

Introduction

Between the years 1840 and 1940, more than twenty million Chinese left China, crossed oceans, and lived in other lands. Part of the first wave of global migration, this massive outflow was not only unprecedented in Chinese history; it was also the third largest after the exodus of fifty-six million Europeans and thirty million Indians during modern times.¹ Chinese emigrants were an indentured workforce for the sugar plantations in the Caribbean, guano islands in Peru, sheep ranches in New South Wales, gold mines in Transvaal, and war trenches in France. They were also present at the historic gold rushes in California and British Columbia and helped build the first transcontinental railroads bringing the United States and Canada westward to the Pacific. All across Southeast Asia, they worked as opium farmers, rubber tappers, rice millers, and tin miners. Some became major players in commerce, industry, government, education, and culture; others were the ubiquitous street peddlers, shopkeepers, vegetable gardeners, laundrymen, cooks, fishermen, and factory workers. Given this broad scope of Chinese mass emigration, numerous studies have detailed its impact around the globe. Yet one question is not often asked: How did it change China?

Such a question invites us to see Chinese history as fragmented and networked, not unlike migration itself, carrying and carried by forces traversing the world. Already significant in the sixteenth century, emigration was a common aspect of life on China's southeastern coast.² Families and entire economies in Guangdong and Fujian provinces subsisted and thrived on the ancient Indian Ocean trading economy. The eighteenth century saw an upsurge of Chinese agricultural and mining activities on both the mainland and the islands of Southeast Asia under local and European patronage, leading to a further integration of commerce and production in the region.³ After Qing China's loss to Britain in the First Opium War and the

forced opening to the West in 1842, emigration reached a global scale, as Chinese labor was pulled into a new geography linked by plantations, mines, railroads, and steamships from the Pacific to the Atlantic worlds. After the 1880s, the rise of anti-Chinese racism and exclusion laws dramatically slowed Chinese emigration to the Americas and Australia, but it continued to flow toward Southeast Asia, which absorbed over 90 percent of China's transoceanic total.⁴

Like millions of other people on the move, many Chinese emigrants did not become strangers to the old country because of their departures. Rather, they enmeshed it ever more deeply into the vast circulations of money, goods, ideas, and people. Leaving behind parents, wives, and children and sending money home, they not only transfigured their native clans, villages, and towns, but also drew China into the orbits of empires, nations, and markets far beyond its shores. Given the relatively high return rate of Chinese emigrants, many also wound up transforming the homeland directly by building new ventures and extending old networks after their return.⁵ Driven by the same forces that hastened China's transition from empire to nation, the history of Chinese mass emigration was inseparable from the making of modern China.

The mutual constitution of China and Chinese emigrants in the world could be seen through the rise of a new dynamism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: a modern relationship between the homeland and the diaspora that changed China. Not just a matter of Chinese nationalist claims, this relationship was powerful and multivalent, because there was as much effort from emigrants to make China an "ancestral homeland" (*zuguo*) as there was from China to turn emigrants into a "Chinese diaspora" (*huaqiao*). More importantly, the new dynamic was far from insular—it was embedded in a wide array of colonial, national, and capitalist forces, often making the results contingent and the causes opaque to the homeland. As China after the mid-nineteenth century became incorporated into the Western-led industrial economy and interstate system, Chinese elites repeatedly encountered the significance of Chinese emigration in a broader milieu where China was hardly the only player. Through recognizing, protecting, and mobilizing the emigrants, Chinese leaders and thinkers entered complex dialogues over slavery and free labor, overseas migration and colonization, Confucianism and Christianity, family and gender roles, and socialism and capitalism. From the 1840s to the 1960s, the weight of

this global engagement pulled China's center of gravity outward and created fields of intense activity. It is in this larger frame that Chinese mass emigration helped create modern China.

Modern China, the Overseas Chinese, and Chinese in the Americas

There is now a massive literature on China and the Chinese elsewhere, but more has been written about China's impact on the emigrants than the reverse, suggesting a missed opportunity despite the enormous extent of the scholarship. Making up a collective body of knowledge that might be called "a global Chinese history," the fields of overseas Chinese, Chinese American, and modern Chinese history have traditionally developed separately from each other. Not always in dialogue, scholars of the three fields share a broad concern over Chinese global engagement, though with a focus on different geographical areas.

