



# CHINA AND THE CHINESE OVERSEAS

Wang Gungwu

"Like Chinese migration, Wang Gungwu's scholarship knows no boundaries, straddling the conventional divide between China and Southeast Asia. This collection of his lectures and writings has the unusual virtue of ranging nimbly over both diaspora and homeland."

—*Far Eastern Economic Review*

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*For Margaret*

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## Part I

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## Part II

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## The Author

WANG GUNGWU, Director of the East Asian Institute at the National University of Singapore and Distinguished Senior Fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, was born in Surabaya, Indonesia, and brought up in Ipoh, Malaysia. His first degrees were from the University of Malaya, Singapore, and his doctorate from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

He has taught at The University of Malaya (in Singapore, 1957-1959; in Kuala Lumpur, 1959-1968), where he was Dean of Arts (1962-1963), and Professor of History (1963-1968). From 1968 to 1986, he was Professor of Far Eastern History in the Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University. During that period, he was also Director of the Research School for five years. In 1986, he was appointed Vice-Chancellor of the University of Hong Kong and was there until 1995.

Outside his universities, Wang Gungwu has been a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities since 1970 and the Academy's President in 1978-1980. He has twice been President of the International Association of Historians of Asia and was President of the Asian Studies Association of Australia from 1978-1980. He is a Member, Academia Sinica; Honorary Academy Member, Chinese Academy of Social Science; Foreign Honorary Member, American Academy of Arts and Science. He has also received honorary doctorates from the following universities: Sydney, Monash (Melbourne), Griffith (Brisbane), Soka (Tokyo) and ANU (Canberra). He is Honorary Fellow of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London; and Honorary Professors of Peking and Fudan (Shanghai) Universities.

Among his books are *The Nanhai Trade* (1958); *The Structure of Power in North China during the Five Dynasties* (1963); *China and the World since 1949* (1977); *Community and Nation* (1981); *Dongnanya yu Huaren* (Southeast Asia and the Chinese) (1987); *The Chineseness of China* (1991); *The Chinese Way: China's Position in International Relations* (1995). He also edited *Changing Identities of Southeast Asian Chinese since World War II* (1988) (with Jennifer Cushman); *Global History and Migrations* (1997); and *Xianggang shi xinbian* (Hong Kong History: New Perspectives) (1997).

## Preface

Ten years ago, Anthony Reid, my former colleague at the Australian National University, selected some of my writings on Southeast Asia and the Chinese and had them published in a volume entitled *Community and Nation*. Since then, I have shifted my focus more towards the Chinese themselves and have paid more attention to aspects of migration, trade and culture. Thirteen of the sixteen essays in this volume were written after *Community and Nation* was published. Indeed, when it was suggested that I collect them together for this volume, five were still in press and two (Chapters 14 and 15) unpublished. As for the three published in the 1970s (Chapters 6, 7 and 16), they may need updating in parts, but have been included without revision in order to retain their place as background pieces for the more current themes.

Many Chinese have migrated from China, Taiwan and Hong Kong during the past decade and many others of Chinese descent have remigrated, largely from Southeast Asia to North America and Australasia. In contrast to the three decades after World War II, when the major issues were the political containment of China and the assimilation of local Chinese, attention has returned to the trading and entrepreneurial skills of the Chinese. In addition, there is fresh interest in the relevance of their cultural values and in the new Chinese urge to move between countries and even continents. My aim in the essays in this volume is not to cover these developments directly but to create a historical and historiographical picture that reflects my professional interests rather than contemporary trends. I hope thereby to prove that it is not really possible to understand what seems to be new without reference to the past.

Wang Gungwu

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PART I

In Historical Perspective



## Patterns of Chinese Migration in Historical Perspective<sup>1</sup>



MIGRATION IS A UNIVERSAL phenomenon made more conspicuous today by international attention in an era of nationalism. The paradox of better and easier transportation over longer distances and the erection of stronger barriers against the movement of people deserves to be studied as a global problem. Many studies have taken the worldwide perspective and the common features of what migration means for nations, communities and individuals are better appreciated now than ever before. Certainly the study of Chinese migration has benefited from comparisons with that of other migrating peoples.

