

Panel Proposal

Forced Migration and Refugeedom: A Neglected Aspect of Chinese Overseas Studies

Exile and Imagined Homeland: Cultural Nostalgia and the Mainlander Native Place Associations in Taiwan, 1962-1987

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Abstract

There has been little research on political exiles and refugees in the study of Chinese migration. The migrant identity and subjectivity engendered by people forced to leave home on account of war and political persecution received negligible scholarly attention despite the proliferation of works based on “diaspora.” While the collective efforts of scholars working in the field have offered illuminating studies of transnational linkages and imaginations both transcended and regulated by the nation-states, it is perhaps interesting to also look into cross-border connections and imaginations across contested national borders. In the late 1940s and early 50s, millions left home during the Chinese civil war and the founding of the PRC. A large group, many of them Nationalist soldiers and civil servants, took refuge on the island of Taiwan with the KMT. This group and their descendants are commonly referred to as “mainlanders” or *waishengren* (外省人) in Taiwan. At first, most of the civil war migrants had expected to return home within a few years, anticipating a final showdown between the CCP and the KMT. Nonetheless, the outbreak of the Korean War (1950-1953) and the stalemate of the two Taiwan Strait Crises (1954-1955, 1958) extended the sojourn on the island. This prolonged experience in exile had engendered a plethora of nostalgic writings pertaining to the migrants’ home provinces and counties in mainland China. This study examines mainlanders’ imagined homeland in the context of Cold War in East Asia. It probes into the activities and cultural production of the “mainlander native place associations” (外省同鄉會) from 1962 to 1987. The idealized imaginations of home were shattered, when the political situation changed on both sides of the Taiwan Strait to allow the civil war migrants to return in the late 1980s. The paper illustrates the discordance between existing theory of political exiles/diaspora and the mainlander experience, and argues for a historical approach to the study of migrant identity and subjectivity. It also add nuances to the debate on the “overseas Chinese” identity by demonstrating the fluidity and historical specificity of mainlanders’ imagined homeland.

Keywords: *mainlanders, native place associations, cultural nostalgia, imagined homeland, Chinese civil war, political migrants, Cold War, Taiwan, KMT, CCP*

Overseas Chinese Refugees in the People's Republic of China: A Neglected Field of Study

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Abstract

The image of people fleeing communist rule in China is one that probably comes easily to mind for many people. Far less familiar for most of us, is the image of people actually migrating *to* socialist China. Yet in the first decade following the communist revolution in 1949, almost as many people migrated to the People's Republic as fled from it. Over the course of three decades from 1949 to 1979, more than 700,000 ethnic Chinese persons migrated to socialist China. At least half of them were refugees from surrounding Asian countries including Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, Burma and India. The purpose of the proposed research is to examine the resettlement of tens of thousands of ethnic Chinese refugees on special "Overseas Chinese state farms" (*Huaqiao guoying nongchang* 华侨国营农场). Located mainly in the sub-tropical regions of southern China, the farms inducted the refugees into what was essentially a system of plantation agriculture, geared to the production of strategic raw materials. During the 1950s and 60s, China regarded Overseas Chinese state farms—in effect, large-scale, permanent refugee settlements—as having the utmost economic and strategic significance. Overseas Chinese state farms were designated to be the principal source for a handful of key agricultural commodities that were prohibited under the US-led international embargo on trade with China. The purpose of this paper is twofold. The first is to examine China's system of overseas Chinese state farms and consider their place in China's Cold War political economy. The second objective is to ask how the experience of overseas Chinese refugees in China fits into the larger fields of forced migration and refugee history. The study of China's overseas Chinese state farms challenges conventional wisdom about what it means to be a "refugee" and suggests the need for new ways of thinking about refugee experience and the relationship between states and refugees in the contemporary world.

Keywords: *refugees, overseas Chinese, overseas Chinese state farms, Cold War*