Focusing on the Asian maritime world, scholars of the overseas Chinese have long recognized Chinese migrants as important subjects linking South China with Southeast Asia, a point to which most historians of modern China have paid scant attention. Plying the open seas as pilgrims, emissaries, traders, and laborers since the tenth century, the Chinese had been active in the Indian Ocean system many centuries prior to the modern migrations.⁶ Crucial to their long-distance activities was the role of affinities based on family, native place, dialect, and brotherhood, not the imperial polity. It is well known that even though Zheng He's seven voyages (1405–33) marked Ming China (1368–1644) as the unrivaled naval power in Asia, the state soon turned its back on the seas. Unlike European powers that successively sought to expand their seaborne empires from the 1500s onward, both the Ming and later the Qing (1644–1911) tried to revitalize the tribute system, outflank private traders, and ban maritime travel periodically, leading to Wang Gungwu's apt phrase for those in defiance: "merchants without empire."⁷ Therefore, it is precisely Chinese engagement without Chinese state support that makes overseas Chinese history a distinct, vital field of study. China as a political unit was rightly peripheral to this early picture centered on maritime Southeast Asia.

While Chinese emigrants have long been central subjects of overseas Chinese history, they have until recently been relegated to the margins of

modern China studies. In numerous narratives depicting China's evolution into a modern nation, the Qing state makes a "belated" acknowledgment of Chinese emigration, after which Chinese emigrants turn up briefly at major junctures of the national story: buying official titles and honors, extending protection to exiled reformers and revolutionaries, playing a supporting role in Sun Yat-sen's 1911 Revolution, and pouring funds into Nationalist China's anti-Japanese war effort.⁸ On the whole, Chinese emigrants seem no more than objects and resources commanded by China, whereas the impact of their own actions and agendas remains localized and derivative. Portrayed as an accessory to China's grand transformations, the emigrants could not have been a historical force. Sadly, what historians have long rejected as an overdetermined "impact-response" model in the study of the relations between China and the West persists in conceptions of China and the overseas Chinese: China called, the overseas Chinese responded—or at least some of them did.

As for Chinese American history, racism, exclusion, and assimilation are the earliest themes related to Chinese migration to the United States. Firmly based in the continental United States, this early scholarship has developed separately from overseas Chinese history, which has a heavy focus on Southeast Asia. As participants and leaders of the civil rights and ethnic studies movements in the 1960s and 1970s, Asian American historians sought to write Chinese immigrants and descendants, together with other Asian ethnic groups, back into U.S. national history. They have stressed how Chinese migrants contributed greatly to the development of the American West and the nation at large, but faced the first exclusion laws from 1882 to 1943, as well as continuous marginalization for seeming "foreign."⁹ Hence, early scholars have tended to downplay Chinese Americans as sojourners implicated in Chinese history, emphasizing instead their place as immigrants conforming to U.S. assimilation theory and themes of national progress.¹⁰ From the narratives of the "melting pot" to multiculturalism, China appears as a distant, bounded place that Chinese Americans came from but left behind.

Recently, a "transnational turn" in the broader historical discipline has pushed the boundaries of all three fields. During the Cold War, an extended, politically charged inquiry into whether Chinese abroad were sojourners or settlers dominated overseas Chinese history. Given the waves of anti-Chinese, anti-Communist violence sweeping across Southeast Asia,

