

SOME NOTES ON THE RESEARCH ON OVERSEAS CHINESE HISTORY IN CHINA IN RECENT YEARS

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(Major changes have taken place in the People's Republic of China's domestic and foreign policies since the death of Chairman Mao Zedong and the fall of the "Gang of Four" in 1976, among which is a new emphasis on overseas Chinese affairs. An important step was taken in this area in early 1978 with the re-activation and strengthening of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (Huaqiao Shiwu Bangongshi) and the revival of the Returned Overseas Chinese Association (Guiguo Huaqiao Lianyihui). Reflecting this shift in policy is the increase in interest in the study of overseas Chinese history and society. The following article describes the status of this field of study, particularly where it is relevant to Chinese American historical research.)

About 70% of the emigration abroad originated from Guangdong; thus, it is only natural that the greatest activity in overseas Chinese studies is to be found in this province. Two institutions of higher learning in Guangzhou -- Zhongshan (Sun Yat-sen) and Jinan Universities, played major roles in this effort. Zhongshan University led the way with an historic first when it signed an agreement with UCLA's Asian American Studies Center to do research on Chinese emigrant families in Taishan (Toishan) county. The joint team spent several months in 1979 researching the library and archival collections as well as conducting interviews with returned overseas Chinese and their families at Xiudun, and Qiluo in Taishan. Although much of the information and data so collected have yet to be completely analyzed and the findings published, the project succeeded in stimulating research into different facets of the Taishan emigration experience. So far, the following papers have been published: "Chinese Emigration, the Sunning Railroad and the Development of Taishan" by Lucie Cheng, Liu Yuzun, Zheng Dehua, in *Journal of Zhongshan University*, social sciences edition, 1980, No. 4; also an abridged version in English in *Amerasia Journal IX: 1*, (1982); "Chinese American Contributions to the Educational Development of Taishan, 1910-1940" (in English) by Yu Renqiu, in *Amerasia Journal, X: 1*, (1983); "The Overseas Chinese and the 1911 Revolution in Taishan" by Liu Yuzun and Lucie Cheng, *Xueshu Yanjiu*, 1982, No. 1. Research is also continuing on Chin Gee Hee and the Sunning Railroad.

In June 1981, Zhongshan University, UCLA and the University of Hong Kong signed another agreement for a joint effort to compile bibliographies on historical materials on the overseas Chinese in Guangdong, Hong Kong and California. By December of that year, Zhongshan University had completed *A Reference Guide to Overseas Chinese History, 1895-1980* (in Chinese), a 530-page publication; however, the other two institutions have yet to publish their findings. A paper resulting from this and the Taishan experience is "A Critical Introduction to Pre-Liberation Taishan Periodicals and Clan-village Publications" by Zheng Dehua and Wu Xingsi, in *Bulletin of the Guangdong Overseas Chinese Historical Society*, 1982, No. 4.

It is at Jinan University, however, that the first Overseas Chinese Research Institute (Huaqiao Yanjiusuo), was established in mid-1981. Under the guidance of Professor Zhu Jieqin, a well-known historian, the Institute so far has published three collections of *Essays on the Overseas Chinese History* (Vo. 1, 2, 1981; Vol. 3, 1983). Some papers relevant to Chinese American history are as follows: "Chinese American History and Society" (transcript of lectures by Professor Lucie Cheng, UCLA); "The Role of the Chinese in the Development of America and Their Plight in the Late 19th Century" by Zhu Jieqin; "Sun Yat-sen's Revolutionary Activities and the Overseas Chinese" by Zhong Zhenwei; "Sun Yat-sen and the Chinese in America" by Zhang Ying; "A

Preliminary Study on Relations of the Overseas Chinese to the Society to Preserve the Emperor" by Zhou Yue; "My Experience in the Laundry Business in America" (interview with Huang Shun); "An Interview with Zhang Manli, Former Business Manager of *China Daily News* of New York City"; "The Founding of the Chinese Hand Laundry Alliance in New York City in 1933", (interview with Lei Zhuofeng); "An Interview with Chen Ke, Returned Overseas Chinese from the United States"; "An Interview with Hong Chunxin, Former Restaurant Worker in the United States"; "A Case Study of a Chinese Immigrant Community in the U.S." by Liao Baoyun; "Biography of Wen Xiongfei" by Wen Jin, (Note: Wen Xiongfei was a Chinese American who served Sun Yat-sen before and after the revolution.); "An Illustrated History of the Chinese in America" by Ruthanne Lum McCunn, translated by Pan Eryao; "The Coolie Trade" by Robert J. Schwendinger, translated by Jiang Gejing.

A national network of historical societies serves as liaison for these research activities. As visualized, societies are to be established in Beijing, and on the provincial, area (diqu), and county levels. Membership is open to individuals or institutions doing research on the overseas Chinese.

