HE LAST HALF CENTURY OF WERSEAS

Edited by ELIZABETH SINN

THE LAST HALF CENTURY OF CHINESE OVERSEAS

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THE LAST HALF CENTURY OF CHINESE OVERSEAS



Preface

This book is an anthology of select papers presented at 'The Last Half Century of Chinese Overseas: Comparative Perspectives' Conference held from 19 to 21 December 1994.

The conference, hosted by the University of Hong Kong, was the spiritual successor of an earlier conference, the 'Luodi Shenggen: The Legal, Political and Economic Status of Chinese in the Diaspora' Conference held in 1992 in San Francisco. The Hong Kong conference, however, was more focused in terms of time, being the first international meeting of its kind to concentrate on the post-war period which had witnessed fundamental changes among Chinese outside China.

The gathering attracted considerable scholarly attention around the world. The 171 overseas participants were well matched by 91 from Hong Kong. Not surprisingly, a large contingent hailed from mainland China, and they were joined by 24 delegates from Japan, 18 from Australia, 17 from the United States and 11 from Taiwan. Delegates from South Africa, Denmark, Germany and Brazil, though small in number, further indicated that the study of the Chinese diaspora was indeed spreading to new corners of the world.

A total of 142 papers, including a number written in Chinese, were presented in 54 sessions over the three days. The majority were related to one of the five themes chosen for the conference: changing economic activities of Chinese overseas, national, international and transnational; migration patterns; political participation in host countries; popular culture and ethnicity; family structure and gender issues.

Variety and breadth characterized the conference programme. Some papers broke new ground by discussing Chinese communities which have hitherto attracted little scholarly interest, in Denmark, Brazil, Mexico and the Caribbean, for example; others, by using new conceptual and methodological approaches. The conference's emphasis on the comparative perspective brought forth stimulating studies which ranged from a comparison between the status of Chinese and Japanese in South Africa, to that between the migration of minorities in northwest and southwest China; from a comparison of settlement experiences of recent Chinese immigrants in Australia from Hong Kong, Taiwan and China, to that of emigrants from these places in the United States.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to publish all the papers in one volume. Members of the Organizing Committee decided to select papers which highlighted the new grounds covered by the conference, papers which were regarded as innovative in terms of issues dealt with, geographical areas covered, methodology and findings. Though only a fraction of the total number of the papers are presented, these selected papers, seven of which are in Chinese, nevertheless reflect the kaleidoscopic effect of the conference as a whole.

Together, the papers enable us to think of Chinese overseas in broad conceptual and global terms as well as to explore their lives in small local communities. They cover Chinese residing in five continents. Perhaps most importantly, scholars from different disciplines using different types of data, methodologies and analytical tools show us the richness of the subject matter. This collection of papers will no doubt go a long way not only to broaden and deepen our understanding of the Chinese overseas, but also to strengthen 'Chinese overseas' as a field of study by showing the many possibilities for further investigation.

Many people have made this publication possible. Members of the Organizing Committee, besides helping to organize the conference, also made valuable recommendations in the selection of papers. Every speaker at the conference contributed to its vitality and success, compelling the Committee to see that it was imperative to produce a publication to mark this significant intellectual occasion. I am especially indebted to Professor Wang Gungwu, Chairman of the Committee, for his inspiring leadership during the long months of preparation, and of course for contributing two key essays to this book. I thank the contributors, who spared no effort at revising their paper after the conference and made my work light by responding promptly to queries and requests for further information. Last but not least, I thank Mr Chin Kong, the Assistant Secretary of the Organizing Committee, for helping to prepare the manuscript.

Elizabeth Sinn The University of Hong Kong October 1997

Contributors

Carolyn L. CARTIER is Assistant Professor of Geography at the University of Oregon.

Stephen CASTLES is Professor of Sociology and Director of the Centre for Multicultural Studies at the University of Wollongong.

CHAO Zhongchen is Professor in the Department of History and Head of the Institute of Research on Overseas Chinese and Chinese Overseas, Shandong University.

James E. COUGHLAN is Lecturer in the Department of Psychology and Sociology, James Cook University, Australia.

Karel DUIVENVOORDEN is Policy Officer in the Bureau of Ethnic Affairs, Department of the Premier and Cabinet, Queensland Government, Australia.

Michelle GUILLON is Professor of Geography at the University of Poitiers, France.

Karen L. HARRIS is Senior Lecturer in the Department of History, University of South Africa.

HUANG Jing is Assistant Researcher at the Chinese Institute for the Studies of Overseas Chinese and Chinese Overseas History.

HUANG Xiaojian is Assistant Researcher at the Chinese Institute for the Studies of Overseas Chinese and Chinese Overseas History.

David F. IP is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at the University of Queensland.