scholarly investments in what became known as “the overseas Chinese question” not only shared a focus on citizenship and assimilation as in early Chinese American history, but also carried a distinct urgency. To repudiate China as the constant frame of reference for Chinese elsewhere, historians declared that their field, “the overseas Chinese,” should be renamed “Chinese overseas.” Still a standard practice today, the inversion rejects that the “Chinese” are a uniform entity defined by China. Instead, Chinese people are “Chinese” differently in the world, as in Wang Gungwu’s tripartite differentiations: *huaqiao*, who are Chinese nationals residing abroad; *huaren*, who locate their cultural origins in China but are politically oriented to their adopted countries; and finally *huayi*, who are well integrated into local society and could only be seen as ethnically—meaning remotely—connected to China.¹¹ Yet such purposeful efforts to harden the boundaries between politics, culture, and descent met an unexpected softening after the 1970s.¹² The easing of Cold War politics and the expansion of global capitalism, most notably China’s reopening since Deng Xiaoping and the subsequent attempts led by international interests to engage a “rising” China, have provoked a reimagining of Chinese identity and power in the world. This shift is evident in an explosion of Chinese transnational studies that challenge nation-based models of self and community.¹³

Meanwhile, the “transnational turn” in Chinese American history is less concerned with the prospects of reconnection with China, as in some recent works on Chinese overseas, but shows new ways to critique a bounded U.S. history. Aiming at claims of American exceptionalism, the Euro- and Western-centric history of migration and empire, and a neglect of the Pacific world, Asian American scholars have adopted wider frames and shown greater sensitivity to U.S. global engagement in Asia and the flows of Asian migrants, capital, and labor into the Americas.¹⁴ Now joined by scholars in Asian Canadian and Latin American studies, they have proposed hemispheric approaches, borderland studies, and trans-Pacific and global frameworks.¹⁵ Influenced by the “transnational turn,” today’s Chinese and Asian American history may engage the Pacific Northwest, including British Columbia, and a number of sites in Asia and the Americas that were joined by war, racism, capitalism, and colonialism.¹⁶ These far-flung connections suggest how excitingly scholarly efforts have broadened the themes of early Chinese American history and Asian American studies, as well as challenged the scope of traditional U.S. and Canadian history that rarely goes

beyond Europe and the Atlantic world. Importantly, some have also begun to consider China seriously as a historical force.

Similarly, the transnational turn in China studies has spurred a search for new horizons. It has laid to rest the already much-critiqued paradigm of “Western impact, Chinese response” and freed the writing of a “China-centered history” from rigid frames vis-à-vis the West.¹⁷ While it is true that scholars have long been at work writing the regional and global back into national history—from political economy to trade and marketing networks to the environment to circuits of knowledge and culture—they have remained slow in recognizing the wider significance of emigration to the task.¹⁸ Yet the history of Chinese mass emigration offers a unique vantage point on the dialectics familiar to many China historians: those between centripetal and centrifugal forces, nation-building and region-making, and borderlands and empires. At present, a more globally engaged China makes it particularly salient to consider it as the cause and effect of economic and cultural flows. The time is right for bringing together the three fields of scholarship—Chinese overseas, Chinese Americas, and modern China—to shine new light on China in global history through migration.

Locating China and Chinese in the World

Given the promise of new insights into shared themes, how does one study the history of Chinese emigrants and China in a single frame? Apart from the risk of sounding essentialist—assuming that Chineseness is given and immutable—there is still the vexing problem of how to organize a massive history and geography into a coherent form. Two dominant approaches exist in the scholarship. The first approach could be called “the sum of parts” through a total mapping of countries and regions. One instructive example is *The Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas*, edited by Lynn Pan.¹⁹ Without discounting the excellent contributions of this monumental resource, the encyclopedic approach to global history rests on a flawed conceptual foundation.²⁰ It presumes nations and regions as fixed, bounded, equal to one another, and existing prior to migration. A concentric-circle diagram in the volume, which sets up China as the center of an outwardly diffusing identity, provokes thought. Reminiscent of the Sinocentric tribute system positing a civilized self and barbaric others, the visualization of “varieties of Chinese” is not so much “symbolic” as mistaken. There is little reason to

