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Qiaowu: Extra-Territorial Policies for the Overseas Chinese

JAMES JIANN HUA TO

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Whereas scholarship on diasporas has expanded in tandem with research on globalization and migration in recent decades, the role of diasporas in international relations remains an understudied subject. In the field of IR, questions of transnationalism and national identity have mostly been approached through the lens of constructivism. In response to this, some scholars have urged for the return of the state in analyses of the role of diasporas in IR. James Jiann Hua To's study of *qiaowu* or "Overseas Chinese (OC) affairs work" (*huaqiao shiwu gongzuo*) falls within the scope of the latter. As such, this is an attempt to offer a more updated and systematic approach to existing accounts of "*qiaowu* methodology" (p. 12), of which Stephen Fitzgerald's *China and the Overseas Chinese: A Study of Peking's Changing Policy 1949-1970* (Cambridge University Press, 1972) is perhaps the most classic example.

The author bases himself on Francesco Ragazzi's model of diaspora policies—in turn inspired by Foucault and the "Paris School" of security studies—according to which these policies reflect changes in "government rationalities and modalities of power" (p. 8) in response to shifting geo-political environments. In line with this model, the author argues that, determined by national interests, *qiaowu* is "a greater quest for hegemonic domination of the Chinese diaspora through political, economic, and cultural channels" (p. 9). The three chapters in the first section discuss the historical background and the nature of policies since 1949, with a strong focus on the period between 1989 and 2008. The second section, comprising three chapters, is concerned with the implementation of policies and challenges to implementation specifically. The two chapters in the third section, finally, outline OC policies in the twenty-first century through an exposition of the role of consular protection and the evolution of *qiaowu* amidst globalization and new migration patterns.

The strength and originality of the book concerns the detailed treatment of the rivalry between ROC and PRC policies towards the OC and how the former has impacted and continues to impact the latter. In terms of the analysis of the *qiaowu* administration, the angle of propaganda also leads to the inclusion of the role of the several CCP departments in the system, and a broader discussion extending to the relation with other ministries not directly part of the system for OC work. This offers new insights as compared to existing analyses, which mostly center on the so-called "five bridges" (*wuqiao*), the five main organizations involved in *qiaowu*. Regarding specific engagement strategies, the author offers a plethora of examples, many of which are taken from the Pacific Islands and New Zealand. Here, apart from evidence gathered through the author's membership of local OC organizations and conversations with officials and

OC community leaders, a unique source concerns the classified reports, memoranda, and papers from the State Council in particular. On the whole, the author combines an impressive amount of Chinese primary sources, such as *qiaowu* reports and handbooks, and Chinese secondary sources with a massive number of media sources in both Chinese and English.

While the argument is overall convincing, a clearer chronological approach and a less prominent role for ROC policies would have made a better case for the evolution of PRC policies in response to changing contexts. In addition, the concern with propaganda and the specific importance given to the period between 1989 and 2008 fails to underscore the role of economic restructuring and other factors in the re-engagement with the OC. The preoccupation with the incorporation of the OC also implies a lack of discussion of the theoretical implications of how transnational policies affect the Chinese state. This seems especially relevant in light of the tensions between political, economic, and cultural engagement strategies. Even in those chapters that deal with “non-territorial” aspects such as cultural work, the attention is mostly on different forms of ideological, psychological, or institutional “cooptation” (p. 201). Since the author mentions that the success of political cooptation is limited because economic motivations are primary for the OC (p. 203), and since the effect of globalization and new migration patterns is part of the analysis, this would require a more detailed look at the limits and frictions involved.

This also leads us to the author’s repeated reference to Yasemin Soysal’s “statist-corporatist” model as put forward in *Limits of Citizenship: Migrants and Postnational Membership in Europe* (The University of Chicago Press, 1994). This model, which Soysal originally applied to the incorporation of immigrants in Germany, is both centralized and top down and includes “intermediary political opportunity structures for participation” (p. 72). However, in the author’s discussion, even the most crucial of intermediary structures, the organizations for OC and returned OC, are treated only in the context of how they serve political causes, such as opposing Taiwanese independence, *Falungong*, or Tibet and Xinjiang separatism. One wonders whether specific engagement strategies and techniques such as root-seeking tours can be considered “participatory platforms” (p. 5), all the more so because the author mentions elsewhere that the role of the OC is merely advisory (p. 202). In other words, the use of this model for the PRC necessitates a discussion of political structures—such as, for example, OC representation in the National People’s Congress—and laws and regulations rather than strategies and techniques for incorporation per se.

This relates to some concerns regarding the methodology and sources, namely the strong emphasis on the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (OCAO) and the shift between a discourse analysis and an analysis of actual policies and strategies, which results in the limited use of policy documents in some chapters. As the author concedes, in recent years, the system has become increasingly decentralized, with conflicting interests between institutions. This implies that primary sources on the OCAO would best be balanced with policy documents from other main institutions so as to reveal shifting internal dynamics. In addition, the author admits, the policy documents do not discuss *qiaowu* administration, but rather *attitudes* towards the OC, which amounts to an unclear focus at times. In spite of these limitations, the book offers a wealth of information on what remains a highly secretive policy domain. The comprehensive overview of both

PRC and ROC policies and attitudes towards the OC since the late-nineteenth century, as well as the inclusion of important developments since the advent of the twenty-first century render its scope notably vast. It hence makes for a welcome and timely addition for those working on modern and contemporary China with an interest in the OC, as well as for scholars in the fields of migration and diaspora and International Relations.

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