Christine INGLIS is Director of the Multicultural Research Centre at the University of Sydney.

Robyn IREDALE has worked at Sydney, Macquarie and Wollongong Universities, as well as at the Ethnic Affairs Commission of New South Wales and the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission.

Ikuo KAWAKAMI is Associate Professor at Miyagi University of Education at Sendai, Japan.

Diana LARY is Professor of History at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver.

LI Minghuan is Research Fellow at the Centre for Asian Studies, Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

Garland LIU is Lecturer in Sociology at the Open University of Hong Kong.

Colleen MITCHELL works for the Centre for Multicultural Studies at the University of Wollongong.

Emmanuel MA MUNG is Director of a research unit on international migrations at the National Centre for Scientific Research, France.

Wing Chung NG is Assistant Professor of History at the University of Texas at San Antonio.

David PARKER is Lecturer in the Department of Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, England.

Rogelia PE-HUA is Research Fellow at the Centre for Multicultural Studies, University of Wollongong.

Frank N. PIEKE is Lecturer in Politics and Society of Modern China, University of Oxford.

Jan RYAN lectures on Chinese and Australian History at Edith Cowan University, Australia.

Elizabeth SINN is Deputy Director of the Centre of Asian Studies at the University of Hong Kong.

Suk-Tak TAM is currently researching on the history of Chinese migrant labour at the University of Cambridge.

TAN Tianxing is Editor-in-chief at the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of China.

Mette THUNØ is Lecturer in the Department of Asian Studies at the Copenhagen University.

WANG Gungwu is Director of the East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore, and Emeritus Professor at the Australian National University.

Chung-Tong WU is Dean of the Faculty of the Built Environment at the University of New South Wales.

YASUI Sankichi is Professor of International Culture at the Kobe University, Japan.

ZHOU Nanjing is Professor at the Institute of Asian and African Studies, Beijing University.

ZHU Huiling is Deputy Director of the Overseas Division, the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of China.

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Introduction:

Migration and New National Identities

Wang Gungwu

The essays in this volume have been written in response to a call for comparative studies on the Chinese overseas and with an emphasis on migration during the second half of the twentieth century. This means that more attention has been given to the new migrants, the majority of whom have gone to the West, and less to the well-established communities in Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, the essays bring out many contrasts and similarities.

There are essays which outline the differences between the old settlers and the new sojourners who both try to share what they have in common, whether in Canada, Australia, Japan and the Netherlands. Others describe the migrants who went in one direction instead of another, whether by choice, or by luck, or by force of circumstances. These essays describe the many differences among those who resided among other Chinese, or, eschewing ghetto-like life, lived instead among non-Chinese, including other migrant communities. The countries they migrated to range from Indonesia and Malaysia, to Scotland, France and to South Africa. And, whatever the differences in their backgrounds, whether they have settled in Korea, Australia or Japan, there are Chinese who visit China, Taiwan and Hong Kong regularly to trade, to seek bonding, or to update whatever perspective they have of the home country, while others visit only as sentimental or skeptical tourists.

Many dramatic events characterized the last half century of change for the Chinese overseas. Underlying the events are interesting paradoxes which either pertain to migrants in general or are peculiar to the Chinese. This introduction focuses on the paradoxes which have come about because of a world dominated by nation-states. These paradoxes show that the *Huaqiao*, or Overseas Chinese, have been seen by foreign governments as posing difficulties for them only after the rise of modern nationalism. Even though the nature of that nationalism has changed greatly during the twentieth century, it remains central to 'the Chinese problem', through the stages of Western national expansion and withdrawal, of Chinese nationalism, and of anti-colonial and anti-Chinese nationalisms, to the much more complex range of national experiments taking place in many of the countries the Chinese are currently migrating to.

For the Chinese themselves, all the manifestations of nation-building they have encountered have strongly influenced their lives outside China. It may even be said that the Overseas Chinese became more troubled and confused about what they were and should do when they themselves became more nationalistic about China. During the last half century, in all the five continents covered by the essays in this volume, the nature of national identity for the various kinds of Chinese who live outside Chinese territories highlights the paradoxes that deserve attention. I suggest that the dominant national ideal that drives global development today provides an essential background to what may be called the paradoxes of Chinese migration. Nation and nationalism, of course, are new concepts to the Chinese. Yet they very quickly became closely woven into a traditional sense of identity, especially during the last half century. The speed at which this occurred, and the intensity of the dramatic events which stimulated the nationalism, have made the paradoxes more extensive and durable.

The nationalism directly experienced by the Chinese overseas reached its climax in modern times when China was most threatened during the Sino-Japanese War. Many of these Chinese had made sacrifices, including buying arms for China during the war, allowing some of their sons to return to China to fight, and raising money for refugee welfare.

