

ETHNIC STUDIES

WANG LING-CHI &
WANG GUNGWU (eds.)

THE CHINESE DIASPORA

Selected
Essays
Volume I



EASTERN UNIVERSITIES PRESS

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Preface

When Wang Ling-chi and his colleagues decided to stress the idea of the Chinese overseas “growing roots where they land” (*luodi shenggen*) as the main theme for the conference held in San Francisco, they were drawing special attention to a phenomenon that has been ignored for many decades by both Chinese and foreign scholars. The motives for this neglect were mixed. The Chinese did not take it seriously because they were convinced of the ultimate loyalty to China of most people of Chinese descent settled abroad, despite the fact that many of them consistently denied any allegiance to the government of China. Foreign scholars tended to focus on the apparent clannishness of most Chinese and concluded that “once a Chinese, always a Chinese” was not merely a physical fact and culturally credible, but also included political loyalty towards the Chinese nation. There were other factors which lent support to this conclusion: a passionate nationalism had spread among many Chinese communities abroad in the first half of the century; and the communist victory in 1949 placed all Chinese overseas who did not support the Guomindang in Taiwan on the wrong side of the global Cold War.

The meeting in San Francisco was the first major effort to examine the position of “the Chinese diaspora” after the end of the Cold War. Finally, scholars could look at the subject free from the ideological straight jacket that had hampered its serious study for so long. The acknowledgement that *luodi shenggen* has been more the norm than the exception for decades was salutary, and formed the basis of a reorientation that was long overdue.

But there are many new obstacles to a clear understanding of the subject. Three are obvious and have made a strong impression on all students of Chinese as migrants. The first is related to Taiwan as a major source of migrants after the Second World War. Taiwan’s success in achieving prosperity and bolstering democratic institutions have led many of their professionals who had settled in North America and Japan to return. They remind us that those who have received tertiary education may not fit into a simple *luodi shenggen* scenario. They are likely to have joined the cosmopolitan elite who move freely

in their careers, or hold ideals which enable them to work for companies and causes across national borders.

The second has been brought about by Hong Kong's insecurity in the face of revolutionary fervour on the mainland. It led to large numbers of "Hongkongers" emigrating, especially to Canada and Australia. Common among them were those who sought foreign passports, but continued to seek profitable pursuits in Hong Kong. They are prepared to settle abroad, but reserve the right to be actively Chinese. This adds a new dimension to the conventional idea of being away only temporarily, of being the kind of Chinese always ready to return to their homes in China and not willing to accept a foreign identity.

China's economic reforms have led to a third phenomenon, so new that it is too early to predict whether it will fit past patterns of tentative settlement. This refers to the tertiary and postgraduate student migrations from mainland China since 1978 which are so striking in the United States, Australia and Canada. Like those educated and middle-class Chinese from Hong Kong, they have moved with their families. Among them are many who still remain uncertain whether to settle abroad or eventually return when conditions in China change.

These three developments remind us of conditions during the early decades of the century, and may seem like a return to a new era of the *huaqiao* (Chinese sojourners) who "return to their roots" (*guigen*) rather than "grow roots where they land" (*shenggen*). But the educational backgrounds of the latest migrations are so different from what happened earlier that comparisons are likely to be misleading. Also, the globalized economies in which the new immigrants are now free to function have widened their choices and blurred old concepts of narrow nationalist loyalties. It would be more helpful for comparative research to stay with the concept of "growing roots" but note that, unlike with earlier immigrants who have sunk deep roots in their adopted homes, the roots of the newcomers are shallow and will need time to grow.

Where the three new groups have created serious problems in understanding is to encourage careless and sensation-loving authors to confuse those with Hong Kong Chinese and Taiwan Chinese, who

stay at home and do not emigrate with the Chinese diaspora. These authors are careless because they fail to appreciate that such Hong Kong and Taiwan Chinese, however much they may not like the regime in Beijing, know that their territories are part of China. Thus they think it laughable to be mixed up with *buaqiao* (Chinese sojourners) or *haiwai huaren* (Chinese overseas) when they remain at home. Other writers may be politically motivated in wishing to isolate mainland China and wean the two territories out of the China orbit. But, perhaps most importantly, such confusion makes it very difficult to study the Chinese overseas who have grown roots, often very deep roots, in their new homes in foreign territories. The numbers are huge, some 25 million ethnic Chinese, more than 85 per cent of whom live in Southeast Asia, whose transformation in recent decades cries for attention and serious research. What we can learn about their history and current condition will be invaluable to our understanding of migration and settlement anywhere, but this will not be the case if we continue to blur the distinctions between them and those who live in Hong Kong and Taiwan.

