

Chinese, Overseas

Over the five thousand years of Chinese civilization, the Chinese people have migrated to virtually all the areas in the world. The overseas Chinese today are widely spread over the globe, residing in almost every country of the world. In the late 1990s, there was an estimated 31 million Chinese living in 76 countries outside mainland China (including Hong Kong and Macao) and Taiwan, comprising more than 98 percent of all overseas Chinese. A famous Chinese poem notes that, "wherever the ocean waves touch, there are overseas Chinese."

Who Are the Overseas Chinese?

Definitions of the overseas Chinese vary from country to country and from scholar to scholar. No definition is unfailingly sharp and concise because the decision on whether or not a person or a group is overseas Chinese tends to be made by governments, both Chinese and foreign, by the individual persons themselves, by the larger societies alongside and within which the Chinese settlers live, and by individual scholars (Williams 1960).

Pan's (1999) discussion of the concept is illuminating. She represents the Chinese people in a series of four concentric circles. The innermost circle refers to Chinese living permanently in the People's Republic of China (PRC). The next circle consists of Chinese living in Taiwan and Hong Kong, as well as Chinese citizens living or studying outside China. The third circle includes those "unequivocally identified as overseas Chinese"; these are what she calls the hyphenated Chinese, e.g., Chinese-Americans, Sino-Thais, etc. They are people who are

"Chinese by descent but whose non-Chinese citizenship and political allegiance collapse ancestral loyalties." The last circle contains persons of "Chinese ancestry who have, through intermarriage or other means of assimilation, melted into another people and ceased calling themselves Chinese."

The term *hua ren* is commonly used to refer to overseas Chinese who have been naturalized by their host countries, and the term *hua qiao* to overseas Chinese who have retained their Chinese nationality and likely consider themselves as sojourners (Wen, 1985). When developing our estimate of 31 million overseas Chinese, we used a broad definition that included as overseas Chinese all persons with Chinese ancestry living abroad (outside the mainland and Taiwan), including *hua ren*, *hua qiao*, and *hua yi* (the descendants of Chinese parents) (see also Poston and Yu, 1992; Poston et al., 1994).

Patterns of Chinese Emigration

According to Wang (1991; also see Ye, 2000), there have been four major patterns of Chinese migration during the past two centuries. The first is the *Huashang* (Chinese trader) pattern, which is characterized by merchants and artisans, and, often their colleagues and members of their extended families, going abroad, and eventually setting up businesses. The migrants are usually males, and over one or two generations, many of the unmarried male migrants tend to "settle down and bring up local families" (Wang, 1991, 5). *Huashang* migration has been the dominant pattern in the growth of Chinese emigration to other Asian countries, particularly Southeast Asia before 1850 (Uchida

1960; Fitzgerald 1965). The *Huashang* pattern is the most basic pattern and has predominated since the earliest time. Indeed it is likely that the very first Chinese emigration, which was to either Japan or the Philippines, and which occurred during the Qin Dynasty (221-207 BC), was of the *Huashang* type. And whereas the other three patterns have definite temporal periods associated with them, the *Huashang* was and remains today the most basic of the Chinese migration patterns.

The second is the *Huagong* (Chinese coolie) pattern which occurred from about the 1850s through the 1920s when Chinese migrated to North America and Australia; this migration involved "coolie trade" in gold mining and railway building (Campbell, 1923; McKenzie, 1925; Stewart, 1951; Kung, 1962; Shen, 1970). Chinese emigrants under the *Huagong* pattern were often men of peasant origin, and the migrations were usually transitional in that a "large proportion of the contract laborers returned to China after their contract came to an end" (Wang, 1991, 6).

The third is the *Huaqiao* (Chinese sojourner) pattern. Although this kind of migration included all types of migrants, it was strongly comprised of well-educated professionals. It predominated after the downfall of Imperial China in 1911 and was strongly tied in with feelings of nationalism. Beginning in the 1920s, many teachers left China to go abroad to instruct the children of Chinese immigrants in the countries of Southeast Asia (Pan, 1990, 206). The pattern dominated until the 1950s.