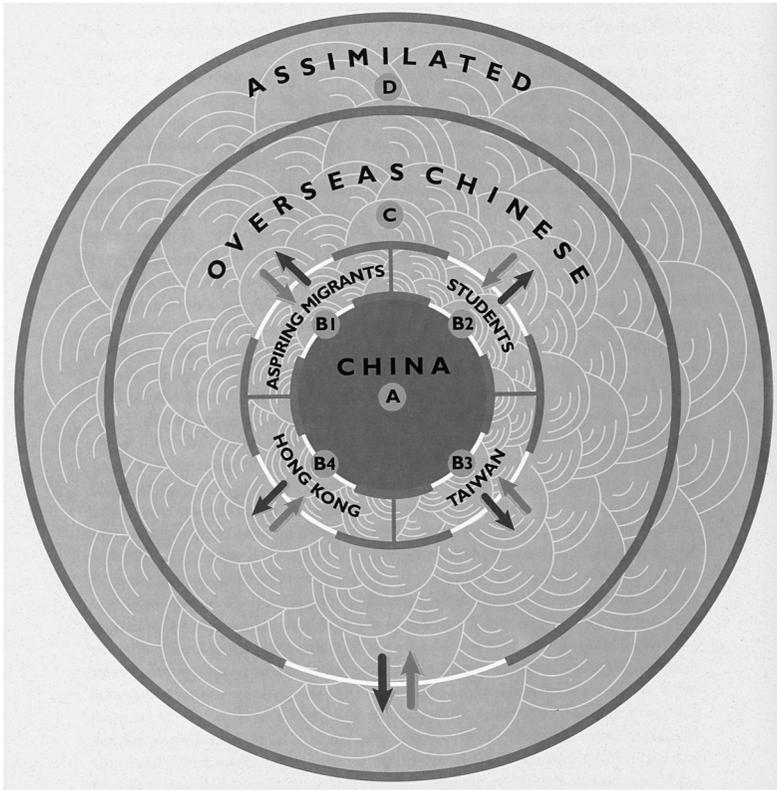


Figure 1.1 “Symbolic representation of varieties of Chinese.”

Source: Lynn Pan, ed., *The Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas*.

believe that Chinese in China naturally possess a unified Chinese culture and that its meaning is stable and never in question.²¹ More importantly, even as the diagram recognizes movement between the inner and outer circles, it stops at the circumference of “China.” As change passes around but never through it, China appears as a fixed, impervious core.

Another example of the “sum of parts” approach involves the tabulation of ethnic Chinese populations worldwide to highlight numerical range and distribution.²² Varying between thirty and fifty million people in different estimates today, this sum of Chinese in the world may inform as much as obscure, since it conceals varying methods of counting, categories of identification, and degrees of interaction with China. It also makes invisible the power of bureaucratic institutions, the inherent instability of the label

“Chinese,” and nonlinear, less recognized modes of migrant passage other than unidirectional movements.²³ Taken together, the challenge of studying China and Chinese globally demands a greater awareness not only of similarities and differences between the two, but also of the fluidity and complexity of both.

Apart from the “sum of parts,” a second general approach to China and Chinese globally could be called “interactions between parts.” Eschewing the focus on a fixed totality, historians influencing and influenced by the transnational turn—such as Madeline Hsu, Adam McKeown, Philip Kuhn, and Glen Peterson—have provided useful models linking the disparate fields of modern China, overseas Chinese, and Asian Americas. They include exploring how change occurs in one transnational community, across multiple communities along similar patterns, among others in the world in a *longue durée*, and in the relations between China and the overseas Chinese during a given period.²⁴ Offering fascinating glimpses of a massive history and geography of Chinese emigration on different scales, each of these models suggests that Chinese emigration was a connecting thread in national, regional, and global change.

Still it is worth going further: How may these insights about “interacting parts” help revise our conceptions of China as a whole?

Toward such a goal, the concept of diaspora can help scholars navigate a fragmented historical geography against which China asserted itself as a unified sovereign nation. A Greek word meaning “to sow or scatter,” *diaspora* is traditionally associated with the forced dispersal of Jews, Africans, and Armenians. As a result of decades of innovative work in postcolonial and cultural studies, diaspora now commonly describes a displaced identity or community in cross-cultural contexts that defy fixed and bounded ideas about the nation, race, and modernity.²⁵ In the Chinese context, diaspora cannot simply be an umbrella term for all Chinese under the sun.²⁶ Instead, shifting the focus to interactions, scholars may retrace how China and Chinese emigrants were coproduced by the discursive and material history of departures, exchanges, and returns. At no point did China command a single Chinese diaspora. But the relationship between the two brings into focus a process to create a sum out of interacting parts—efforts to designate China as the homeland and to incorporate a variety of actors in the diaspora at a given time. Constructed on both sides, the claims of fixed, unbroken ties, in fact, reflect the palpable effects of living in a world

that does not stand still. Seen this way, diaspora can generate the kind of moving edifice that the global historian of China might need.

