

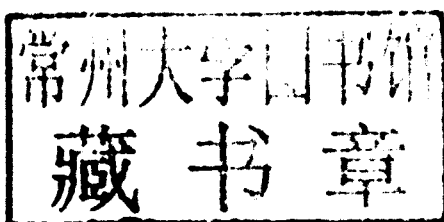


OVERSEAS CHINESE IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

Glen Peterson

Overseas Chinese in the People's Republic of China

Glen Peterson



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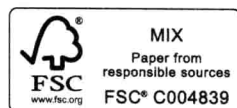
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Overseas Chinese in the People's Republic of China

Overseas Chinese in the People's Republic of China examines the experiences of a group of persons known officially and collectively in the PRC as 'domestic Overseas Chinese'. They include family members of overseas migrants who remained in China, refugees fleeing persecution, and former migrants and their descendants who 'returned' to the People's Republic in order to pursue higher education and to serve their motherland. In this book, Glen Peterson describes the nature of the official state project by which domestic Overseas Chinese were incorporated into the economic, political and social structures of the People's Republic of China in the 1950s, examines the multiple and contradictory meanings associated with being 'domestic Overseas Chinese', and explores how 'domestic Overseas Chineseness' as political category shaped social experiences and identities.

This book fills an important gap in the literature on Chinese migration and Chinese transnationalism and will be an invaluable resource to students and scholars of these subjects, as well as Chinese history and Asian Studies more generally.

Glen Peterson is Associate Professor in the Department of History at the University of British Columbia, Canada.

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interpretation. This book is dedicated to my wife, Christine, and to 'pickle' who was steadfastly present on my desk during the writing of most of it.

Note on use of Chinese-language terms: This book uses *pinyin* romanization for Chinese-language proper names and terms, except in a few instances where more familiar forms have been retained, such as Chiang Kai-shek, Hong Kong, Sun Yatsen and Tan Kah Kee. Chinese characters are provided on the first occurrence of a Chinese name or term.

Unless otherwise indicated, I have rendered the terms Overseas Chinese, Guiqiao and Qiaojuan as proper nouns, in order to convey their status as officially defined groups.

Abbreviations

APC	Agricultural Producers' Cooperative
ARL	Agrarian Reform Law
CCFE	Central Commission on Finance and Economy
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CPPCC	Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
GMD	Guomindang
MCP	Malayan Communist Party
NPC	National People's Congress
OCAC	Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PRC	People's Republic of China
SEZ	Special Economic Zone
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees



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1 Introduction

The idea for this book was sown more than three decades ago, the first time I visited China. In those days, it was impossible to travel on one's own in China; foreigners were only allowed to enter the country in the company of a guided tour escorted by the official China International Travel Service. Our days were filled with visits to model communes and factories, followed by formal presentations by commune leaders and factory managers, where we filled our notebooks with the latest production figures and targets and were earnestly told of progress made and the difficulties that still lay ahead. With seemingly every moment of our tour carefully planned and packed full of such official engagements, there was precious little in the way of 'free time' when we could wander as we pleased, much less escape from under the watchful eyes of our China Travel Service minders, who were unfailingly courteous and never very far from our side. Yet there were times, usually in the late afternoons or early evenings before or after dinner, when the guides had retired to their rooms, too tired at the end of the gruelling day to bother keeping tabs on each and every one of us, when we were able to slip out of the hotel unawares and for an hour, maybe two, roam the streets on our own, savouring the rhythms and flow of daily life in China's cities. Guangzhou (广州) in those days was a drab and dimly lit city whose streets were ruled by day by bell-tinkling bicycles and the occasional roaring transport vehicle. At night-fall, the entire city seemed to fall silent. The streets appeared strangely empty, devoid of people and things. But the silence and feeling of emptiness were misleading. For wherever we wandered, we had only to pause for a moment or two before throngs of curious citizens had gathered round us: students eager to practice their English and to know what life was like where we came from; children with eyes bursting with a mix of fear, wonder and curiosity; older folk gazing with the wisdom and experience of their years. It was on one such occasion that I was approached, stealthily at first, by a middle-aged man who was obviously 'local' and yet, at the same time, appeared to be not so; someone who also seemed curiously out of place and somehow 'foreign', like me. I cannot recall just why I felt this way. Perhaps it was the manner of his dress or the way he carried himself, his general demeanour. It probably had something to do with the idiomatic way in which he spoke English with me, and the ease

2 Introduction

with which our conversation unfolded. I couldn't put my finger on it at first, but there was *something* unmistakably different that set him apart from the rest of the crowd that had gathered around us. It didn't take long to find out. Over the next half hour or so, he recounted the gripping tale of how as a young teenager he had left Indonesia, the country where he was born and had grown up, in order to study in China and serve his motherland. But his optimism had quickly faded and he had ended up suffering severely, especially during the Cultural Revolution of 1966–76, when he had been attacked for his 'foreign connections' and sent off to the countryside for 're-education'; now, two years later, he was anxiously looking for a way to get out of China. Could I help? I wasn't able to help, and I never did find out his name. But over subsequent years, I met many more such individuals whenever I visited China, in Guangzhou, Shanghai (上海), Kunming (昆明) and other cities where 'Returned Overseas Chinese' were to be found. What powerful motives and circumstances, I began to wonder, could possibly have impelled these young people to want to give up everything and 'return' permanently to an ancestral land that many of them had never laid eyes upon? What was it about China in the 1950s that could have inspired such a courageous act? And why did they end up suffering so much at the hands of the 'Motherland' that had welcomed them with open arms? This book is, in one sense, my attempt to answer these questions.