The fourth is the *Huayi* (Chinese descent) pattern, a more recent phenomenon, and prevalent since the 1950s. It involves

persons of Chinese descent, *Huayi*, in one foreign country migrating or re-migrating to another foreign country.

Of the four, the *Huashang* is the most elementary and has been occurring for the longest time. Most of today's global migration of Chinese is of the *Huashang* type, and will be so in the future.

The Size And Distribution Of The Overseas Chinese

We have gathered data on the numbers of overseas Chinese from several sources, mainly issues of the *Overseas Chinese Economy Year Book* (1996, 2000) and the *Encyclopedia of Overseas Chinese* (Pan, 1999). More than 31 million overseas Chinese live in 76 countries, comprising more than 98 percent of all the overseas Chinese living in more than 130 countries. The distribution of the overseas Chinese around the world is uneven though widespread. Of the 31 million overseas Chinese, about 85 percent reside in 21 Asian countries, and over ten percent live in 26 countries of the Americas. Of the almost 24 million overseas Chinese living in Asia, 75 percent live in just three countries: 7 million in Indonesia, 6 million in Thailand, and over 5 million in Malaysia. Of the nearly 4 million Chinese living in the Americas, almost 2.5 million live in the United States.

What Are the Characteristics Of The Host Countries? Are there any noticeable regularities about the locations of the overseas Chinese? Are Chinese found more so in rich or in poor countries, and in small or in large countries? Is there a distance gradient in their settlement patterns?

There is a positive association among the countries of the world between the logged values of the number of overseas Chinese population and the host country's total population, and this relationship is maintained when the world is divided into Asian and non-Asian countries; the larger the population of the host country, the larger the population of the overseas Chinese in the country. This same pattern of relationships is also found for the country variable of geographic size, although the magnitude is not as high. There is not much of a relationship between the number of overseas Chinese (either absolute or relative) in the country and the per capita Gross National Product of the country, and this is particularly the case among all the countries of the world, and among the Asian countries; there is a modest positive correlation among the non-Asian countries. Among the Asian countries there is a high negative association between the number of overseas Chinese and the distance in kilometers from Guangzhou (Canton), the capital city of Guangdong Province, the major province from which Chinese emigration was initiated; the farther away the country from Guangzhou, the smaller the number of overseas Chinese. The relationship is lower among the non-Asian countries. Finally, among the Asian countries, there is a positive relationship between the relative number of overseas Chinese and population density; the higher the density of the country, the larger the relative number of overseas Chinese. This association is highly conditioned by outliers, such as Singapore.

Conclusion

Chinese emigration started thousands of years ago to other Asian countries, particularly in Southeast Asia. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, large numbers of Chinese emigrants went to virtually every country of the world. Nowadays the direction and magnitude of Chinese international migration are largely affected by the migration policies at origin and destination. Immigration is now limited in many countries, including such host countries as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States; this has resulted in a sizable number of illegal emigrants from China.

The growth patterns of the overseas Chinese in the future will be affected more by international emigration and immigration than by fertility and mortality. In fact, Massey has written that "China's movement towards markets and rapid economic growth may contain the seeds of an enormous migration ... that would produce a flow of immigrants [to the U.S. and other countries] that would dwarf levels of migration now observed from Mexico (Massey, 1995, 649). The potential for international migration from China is a "tsunami on the horizon" (Goldstone, 1997).

The overseas Chinese population in the world in the late 1990s comprised more than 31 million persons, a number larger than the total population of either Canada, Peru, Kenya, or Algeria, and almost twice the total population of Syria or the Netherlands. The numbers of overseas Chinese are likely to become even larger in future decades. The overseas Chinese have had, and will continue to have, important and significant influences in

their host countries and are certainly not an inconsequential population.

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