The Guangdong Overseas Chinese Historical Society (Guangdong Huaqiao Lishi Xuehui) was the first to be organized, on June 29, 1981. This was followed by the establishment of the Overseas Chinese Historical Society Beijing on December 19, 1981; establishment of historical societies in the other provinces have been slower. The latest addition, the Fujian Overseas Chinese Historical Society, was established in February, 1983. However, preparatory committees have been organized in most emigrant areas.

The Guangdong society, to which both Zhongshan University and Jinan University are institutional members, is one of the most active. The society publishes a quarterly bulletin which includes scholarly articles, announcements of publications, and news of members, visitors and other activities. The society has published two collections of *Essays on the Overseas Chinese* (1982). Among the papers there were some which are of interest to Chinese American historians; e.g. "An Outstanding Patriotic Overseas Chinese Scholar--Yung Wing" by Dai Xueji. Works by Professors Lucie Cheng, Liu Yuzun and Zheng Dehua from the Jinan University collection previously mentioned, as well as several essays exploring theoretical aspects and the direction of overseas Chinese history research, are also included.

An ambitious nation-wide plan has been announced assigning responsibilities to institutions and scholars to do research on various phases of overseas Chinese history and society. Twenty-eight works are scheduled to be published by 1987, including histories of the Chinese in the United States, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, and Thailand; biographies of outstanding personalities; overseas Chinese education, etc. In another separate effort, a group of researchers in Beijing led by Chen Hansheng is compiling *Historical Materials on the Emigration of Chinese Laborers*. As projected, the collection will be published in ten parts: 1. *Selected Official Chinese Documents*; 2. *Selected Translated Documents from the British Parliament*; 3. *Selected Translated American Official Documents*; 4. *General Works in Chinese and Foreign Languages on the Emigration of Chinese Labor*; 5. *Chinese Laborers in Southeast Asia*; 6. *Chinese Laborers in Latin America*; 7. *Chinese Laborers in the United States and Canada*; 8. *Chinese Laborers in America*; 9. *Chinese Laborers in Africa*; 10. *Chinese Laborers Supplied to Europe during the First World War*. So far, collections No. 2, 3, and 4 have been published.

The establishment of historical societies at the area and county levels has also been slow and has been affected by changes in provincial administrative structure. For example, the Overseas Chinese Historical Society of the Foshan Area, Guangdong Province, was established on May 26, 1982. Within the boundaries of this area are most of the counties providing emigrants to the United States, including Sam Yup, Sze Yup

and Zhongshan. However, in 1983, responsibilities were reassigned with Foshan (Fatshan) and Jiangmen (Kongmoon) each administering several counties. This left the historical society with an administrative area which no longer exists and it has to be reorganized. However, despite such delays, research is still proceeding at this, the grass roots level, often in collaboration with other institutions. At this level, where documentary resources are limited, the effort has been on gathering materials on local institutional histories and biographies, often based on oral interviews. Historical structures and artifacts are also being identified. For example, one team led by professors from Jinan University has made an investigation of schools built with contributions from the overseas Chinese. They found that the earliest such school is the Jinxian School in Zhuhai, Yung Wing's home county. Yung had proposed its construction in 1872. Another example is the investigation in Yanping on the life of Fong Joe Guey, the first Chinese American aviator, as part of preparations for a commemoration of the centennial of his birth.

The level and quality of research varies from locality to locality. The more active areas appear to be Kaiping (Hoiping) and Zhongshan (Chungshan). For example, Kaiping researchers have tentatively identified Xie Shede from Tangxi Village as the first Kaiping emigrant to America. In Zhongshan is the only museum on overseas Chinese history in Guangdong (There is a bigger overseas Chinese museum donated by Tan Kah Kee in Xiamen). It is housed in the new imposing Zhongshan Memorial Hall in Shiqi and only opened officially in November, 1983.

Alongside these research activities in the area and county level, a number of county, clan, and village periodicals have now resumed publication. These include items on contemporary events in the area, news of villagers at home and abroad, belles lettres by local citizens and emigrants abroad, as well as historical articles. The level of scholarship is somewhat on the same level as that found in local U.S. historical societies.

Research on overseas Chinese history is still in a developmental stage in the People's Republic of China. Although the quantity and quality of studies have increased since this phase began in 1978, there is a gap in scholarly expertise due to the decade of turmoil during the Cultural Revolution. Many older more knowledgeable researchers are close to retirement, while the younger scholars still have not gained the depth which comes as a result of experience.