Several leading scholars in history, cultural studies, and literary criticism—most notably Wang Gungwu, Ien Ang, and Shu-mei Shih—have rejected the use of diaspora, but their criticisms could serve to start rather than end the discussion. In no uncertain terms, they have warned how diaspora misconstrues a homogenous Chinese population perpetually loyal to China, feeds racist and nationalist discourses, and denies immigrants an opportunity to become locals. Politically fraught, diaspora has “an expiry date,” occludes how politics and culture are “place-based,” and should be abandoned.²⁷ Undoubtedly, the continuous injustice of racism and discrimination deserves serious attention, but it should not be given at the expense of the historical imagination, an openness to the plurality and contradictions of the human past.²⁸ Often degraded by progressive narratives of assimilation and integration, diaspora histories remain poorly understood, sometimes appearing as no more than a developmental stage to be overcome. With millions of people moving around the world each day, it seems riskier to avoid rather than learn about the complexity of their lives. Moreover, after decades of groundbreaking interdisciplinary work, historians striving to describe a mobile world can reap the critical insights accumulated in postcolonial, literary, and cultural studies: diaspora is shifting in meaning, intersectional with other social categories, challenges but is not always in opposition to the nation-state.²⁹ Not a fixed group, diaspora serves as a tactic for political solidarity, a lens onto cultural hybridity, and a reminder that identity is a process.³⁰ Work remains to uncover how diaspora in the Chinese experience may advance these enlightening conversations, and how global history is yet another dimension of diaspora.

Diaspora in Chinese History

Returning to the central question driving this book—how did Chinese mass emigration change China?—I argue that a new homeland–diaspora dynamic developed, which over the next century inextricably enmeshed China with the world. During the wave of global migrations in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, *huaqiao* was the Chinese concept of diaspora that arose in relation to China as the homeland, *zuguo*. Often translated as “the overseas Chinese,” the term *huaqiao* literally means “Chinese who

are *temporarily* located,” emphasizing at once the spaces beyond China and one’s temporary absence from it. This compound had not appeared prior to the late nineteenth century but was a product of old and new forces—*hua* denotes a Chineseness refashioned in racial-national terms vis-à-vis a Western-dominated world, whereas *qiao* evokes familiar meanings of “visiting and lodging temporarily” (*lüyu*) in imperial history, as in the expression *qiaojū*. During the Northern and Southern Dynasties (A.D. 222–589), a period of disunity and war, *qiaomin* and *qiaozhi* referred to the relocation of Han Chinese people and prefectures because of invasions by non-Han nomads. Hence, *qiao* conjures up the ancient tropes of exile, subjugation, and displacement in elite Chinese culture, though the word had only been applied to officials and literati, not traders or laborers, and it certainly had not been about going overseas. A broader label referring to emigration in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, *huaqiao* combined old and new meanings to suggest mass, temporary relocations outside China but also bound to it.

Referring to a “temporary” diaspora spread across the globe, *huaqiao* served as a device to create a “permanent” homeland-nation at home, part of the underpinnings of modern China. In a foundational essay written in 1976 that remains the most cited account on the topic, Wang Gungwu finds that the assumed temporariness in the term *huaqiao* was a sign of official understanding that migration was forced and unwilling.³¹ Traditionally, those who wandered were “regarded by the society as unfilial sons and vagrants and by the imperial government as potential if not actual criminals, traitors and spies.”³² What changed in the nineteenth century was official acceptance that migration could lead to settlement, following a series of international treaties, diplomatic reports, revolutionary activities, and nationality laws. These efforts culminated in the widespread use of the term *huaqiao* by the time of the 1911 Revolution and an end to the negative connotation of “enforced and illegal wandering.” However, a look across China’s century of mass emigration suggests that the idea of a “temporary” diaspora had a greater effect—it undergirded China’s national development.³³ Not just a matter of sojourn or settlement ending in official approval, the idea of *huaqiao* has worked in tandem with that of *zuguo*, suggesting a productive contrast and a mutual constitution between nation and emigration. In this formulation, the temporariness of the diaspora lends the homeland a semblance of permanence. Dissonances between the diaspora

