeast Asians</i> (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies), pp. 1–24	III	40
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1998	Frank N. Pieke	Introduction	Gregor Benton and Frank N. Pieke, eds., <i>The Chinese in Europe</i> (London: Macmillan Press), pp. 1–17	III	45
1999	Lucie Cheng	Chinese Americans in the formation of the pacific regional economy	Evelyn Hu-DeHart, ed., <i>Across the Pacific: Asian Americans and Globalization</i> (New York: Asia Society; Philadelphia: Temple University Press), pp. 61–78	IV	65
1999	Adam McKeown	Conceptualizing Chinese diasporas, 1842 to 1949	<i>Journal of Asian Studies</i> 58:2, pp. 306–37	I	4

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2000	Tan Liok Ee	Chinese schools in Malaysia: a case of cultural resilience	Lee Kam Hing and Tan Chee-Beng, eds., <i>The Chinese in Malaysia</i> (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press), pp. 228–54	II	32
2001	Ien Ang	Undoing diaspora: questioning global Chineseness in the era of globalization	Ien Ang, <i>On Not Speaking Chinese: Living between Asia and the West</i> (London and New York: Routledge), pp. 75–93	I	14
2001	Philip A. Kuhn	Toward an historical ecology of Chinese migration	Paper originally prepared for "China and Southeast Asia" Conference, UCLA, pp. 1–33	I	3
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