There have been many studies of the large Chinese communities in Southeast Asia, and there are an increasing number of studies of the much smaller groups elsewhere in Asia, Europe and the Americas, and in Australasia and the Pacific. The next stage in research is to encourage and enable systematic comparative studies to be done. The 15 essays which appear in Volume I have been chosen from the nearly 150 papers in English that were presented to the conference. Many of those in the other two languages of the conference, Chinese and Spanish, have been published elsewhere. The choice of essays to include in the two volumes has given priority to papers on communities less known than those in Southeast Asia. It is hoped that this will convey a fuller picture of the diaspora worldwide and, in particular, stimulate readers and aspiring scholars in Southeast Asia to take on new comparative perspectives of their own experiences.

Wang Gungwu
March 1998
Singapore

On Luodi-shenggen*

WANG LING-CHI

First of all, on behalf of the Luodi-shenggen Conference Planning Committee of the Asian American Studies Programme of the Department of Ethnic Studies, University of California, Berkeley, I would like to welcome all the scholars and community leaders from different parts of the world to the Luodi-shenggen International Conference on Chinese Overseas. I would like also to thank all of you for honouring us with your presence and for sharing with us the fruits of your research and experience.

The theme of this conference — *luodi-shenggen* or the planting of permanent roots in the soils of different countries — represents a significant departure from two existing paradigms or approaches to the treatment and studies of the overseas Chinese.

First, most overseas Chinese today no longer see themselves as sojourners, orphans, or patriotic Chinese nationalists whose welfare, sole future, and final resting place is to be in China. This old China-oriented and China-centred approach to the study of overseas Chinese has been, for quite different reasons, the dominant perspective or paradigm of successive governments in China for centuries and of the governments of many countries throughout the Cold War. In its extreme manifestation, this approach sees the overseas Chinese communities as *de facto* extensions or colonies of the motherland, China. This approach is chauvinistic and it ignores the uniqueness, diversity, interests and welfare of overseas Chinese experience in each country and the different roles they play in it. Fortunately, that era of the *luoye-guigen* paradigm, the inevitability of return to China, has been on the decline in our fast changing world.

Secondly, the *luodi-shenggen* approach differs with yet another paradigm which, in essence, mandates assimilation and ignores, and at times, suppresses racial and cultural differences. As formulated by American sociologist, Robert Park, the cycle of race relations begins with the contact between a majority and a minority race. This contact

results in a conflict between the majority and the minority. After a while, the conflict is followed by a period of accommodation, which leads eventually to the assimilation or conquest of the minority by the majority.

The end result of the approach, in other words, is *zancoo-cugen* or the total elimination of racial identity and cultural heritage. The proponents of this paradigm regard the process toward assimilation to be natural and inevitable. However, in practice, the process has been neither natural nor inevitable for the powerless minorities and in many countries, government-sponsored policies of assimilation have been disastrous and tragic. The imposition of such policies have meant in some countries racial exclusion, discrimination and cultural oppression, and in other countries, genocide, pogroms, holocausts and ethnic cleansing. Increasingly, the theory and its applications have been called into question and considered racist, counterproductive and dehumanizing.

The above two approaches or paradigms can now be characterized as chauvinistic, regressive and approaching the anachronistic. The *luodi-shenggen* approach rejects the extreme positions of both and views the Chinese minority to be an integral part of each country's citizenry, to be treated with equality and justice. This approach also posits the racial and cultural heritage of the Chinese and treats the overseas Chinese as a cultural asset in the building of more enlightened societies in our integrated global economy and shrinking world, whose diversity is brought ever closer home by expanding international trade, rapid flow of information, capital and labour across national boundaries and jet-age travel.

The Cold War has ended. A new world order is yet to emerge. Just what that new world order is going to be is still undefined. We do know that there is a very high degree of integration in the global economy. We also see a declining significance of geographic distance, national boundaries and indeed, citizenship. As the world becomes smaller and peoples are brought ever closer, we must learn how to live with diversity. It is in this global context that we gather here to share our research.