and the homeland are understood as a reality produced by a backward and imperfect nation; until the nation is fully brought into modernity, the future has to be deferred. Thus, despite the rapid transformations of both China and the Chinese in the world, diaspora has served to unify a fragmented time and space, a means through which the homeland-nation can be constituted and reconstituted.

Rooted in the material history of China and Chinese emigration, the coproduction of time and space through huaqiao beckons a reassertion of temporality, thus offering a wider theoretical implication for transnational and diaspora studies that have tended to privilege spatiality. Generally speaking, scholars have more often associated migration with movement in space than with movement in time, even though one cannot be fully understood without the other.³⁴ It is common to understand diaspora as dispersed communities, while the comparable idea of fragmented temporalities has not attracted much discussion.³⁵ Furthermore, devoted to the critique of the nation as the basic unit of analysis, the transnational turn in history is a job only half done, as it has more readily challenged the boundedness of a national territory than that of a national chronology. Inspired by the “spatial turn” in critical social theory, the insights on the production of space can be integrated with the parallel work on time that has raised the question of multiple temporalities.³⁶ Socially and culturally produced, multiple temporalities refer to time not only as a linear succession or an autonomous force, as in the “arrow of time,” but also as a diverse product of human and institutional efforts to separate, recombine, and remember it.

In the broader historical discipline, scholars have written about a multitude of times but have yet to consider diaspora time. Some of the most significant works on historical chronologies have focused on non-European contexts and the enduring impact of colonialism and nationalism on notions of the past, present, and future, as in the provocative writings by Prasenjit Duara, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Harry Harrotonian on Asia.³⁷ Writing about Latin America, Steve J. Stern also argues that colonial legacies there have created a wealth of “sensibilities about time,” calling attention to “cycle and recurrence, continuity, and multiple motion (forward, backward, inertial) in human wanderings through history.”³⁸ More recently, in East Asian history, Stefan Tanaka finds that new reckonings of time during the Meiji period enabled the creation of a temporally and spatially unified society known as “Japan.”³⁹ Louise Young has observed how Japanese urbanites

in the interwar period imagined their cities as a “chronotope,” a particular time-space in modern society where the future had already arrived.⁴⁰ Pondering rural women’s memories of the Mao period, Gail Hershatter has used “campaign time” to describe how agricultural collectivization in the 1950s produced gendered experiences and memories; but these gendered memories do not simply reflect a sequence of state-led campaigns.⁴¹ Overlooked thus far, diaspora is part of this social and cultural assemblage, representing multiple times no less than multiple spaces.

Seen this way, diaspora in the mode of *huaqiao* was not simply a set of transnational communities, but also a series of transnational moments. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Chinese mass emigration stemmed from an uneven process of globalization that created a coexistence not only of spaces but also of times. As the spread of industrial capitalism, colonial empires, and nation-states spurred a worldwide search for labor, resources, and markets, Chinese time and space proliferated dramatically. This is because Chinese emigrants spun off and became part of other histories from Cuba and Peru to the United States, Canada, and Australia to the Dutch East Indies and the British empire, while China at the same time underwent struggles for modernity of many kinds. These divergent developments sometimes intersected, as industrial, colonial, and national forces did not exist in separate worlds but moved in a constellation of interdependent relations. Thus, what made China and Chinese elsewhere connected and separate was not only a matter of origins or localization, but also a history of globalization that caused Chinese engagement with the world to split, expand, and intertwine in moments of exchange and return. After a century of rupture, transformation, and reintegration, China became ever more fragmented and networked; its modern evolution was at once disrupted and enriched by its condition as a diaspora’s homeland.

