

Trans-nationalising Chineseness: Overseas Chinese Policies of the PRC's Central Government

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Summary

This paper examines evolution and the scope of the PRC's policies towards overseas Chinese in the reform period. It analyses the mechanisms for incorporating the overseas Chinese into the Chinese modernisation strategy and considers how the Chinese leadership utilizes the global regimes of migration, trans-nationalism, media, and multiculturalism to affirm the CCP's political legitimacy, to extend China's political standing, to reassert Chinese culture, and to benefit China's economic performance. The argument contends that China's adaptability to the flexible nature of the global economic system signifies a departure from its position as a single territorially-restricted unit. It employs a new type of ideology of ethnic nationalism to engage in a single but territorially dispersed project ensuing in the Chinese nation-state being trans-nationalised.

Globalisation is commonly associated with the processes which complicate our understanding of national and ethnic affiliations and confuse the theorisation of such established concepts as nation and nation-state. Indeed, in the age of all-encompassing human mobility and information fluidity the meaning of place, space, community and nation becomes unstable and contestable. This seems especially pertinent when one considers the fates of those who, by free will or force seek to live outside the place which they would normally call 'home'. One of the phenomena often mentioned in relation to buoyant global capitalism is how, for the people of the diaspora trans-national identity seems homeless, 'empty', or lost in the time and space between themselves, their homeland, and their place of residence. While multiple forces compete to occupy this vacant space, in this paper I attempt to investigate how a nation-state works its way out to fill in this niche in the minds of its former subjects. It is true that the migrants themselves conjure up the images and reproduce the histories of their departed home. In fact, it has been suggested that the act of displacement or exile itself can generate 'powerful attachments to ideas of homeland that seem more deeply territorial than ever' (Appadurai 1996: 177). But it is difficult to deny that these imaginings are set off by a tangle of processes, in which a nation-state is an active player. And not only can a nation-state influence the minds of its former citizens, but it reaches out in new ways to its reclaimed subjects, who are