Professor Mackie, as a distinguished scholar of Southeast Asia, has found the role of Chinese migrant communities particularly interesting. He has contributed several studies which have greatly illuminated the field for all of us. It would seem appropriate to register our debt to him with an essay that explores the historical characteristics that delineate some of the main patterns of Chinese migration during the past two centuries. Chinese migration has meant different things at different periods and to different peoples. While it may seem easy to generalize about it, it is also very easy to draw conflicting conclusions — conclusions which can be misinterpreted and which certainly do not help understanding. The complexities of the history of Chinese migration has contemporary relevance in so far as they would help our understanding of more recent manifestations of this ancient phenomenon.

### I

I shall not attempt any narrow definition of “Chinese migration” but try to introduce the subject in broad terms. Broadly, Chinese migration refers to the departure from Chinese soil for the purpose of living

and working abroad. I leave open the question of whether the migrants intended to settle permanently abroad or whether they meant to return to their homeland eventually. For our purposes here, the problem of intentions is not a central issue. More to the point is that in some periods, many Chinese migrants settled down and did not return while in other periods, very few did. We need to understand why this was so at different times, that is, what induced migrants to stay or to return; and also, what happened when they did settle and what happened when they actually returned. For those who settled, what changes occurred to these migrants and their families, to their migrant communities, to their relations with other local communities and, not least, to their relations with their ancestral communities in China?

Chinese migration, therefore, refers to the phenomenon of Chinese living and working abroad with the likelihood of settlement, whether or not these Chinese intended to do so from the start. By this, I would exclude diplomatic and other officials sent from China to serve China's interests; private agents who travelled on specific short-term missions; as well as students and, of course, tourists. But, as we know, that does not exclude many and for most periods during the past five to six hundred years "Chinese migrants" would have included the majority of those Chinese who left the borders of their country.

I shall not try to cover the whole history of Chinese emigration here but shall limit myself to the modern period, that is, the last two centuries since about 1800. For this period I shall use one of the historian's favourite devices and look for patterns of migration during different parts of that long period. For these two hundred years, I suggest that there have been *four* main patterns. These patterns overlapped in time as well as in many other ways but are quite easily identifiable. They are the trader pattern, the coolie pattern, the sojourner pattern and the descent or re-migrant pattern. Let me first deal with each of them individually.

## The Trader Pattern

The trader pattern refers to merchants and artisans (including miners and other skilled workers) who went abroad, or sent their colleagues, agents or members of their extended families or clans (including those with little or no skills working as apprentices or lowly assistants) abroad to work for them and set up bases at ports, mines or trading cities. When this proved successful, the business abroad, or

the mining business, could expand and require more agents or young family members to join it; or new businesses and mines were established into a network, also requiring more agents or family members to be sent out to help the new ventures. Over a generation or two, the migrants, mostly male, would settle down and bring up local families. But even if they themselves did not settle down, their local families did and, more often than not, remained as recognizably Chinese families to keep the businesses going. The more successful the businesses, the more likely their families kept up their Chinese characteristics, if not all their connections with China. But, where there was sufficient inducement or political pressure to do so, some of these families abandoned their Chineseness and became local notables. However, for the most part, the requirements of their businesses ensured that not all members of these families could depart too far from the Chinese connections necessary for their continuing success.

I call this the "Huashang" (Chinese trader) pattern of migration. This was the dominant pattern from early times in various parts of Southeast Asia. In all its essentials, it was a migration pattern that had been established by traders, artisans and miners *within* China since at least the Song dynasty. A later parallel involving Han Chinese settling among minority peoples may be seen in migration to provinces like Yunnan, Guizhou, Guangxi and Taiwan. The crucial difference, however, was that those provinces were under imperial Chinese administration so that the Chineseness of their families was rarely in doubt. Indeed, it was traditionally in this context that the word *qiao*, meaning temporary residence, was appropriately used. *Qiao* originally referred to temporary residence away from home, from one's own village, country or province, but still *within* China. It was appropriate in particular for people who retained the registration (*jiguan*) with their home towns and had not registered in their place of residence (*ruji*). But it was a common phenomenon for traders and artisans from the same home town or country to retain that connection in order to sustain their successful line of business for generations. Excellent examples within China were those merchants of Shanxi, Anhwei, Fujian and Guangdong, who dominated the long-distance trade within China for several centuries.