Diaspora Time and Moments

Using the age of global migration as bookends, this study is an exploration of Chinese history through the temporalities of diaspora. To maintain a clear vision of the different timescales of impact, I will use two concepts: “diaspora time” and “diaspora moments.” “Diaspora time” describes the diverse, ongoing ways in which migration affects the lifeworlds of individuals, families, and communities. Though not static, it is a slow-moving

and silent condition, continuously combined and combining with other everyday realities. In Chinese history, diaspora time represented the ongoing process in which a family-based strategy of survival and accumulation unfolded in South China and negotiated with the larger forces of globalization. A “diaspora moment” erupts and recurs when diaspora time interacts with other temporalities and produces unexpectedly wide reverberations.⁴² At these junctures, diaspora rises to the level of major discussions, demanding a coherent response from leaders and institutions and causing long-term consequences. In Chinese history, diaspora moments were manifest in the development of sovereignty and diplomacy, knowledge about world history and geography, debates over tradition and modernity, reform of marriage and family, and struggles between socialism and capitalism. Momentous encounters took place as Chinese emigrants helped pull Qing China into a Western-led system of nation-states through indentured “coolie” migration to the Americas, inspired an ocean-based national identity in Republican China through the power of Chinese merchants in Southeast Asia, revived Confucianism through the experience of being colonial subjects in the British empire, clashed with the socialist mode of production through maintaining split households, and returned with the effect of embodying a capitalist threat to high socialism through successive waves of refugees. In these political, cultural, and social debates, the Chinese nation took shape not before but during mass emigration, as huaqiao periodically introduced forces that shook the homeland.

Taken together, the changing time and moments of diaspora suggest both a fractured and interconnected Chinese engagement with the world. To assess the effects of Chinese mass emigration on China in a moving historical geography, this study crosses three traditional state periods—the late Qing, Republican, and Communist-Maoist—and connects the territorial units of East Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Americas. This periodization accommodates a global century of mass migration (1840–1940) and extends into the 1960s to highlight the dramatic effects of the Cold War on Chinese migrant flows. Given the breadth of history and geography involved, I draw on a wide range of sources collected in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and through British government databases, including diplomatic papers, history and geography collections, biographies, newspapers, magazines, and Communist-period archives. The range of my source material suggests a multiplicity of historical agents engaged in the Chinese

diaspora–homeland dynamic: indentured laborers, Chinese and foreign diplomats, treaty-port university scholars, colonial and creolized intellectuals, women living in rural South China, well-off and dispossessed refugees, and Party-state officials. Arising from the encounters is a broad array of questions and evidence requiring a cross-field, cross-disciplinary interpretation. Therefore, I also rely on Chinese, Asian American, and overseas Chinese historiographies, diaspora and cultural studies, gender and class analyses, and secondary scholarship about the Americas and Southeast Asia in Chinese and English languages, original or translated. Taken together, this book suggests a moving, interconnected archive of Chinese global engagement, a deep reservoir of challenges and resources for national construction.

Structurally, I have organized this book into five diaspora moments that can be read together like fragments turning in a kaleidoscope during the long nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Far from an exhaustive collection, the moments represent significant shifts in modern Chinese history that have often been narrated without attention to the diaspora, or with too narrow a view about it. While significant segments are new and based on unpublished sources, I also reopen old debates to facilitate a broader analysis and advance a different understanding of the issues at hand. Dynamic and recurrent, diaspora moments reveal a connective tension between migrant histories and national history in the age of global migration.

Chapter 1, “A Great Convergence,” revisits the Qing lifting of the emigration ban in 1893, which historians have widely deemed “belated” and inconsequential to China’s grand transformations. Revealing that the actual initiative was to invite returns and not simply to endorse exits, the chapter argues that the emergence of China as a “homeland” was not only part of the 1890–1911 sweep that brought down the imperial system, but was also grounded in a mid-nineteenth-century engagement with the indentured “coolie” migration. Contributing to the global spread of diplomacy and sovereignty, this prehistory involves a convergence of Western attempts to recruit “free” labor at the end of the African slave trade, a global crisis provoked by the abuses of Chinese “coolies” bound for the Americas, and Qing assertions of the right to protect the emigrants. By creating new institutions, conventions, and actors, these earlier efforts paved the way for China’s transition into a modern nation-state, often marginalized in historical narratives focusing on events at the turn of the twentieth century.