In this book I attempt to tell the story of a group of persons in the People's Republic of China known officially and collectively as 'domestic Overseas Chinese' (*guonei huaqiao* 国内华侨). Following its establishment in October 1949, the People's Republic of China (PRC) set about creating a series of institutions, policies and discursive practices designed to affirm a separate *Huaqiao* ('Overseas Chinese' 华侨) identity on the part of persons in China who had emigrant connections. The term 'domestic Overseas Chinese', which on first reading appears to be a contradiction – how can one be 'domestic' and at the same time 'overseas'? – requires some explanation. In its 1953 national census figures, the government claimed there were just over 11.7 million 'Overseas Chinese' worldwide, made up of ethnic Chinese, regardless of nationality, who lived outside the territorial borders of the Chinese nation-state, excluding the populations of Hong Kong and Macao. The figure appears to have been based upon estimates compiled by the previous Nationalist government. By the end of the same decade, there were said to be an almost equal number (approximately 11 million) of 'domestic' Overseas Chinese', according to official sources. The latter category was made up of three groups. It included, in the first place, the family members of emigrants, those who had remained in China tending the family possessions while one or more, usually male, household members made their living overseas and remitted funds to the family in China, often with the intention of someday returning permanently. These stay-at-home members of emigrant households were officially known as 'Overseas Chinese Family Dependents' (*huaqiao juanshu* 华侨眷属) or 'Qiaojuan' (侨眷) and included both immediate and

collateral family members. Qiaojuan accounted for the vast majority of domestic Overseas Chinese: more than 10 million of the estimated 11 million domestic Overseas Chinese in 1960. The second group of domestic Overseas Chinese consisted of former migrants who had 'returned' to the People's Republic (anyone who 'returned' prior to 1949 was not included); they were officially known as 'Returned Overseas Chinese' (*guiguo huaqiao* 归国华侨) or 'Guiqiao' (归侨). By 1960 there were up to 600,000 Guiqiao in China, following several major waves of return migration. The third group was made up of ethnic Chinese youth from around the world but mainly from Southeast Asia who had 'returned' to China to pursue higher education and serve the motherland; they were known as 'Returned Overseas Chinese Students' (*guiguo huaqiao xuesheng* 归国华侨学生) or 'Guiqiao Xuesheng' (归侨学生). By 1960 there were said to be around 60,000 Guiqiao Xuesheng in the PRC.¹

Despite the precise criteria for membership, these state categories were not nearly as stable as their formal definitions may lead us to believe. The elasticity of the labels varied over time and with the specific policy purpose for which they were intended to apply. For instance, the ethnic Chinese populations of Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan (the first two under the colonial rule of Britain and Portugal, respectively, and the latter ruled since 1945 by the rival Nationalist government) were formally known as 'compatriots' (*tongbao* 同胞) rather than 'Overseas Chinese'. But, depending on the specific policy, family members of persons living in Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan were sometimes included in the definition of 'domestic Overseas Chinese' and at other times excluded. Thus, when it came to encouraging remittances and investment, family members of Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan *tongbao* were included. But when it came to who was entitled to 'special treatment' during land reform, family members of Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan *tongbao* were deemed ineligible. The term 'domestic Overseas Chinese', like its counterpart 'Overseas Chinese', was an official construction linked to specific state projects.

It is crucial to recognize that the terms 'Qiaojuan', 'Guiqiao' and 'Guiqiao Xuesheng' were not just convenient labels for describing a person's background or experience. They were official identities (*shenfen* 身分) to which were attached both political and juridical meanings. To be a Guiqiao, Qiaojuan or Guiqiao Xuesheng was in the first place to hold a legal status that conferred certain prerogatives, many of which were unavailable to ordinary citizens, including the right to receive and hold income from abroad, the opportunity to invest in certain kinds of state-approved economic ventures, and access to certain forms of preferential treatment when it came to job assignments and choice and place of residence. In addition, however, to be a Guiqiao, Qiaojuan or Guiqiao Xuesheng implied a different and more complicated sense of 'belonging' to society and the nation. To be a Qiaojuan or Guiqiao or Guiqiao Xuesheng marked one as a kind of permanent 'outsider' whose peculiarity or 'special features' (*tedian* 特点) was defined by their connection to foreign worlds. This in turn necessitated a heightened vigilance on the part of the