This Huashang pattern of migration was an extension abroad of this traditional practice, most notably among the Hokkien (South Fujian) merchants in Japan, the Philippines and Java, the Hakkas in West Borneo and the Teochius in Thailand. It was clearly the

dominant pattern by the eighteenth century, and the only significant pattern before 1850.

## **The Coolie Pattern**

The second pattern, the "Huangong" (Chinese coolie) pattern, derived from the migration of large numbers of coolie labour, normally men of peasant origin, landless labourers and the urban poor. This was not significant before the 1850s. It took a most dramatic form with the gold rushes in North America and Australia, but that did not provide the pattern of settlement. More important was the coolie labour phenomenon. This had many variations but its main characteristics are well known. It was associated with plantation economies of one era as well as the beginnings of industrialization in another, most notably the building of railways in North America. On the whole, this pattern of migration may be described as transitional. It was transitional in that a large proportion of the contract labourers returned to China after their contract came to an end. But it was also transitional in that it was quickly put to an end — very quickly in the Americas by the end of the nineteenth century; and not long afterwards in Southeast Asia (by the 1920s).

Nevertheless, it is an important pattern historically, especially outside Asia, in the countries of European settlement whether in the Americas or in Australasia. Although it occurred also in Southeast Asia, and was certainly significant in certain parts of Sumatra and the Malay peninsula, it was never the dominant pattern there but was largely subordinated to the Huashang pattern of migration.

## **The Sojourner Pattern**

The third pattern was the Huaqiao (Chinese sojourner) pattern. The term "Huaqiao" is still a controversial one, but one that urgently needs definition and clarification. It is quite different in nature from the terms for traders and coolies in that it is not descriptive of the occupations of migrants but referred broadly to all Overseas Chinese. Furthermore, it had political, legal or ideological content soon after the term came into use towards the end of the nineteenth century. It came to be used to apply to all those previously known as Huashang and Huangong, but also included those teachers, journalists and other professionals who went out to promote greater awareness of Chinese

culture and national needs.

At one level, that of linguistic convenience, its introduction was understandable. There had been a proliferation of terms for the Chinese abroad like *Huashang*, *Huagong*, *Huaren*, *Huamin*, *Huamang* (the last three are various ways of saying "Chinese" or "Chinese people") in addition to *Min Guangren*, *Min Yueren* and *Tangren* (people from Fujian and Guangdong, who traditionally called themselves "people of the Tang" [dynasty]) and none of them seemed accurate enough to cover all the Chinese living outside China. These Chinese were increasingly conscious of the weakness of China, of a China opening its doors and seeking to modernize through more contacts with the West. It was soon apparent that they needed China's help and protection and that China needed their experience — and in the case of Southeast Asia, also their wealth and expertise and their interest in investing in modern business and industry in China itself. To find a term that might include all Chinese and convey the idea of the official protection of China's citizens temporarily resident abroad was most useful.

But it was at another level that the pattern took its primary shape. This was the political, legal and ideological level at which the Qing imperial government and the Republican government acted and which the revolutionary movement of Sun Yat-sen and his followers later brought to a climax in the Nanking government of 1928.

The first political step was the claim that the *Huaqiao* owed their allegiance to China and to the Qing throne, thus negating British and Dutch claims to the loyalty of the Chinese subjects in their colonies. But this also meant the right of the Qing empire to intervene to prevent disloyalty and rebellion — to stop foreign countries from harbouring outlaws and rebels like Kang Youwei and Sun Yat-sen. The legal step provided protection for all Chinese abroad through embassies and consulates, but it also led to ambiguities about the application of legal systems to such Chinese. To what extent were these Chinese under Western law in areas over which the Chinese government had no control, or under Chinese law when inside China if some of them could show that they were foreign citizens?