Chapter 2, “Colonists of the South Seas,” offers an account of Chinese scholars at Shanghai’s Jinan University during the 1920s and 1930s who churned out massive collections of historical and geographical studies about the Chinese in Southeast Asia. Drawing on Western and Japanese discourses that understood migration as colonization, the Jinan scholars, who had been moving across maritime Asia, actively participated in the circulation of colonial power by debating whether Chinese emigration constituted a type of settler colonialism. In so doing, they reinvented received categories of knowledge and portrayed Chinese in the South Seas as critical conduits in China’s drive for modernity. As a result of their efforts, which have largely been forgotten, the maritime geography of Chinese settlement became an institutionalized and enduring field of Chinese knowledge about the world.

Chapter 3, “Confucius from Afar,” reinterprets the familiar, well-worked story of Lim Boon Keng, a Singapore-born, Edinburgh-trained creole intellectual who famously clashed with the May Fourth writer Lu Xun, but whose colonial experience needs to be taken more seriously. Despite their apparent differences over Lim’s belief that Confucian traditions could provide a modern Chinese identity, this chapter argues that both Lu and Lim shared a deep interest in Western colonial and missionary discourses as well as Chinese national projects, hence suggesting their simultaneity rather than Lim’s anachronism. Moreover, Lim’s commitments to a Confucian revival had originated from his life experiences of moving through the British empire as a colonized subject. Given the great variety of neo-Confucianisms throughout Chinese history, Lim’s story highlights the impact of the diaspora experience on Chinese national culture and identity. Even though China was never fully colonized and nationalist discourses typically rejected lasting effects of colonial power, the colonial inflections in Lim’s brand of Confucianism have traveled far and wide as a source for Chinese identity and power down to the present.

Chapter 4, “The Women Who Stayed Behind,” examines how the Communist Party’s land and marriage reforms in the early 1950s backfired in emigrant South China. Aimed to free rural Chinese of feudal oppression and incorporate them into a broader strategy of socialist production, the campaigns of redistributing land and granting women the right to divorce provoked a serious conflict in the transnationally connected south. Revealing a discrepant huaqiao mode of production split between home and

abroad, the conflict convinced the Communists to reconceptualize domestic women married to overseas men as new intermediaries between huaqiao men and the state. Widespread confusion ensued. The surprising results suggest that socialism in the 1950s was far from a closed system, but rather continued to be influenced by global circulations through the legacies of mass emigration.

Chapter 5, “Homecomings,” looks at the sudden “return” of Chinese from Southeast Asia during decolonization and anti-Chinese movements in the 1950s, and their difficult reintegration at “home” from the time of the Great Leap Forward to the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. An official label of *guiqiao*, meaning “returned overseas Chinese,” emerged to cope with a vastly heterogeneous group of arrivals divided by social and geographical origins, but the Communist Party-state increasingly fixated on their collective appearance of disobedience and immutability during an acceleration of socialist building. Although party leaders had recognized and tolerated the transitional nature of *guiqiao* before the late 1950s, criticisms of the unknown “foreign past” of the returnees became a code for an insidious “capitalism” in the body politic, suggesting a collapse in the efforts to balance different times and spaces in high socialism.

In sum, this book provides a portal to the “diaspora time” operating in Chinese history and the repeated attempts to incorporate it into narratives of the nation. Its point of departure lies in a deceptively simple and understudied question: how Chinese mass emigration changed China. Its conceptual foundation is the “diaspora moments” that emerge in tension with other coexisting temporalities. Not to be reduced to “snapshots in time,” diaspora moments conceptualize the opening, closure, and renewal of transnational crossings that resist linear national time. An ever-changing synthesis of the past and future, each moment is a reminder of the plurality and connectedness of the Chinese global experience, as well as a method to study the movements between spaces and times.