A number of papers on the overseas Chinese have also been published in recent years. In general, many works place emphasis on the following areas; (1) the reasons the emigrants left China, (2) their contributions to China, (3) their influence on their native areas (e.g. "The Status and Pre-Liberation Overseas Chinese Investments in Guangdong and its Effects," by Lin Jinzhi, in *Xueshu Yanjiu* 1981, No. 5, 6, is based on original field data gathered during the early years after the founding of the People's Republic.), etc. However, one factor hampering research is the poorly catalogued library collections. Another point is that researchers lacked access to source materials on the Chinese abroad, and existing materials are often inadequate. In addition to this, China was cut off from research abroad for almost three decades so that many scholars have not kept up with the latest developments in the field. However, with China's new emphasis on Overseas Chinese Affairs, it seems certain that rapid progress will be made in overseas Chinese research during the next few years and the increasing number of scholarly exchanges between the two nations will surely offer exciting opportunities for researchers in this country and China to work together and develop historical interpretation covering the full range of the overseas Chinese experience.

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The author, Him Mark Lai, retired as engineering supervisor from Bechtel Power Corporation in September. He has taught the history of the Chinese in America at San Francisco State College (1969); an in-service training course organized by The Association of Chinese Teachers (TACT) (1971); Chinese American history courses at CSU San Francisco in 1972, 1973, 1974, and 1975; and at UC Berkeley 1978 and 1979.

A consultant on many projects, Lai has been called in on the production of "Gum Saan Haak, A History of the Chinese in California" for KRON-TV, 1972-74; the Film Project for Cross-Cultural Understanding (TACT/ESSA) 1974-75; a National Communication Foundation film; the Chinese American Chinese Language Bibliography, UCLA, 1978 to the present; Felicia Lowe's film on "Angel Island" 1981; he's an Advisory Board Member of the "Chinese Women of America Research Project" by the Chinese Culture Foundation; an Advisory Committee Member of the AA Studies Program Chinese Materials Research Collection at UC, 1980.

The many articles and books that he has edited or been a co-author of include the *Syllabus: A History of the Chinese in California* (1969); *Outlines: A History of the Chinese in America* (1972); *Island: Poetry and History of Chinese Immigrants on Angel Island, 1910-1940* (co-author with Judy Yung and Genny Lim) (1980); *The Chinese in America*, an exhibition catalogue and illustrated history, (1980).

He and his wife, Laura, both of whom are society life members, have made several trips to China. On his last trip, he was able to pursue further research on the PRC's studies of the overseas Chinese. His notes were incorporated into the short article that he wrote for the November issue of the *Bulletin*.

HISTORY IN THE MAKING

The Chinese of America by Jack Chen has now been translated into Chinese. Published by Harper and Row in 1981 in hardcover and paperback, the Chinese language editions are printed in traditional and simplified characters by the Joint Publishing Co., Hong Kong publishing house and will be distributed through its worldwide sales network. It is being distributed in New York by Oriental Cultural Enterprises Co. and at Eastwind Books and Art, Inc., 1435A Stockton Street in San Francisco.

One Day, One Dollar: Locke, California and The Chinese Farming Experience in the Delta by Peter C.Y. Leung and edited by L. Eve Armentrout Ma is now available for \$14 per copy, declared Ms. Ma. Add \$1.50 per copy for postage and handling to Chinese/American History Project, 1355 Arlington Blvd., El Cerrito, CA 94530.

The E Clampus Vitus society requested permission of our Society to place a plaque at the Society's headquarters on September 29.

The Chinese American Council of the Bowers Museum in Santa Ana had an "Iron Spike" fund-raiser October 13 paying tribute to pioneer Chinese railroad builders.

Francisco Hsieh and Alon Yu, two Society members, were among the candidates for the "Emperor of the August Moon" festival. All proceeds went to the Chinese Hospital.

"An ad to ascertain possible descendants of Chinese who may still be buried in the Nevada City Cemetery will soon be appearing in a Chinese-language newspaper," declared Jerome F. Hund, the superintendent of schools in the County of Nevada, California.

The Nevada County Office of Education, in conjunction with the Nevada County Board of Education is negotiating with the U.S. Bureau of Land Management to acquire a 16-acre parcel of land on the edge of Nevada City. Located in the center of this parcel is a Chinese cemetery, surrounded by a barbed wire fence that encompasses almost two acres. The NCOE/NCBE intends to build an office building of approximately 10-12,000 square feet, to be located on a portion of the abandoned cemetery.

"Although documents from BLM's archaeologist suggest there are no deceased remaining in the cemetery," Superintendent Hund said, "the county board of education will have conducted for us soil studies that will provide additional assurances regarding possible remaining deceased. The altar and incinerator will remain intact and be incorporated into a memorial that will acknowledge the Chinese contribution to the Mother Lode's history."

Any development as well as reconstruction of the original entrance will be done in cooperation with the Society and in particular, with the advice of member Philip Choy, architect.