It is therefore to the scholarship on overseas Chinese alone that this conference is dedicated. We welcome open debates on issues in scholarship and we gladly accept unconditional hospitality extended to us by parties supporting our objective. As a scholarly conference, we are not interested in political issues in China. We hope no one will inject these issues into the conference. Through this conference, we hope the cause of overseas Chinese studies will be advanced and an international scholarly network will emerge to promote and sustain the same cause. We also hope that through this conference, the world will reach a better understanding of the hopes, aspirations and rights of the overseas Chinese.

* The planting of permanent roots. Based on the opening remarks by the Conference Chairman, Professor Wang Ling-chi, this sets out the basic issues of the conference.

In Diaspora*

J.L. HEILBRON

The word “diaspora”, from the Greek word “dispersion”, made its first appearance in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Bible prepared by Jews in Alexandria to replace the Hebrew scriptures. The Alexandrian Jews had taken Greek as their vernacular and had lost familiarity with the language of their fathers. That is a common happening among peoples in diaspora, who, after some generations in a new land, may become not only dispersed, but also assimilated in the host country.

The Hebrew word that the Septuagint translates as “diaspora” is more closely rendered as “exile”. The difference in meaning is significant. An exile is one forced out of his or her own country; its root meaning in Greek is probably “to wander”; it gives no suggestion of eventual assimilation. The first diaspora discussed in the Bible, in which many Jews were forcibly removed to Babylon and kept there against their will, was an exile. Most of the people longed to return to Palestine, which in time they did, thus ending their experience in diaspora. A portion of the Jews exiled in Babylon had prospered, however, and they elected to stay. The Babylonian captivity, therefore, was a mixed diaspora, a temporary exile for some families and a permanent relocation for others. Contrary to the case of the Alexandrine Jews, however, the Babylonian Jews kept their language and nuclear communities and assimilated only slowly. The rabbinical school of Babylon remained an important influence in Jewish thought for 1,500 years. That is a good long time to remain in diaspora.

By the time of the Christian apostles, dispersed Jewish communities existed all around the Mediterranean and far into the Middle East. Their spread was aided by the policies of Alexander the Great and also of the Roman empire, which allowed Jews citizenship and freedom of worship, and thus the opportunity to promote their business while preserving their religion. Many of them tithed to the temple in Jerusalem; gold sometimes flowed to Palestine in such

quantities as to cause serious shortages in other regions of the Mediterranean. The energy of Chinese merchants in their diaspora has occasionally achieved a similar impact on capital in the Western world.

We have not exhausted the lessons of the Bible. We read in Acts, Chapter 2, that the 12 apostles gathered in Jerusalem on Pentecost, the 50th day after the first Easter. We are given a report of what happened: “Suddenly, there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting ... And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the spirits gave them utterance.”

When this mighty wind blew, there were many Jews of the diaspora visiting Jerusalem, Jews who had adopted the languages of the gentiles among whom they resided. A great multitude of these dispersed peoples, who did not know Hebrew, gathered to listen to the apostles. Each was amazed to hear the apostles preach to him in his very own language. “How hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?” This first large gathering of the Jews from the diaspora was also the first international conference with simultaneous translation.

Diasporas have had deep and wide effects on human history. The spreading of the Jews around the Mediterranean and into Asia not only began a dispersion that took them to the furthest corners of the earth and made Jewish history at times, and particularly in our century, world history; the diaspora also provided the network through which Christianity disseminated itself and grew during the time of the apostles. The Jews in diaspora were much better assimilated to pagan thinking and ways of life than the Jews of Palestine; moreover, the synagogues of Antioch, Damascus, Rome and other large centres acted as missionary magnets to gentiles attracted by monotheism and the after-life. The dispersed communities of the Jews provided access to the first potential converts to Christianity. That may be the chief world-historical work of the Jewish diaspora.

A second example of the unexpected powerful workings of a diaspora is the definitive European discovery of America. By the time of Columbus's birth, Genoese merchants had established trading

communities from one end of the Mediterranean to the other, from Portugal to the Black Sea. Typically, their terms of settlement required them to remain in their own quarters, especially in Greek and Arab cities. It was on these voyages, which took Columbus, a native Genoese, from the island of Chios in the Aegean to perhaps as far as Iceland and from Lisbon far down the west coast of Africa. On these voyages too, he learned navigation and ship handling, and, perhaps, found inspiration for the idea of a western voyage to the Indies. Genoese merchants in Portugal and Spain helped him make the contacts that brought him into the presence of Ferdinand and Isabella, and Genoese merchants established in Spain joined in underwriting the expenses of the western voyages.