But perhaps the most important feature of the *Huaqiao* pattern was the ideological one. This was primarily determined by nationalism, but it was also enhanced by a close association with revolution — first as espoused by Sun Yat-sen, but later in both its manifestations under the Guomindang and the Chinese Communist Party. In this way, it gave shape to a conscious migration policy that brought

both the Huashang and the Huagong patterns under its umbrella. The Huaqiao pattern was to become the only pattern through which Chinese governments could protect Chinese migrants and intervene in overseas Chinese affairs.

The nationalist principles were clear. All Chinese, wherever they were, were part of the Chinese nation. They wanted protection and must be duly protected. All Chinese should give their primary loyalty to China. They must therefore have their consciousness raised and, if necessary, adequately politicized in order to ensure that the political loyalty was fully understood. To this end, the Huashang and Huagong patterns were not enough. They had to be supported by officials, teachers, journalists, party workers and a wide range of China-trained intellectuals to do the following: to re-sinicize those who had been acculturated by local or Western ways, to sustain the Chinese who wanted their local progeny to remain Chinese and not least, to serve the Overseas Chinese as direct and strong links with China. Eventually, an additional dimension was added, especially after the revolutionary movement was divided between Left and Right and the Overseas Chinese were drawn into certain aspects of the Civil War in China. An even more powerful development came with the Sino-Japanese War and the patriotism it aroused among most Overseas Chinese. The impact of that experience was to stay with them for at least a decade after the end of the war in 1945.

This Huaqiao pattern, including all migrants whether traders, coolies or educated professionals, developed only after 1900 but it reached high emotional levels very quickly after 1911. Although it was influenced by the numbers and wealth of Overseas Chinese, the chief feature that distinguished it from the two patterns of migration above was that it focused on quality, especially the quality of Chineseness among all the Chinese abroad. Thus this pattern had at its centre a deep commitment to education in the Chinese language and a willingness to help and encourage all Overseas Chinese to do battle with local authorities, whether colonial or nationalist, on behalf of that education. It was a pattern that was dominant until the 1950s and some aspects of it have survived till this day.

## **The Descent or Re-migrant Pattern**

The fourth pattern I have called the Huayi (Chinese descent or re-migrant) pattern. This is mainly a new phenomenon, Huayi being foreign nationals of Chinese descent. While they are largely foreign-



born, they also include some who were born in China, Taiwan or Hong Kong who have acquired foreign citizenship and are, strictly speaking, not Huaqiao temporarily resident abroad.

Before I continue, I must emphasize one point strongly. By this Huayi pattern, I am not referring to the earlier and basic kinds of migration that ended with many Chinese becoming foreign nationals. All three patterns of Huashang, Huagong and Huaqiao migration produced such naturalized or foreign-born Chinese. What I am referring to is the more recent development when Huayi in one foreign country migrated or re-migrated to another foreign country. Obvious examples are Southeast Asians of Chinese descent who migrated to Western Europe (Netherlands, Britain, and France), North America and Australasia during the past three or four decades, especially since the 1950s when some Southeast Asian nations made those of Chinese descent feel unwanted. Their numbers are not large, but they have produced a different pattern of migration which deserves attention.

It is not, of course, an entirely new development. Foreign nationals of Chinese descent have existed since the middle of the nineteenth century and there are some families — still recognizably Chinese families — who have been foreign nationals for generations. And among them have been those who have migrated from their adopted country to a third country and then settled down and acquired a new nationality. What is of great interest is whether this secondary or even tertiary migration, or re-migration, helped to sustain the sense of Chinese identity. In some cases, there is evidence that the second or third move was related to the migrants' search for less discriminatory conditions to bring their children up as ethnic Chinese. We are familiar with the re-sinicization of Baba or Peranakan Chinese in Malaysia and Indonesia during the period when the Huaqiao pattern was dominant. Now that the Huaqiao pattern is quiescent and at best low key, one wonders whether the new Huayi pattern of secondary or tertiary moves may keep open the possibility of re-sinicization for a longer period. An extra and probably disorienting move might loosen a foreign attachment and open such migrants to a revival of interest in their origins in China. It could, of course, produce the opposite effect. The new generations who have to endure a second change of identity might well abandon all desire to find links with the ancestral country.

One additional point worth making is that this Huayi pattern of migration is strongly represented by well-educated professionals who