Thus, when the Second World War ended in 1945, the Chinese outside China felt that all their efforts and sacrifices had turned out to be worthwhile. In particular, they were proud that China was one of the Big Five members of the United Nations Security Council. The nationalism that had been first aroused by Sun Yat-sen during the long years of inequality and humiliation during the first half of the century seemed to have achieved the desired end. Nationalism was seen as having played its historic part.

There were, of course, paradoxes within China itself. For example, one that no Chinese could have missed was that the victorious nationalists immediately faced a civil war against a strong communist army that

claimed to be internationalist. For those outside China, there were other serious changes. On the one hand, the Allied victory over the aggressive nationalisms of the Axis Powers had led to a new generation of political leaders in the West who eschewed old national rivalries, and highlighted the greater ideological struggle for liberty and democracy against collectivist and expansionist Soviet tyranny. The immigrant Chinese who lived in countries where such changes were occurring thought that their old nationalism had achieved equality for them, and expected the end of anti-Chinese discrimination. But, with many governments still uncertain about the loyalties of their Chinese communities, whether they might remain loyal to China (communist or not), this discrimination did not officially and legally end for another two or more decades.

On the other hand, the Western retreat from empire, especially in Southeast Asia where most of the Chinese were, was accompanied by the rise of anti-colonial nationalism. There, the nationalism against the West was turned into forces which would not tolerate any kind of foreign enclave nationalism in their newly independent countries. As a result, during the decade of the 1950s, Chinese who were still wrapped up in concerns about their China identities were forced to consider new, local, and more legitimate, national causes. Those who did not accept this new nationalism could return to China, or remigrate somewhere else. Another alternative was to embrace an internationalist creed like communism that was thought to be above mere nationalism. Faced with these choices, the majority, however, decided that their homes were indeed in these new countries, that they wished to settle down and were determined to make their peace with local nationalism.

What the Chinese today have to face are nationalisms that evolved through the twentieth century, especially during its latter half, and the reactions against the nation-state arising from the successful expansion of the global market economy. The pressures on the Chinese overseas to adapt to the shifts and turns of these developments, and to re-examine their strategies in order to survive as Chinese, are particularly relevant for an understanding of the paradoxes that will be described later. Sun Yatsen's idea of nationalism had left a clear message and developed a sense of national pride in the face of discrimination. The republic he established in 1912 was not a narrow nationalism. It evolved into the multi-nationality and multicultural republic that eventually recognized fifty-five minorities in China. The Chinese overseas, who lived among a variety of different peoples and communities, have had little difficulty identifying with this more inclusive nationalism.

These nationalistic Overseas Chinese were conscious of the divisions which China faced during the years of civil war and Japanese invasion

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because many of them had actively taken sides in that civil war. What united them finally was the Sino-Japanese War of 1937–45. That was an emotional experience which drew all Chinese together in ways unknown in the past. The best indication of this was the way this sense of national identity was shared across the many different jurisdictions in Southeast Asia as well as across several continents. No matter where they were, the *Huaqiao* seem to have responded in similar ways. This was because in the European colonies of Asia, local nationalist movements were still weak, and because in the European migrant states of North America and Australasia, the dominant white races discriminated so strongly against the Chinese that those who lived there were forced to defend their communities in any way they could.

Nationalism, whether in China or in a colonial or post-colonial setting, was still seen as a positive development. It symbolized the quest for independence, liberation, equality, modernization, and was also associated with freedom and democracy. It seemed quite different from the 'dark side' of nationalism in Italy and Germany during the Second World War which turned most Western nations against the old nationalism. In Asia, nationalism was also very different from the imperialism of the Japanese. Thus, when the local leaders began to build their nations after the Pacific War, most Chinese living in these countries had some sympathy for what was a familiar nationalism. With different degrees of willingness, they realized that they had to accept one of the conditions of this nationalism, which was the policy to limit strictly any further immigration from China, or indeed any kind of Chinese from anywhere. A near-paradox here was that the better they understood their own nationalism, the sooner they went along with the nationalism of others.

The post-war circumstances, however, were very complicated. Under the shadow of the Cold War, the People's Republic of China (PRC) joined the struggle between the two superpowers as an internationalist country. As for the Chinese overseas, they were an internal resource for many countries, especially those which tied themselves closely to the market economies of the West. But the PRC was on one side of the Cold War while the Guomindang in Taiwan was on the other. Some of the new nations in which the Chinese overseas had settled did not want to choose between the two sides. The Chinese settlers, therefore, had to adjust to local nationalism as minority communities which accepted each country's national aspirations. Once the emotional commitment to China was breached, being Chinese was not to be the same again.

Thus the Chinese overseas learned to live with the nationalism of the emerging nation-states. But the world changed, economically and technologically, more rapidly than most people expected. This affected