The famous story that Queen Isabella pawned her jewels to finance her Admiral is a fable. Her investment came to well under half the total cost and she recouped it almost immediately by selling indulgences. This merchandise gave the purchaser perpetual forgiveness of his or her sins, in retrospect and in prospect. The cost to the Queen for the paper, printing and marketing was minimal; the mark-up gigantic; the sale, quick and complete. I hesitate to guess at the analogue in the business ventures of the overseas Chinese.

To return to the point: a Genoese diaspora prepared the way for the Admiral of the Ocean Sea, for the discovery of the so-called Indies, and for the conquest and settlement of America. The settlement required another sort of diaspora, the voluntary emigration of peoples from Europe, and also a frightful recurrence of an older sort, in the deportation and enslavement of Africans. Still another diaspora connected with the voyages of discovery derived from the expulsion of the Jews and Moors from Spain 500 years ago. A useful legend has it that the last boat carrying Jews into exile left Spain on the same day that Columbus sailed for the Indies.

Chinese diasporas have included most of the types I have mentioned. The Chinese journeyed far as traders, setting up communities and preserving their customs abroad. They have been quasi-enslaved as coolie labourers; they have been sojourners in foreign lands, voluntary exiles eager for repatriation; and they have adopted the life and languages of the countries in which they have settled.

The problem of the man or woman in diaspora is one of the most pressing of our time. Economic forces and ease of travel have brought the peoples of the world into contact as never before. Will the contact be mere juxtaposition or an intimate mixture? How can different racial and ethnic groups live together in a common culture while retaining what is appropriately distinctive about their own cultures? How much of the old ways is it appropriate and useful to maintain in a multicultural environment?

Questions like these are at the top of the public agenda in California. Two-thirds of the students enrolled in the public schools of Los Angeles are Chicano or Latino. The dominant ethnic group in San Francisco is of Asian origin. Whites are no longer in the majority on the Berkeley campus of the University of California. By the year 2000, the state of California will have no majority racial group. We will then be in the curious situation of having no frame of reference for a diaspora; all the groups will be dispersed among the others. Our challenge is to integrate them in a manner that at once ensures the survival of ethnic diversity and the cooperation of individuals needed to preserve a humane and prosperous society.

It is most fitting that this conference convene here, in the great cultural mix and mess that is San Francisco, and be sponsored in part by my university. The study of the wide experience of the Chinese in diaspora is already established within the vigorous programme in Asian American Studies at Berkeley. A fuller understanding of their experience might help in the formulation of policy for defining and adjusting the aspirations of all the many peoples in diaspora who make up the population of our state, our city and our university.

* Professor J.L. Heilbron, Vice-Chancellor, University of California, Berkeley, expanded on Professor Wang Ling-chi's opening remarks with these comments on the Chinese in diaspora.

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The Status of Overseas Chinese Studies

WANG GUNGWU

This conference is a truly ambitious effort to study the Chinese people who left China and spread themselves around the world. Even the many scholars who work on the two large “blocs” of Chinese communities, that in Southeast Asia and that in North America, have rarely explored their subjects at a single conference. It is certainly time for all those who believe that their studies go beyond local and regional interests to begin to examine each other’s work in depth and embark on systematically planned voyages of comparisons.

Among the Chinese outside China today, there are clear differences between those who have grown up in different countries or territories. For example, American-born Chinese see the world differently from new Chinese immigrants or Southeast Asian remigrants of Chinese descent. Similarly with the sizeable communities of settled Chinese in Western Europe, in India, Korea or Japan, in Fiji, Australia, New Zealand, Tahiti or Mauritius. The Chinese in these communities are different again from those who have emigrated recently and directly from Hong Kong, Taiwan or the People’s Republic of China.

So where does one begin? Some of the communities obviously have long histories of their own to relate, others are now large enough to attract sociological and psychological study, yet others are the subjects of foreign policy, political and security concerns. Today, many more have become economically so successful that they make intriguing case studies for economists, MBA students and Third World planners. Also, some Chinese groups have been outside China for