



**Philip A. Kuhn.** *Chinese Among Others: Emigration in Modern Times.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008. 431 S. \$53.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7425-1070-8.

**Reviewed by** Yong Chen

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## Ph. Kuhn: Chinese Among Others

With a population of about 40 million located in more than 130 countries, the Chinese diaspora is the one of the most extensive and most complex diasporas of the modern world. Intersecting international trade in commodities and slaves and the expansion of western capitalism, its creation and development have been an integral part of the accelerated globalization that created the world we know today. Besides being an important part of the development of the host societies, it also been intimately related to developments in modern China, including the continuous efforts to build a strong China since the early 20th century. Demonstrating his remarkable historical and historiographical knowledge, Philip A. Kuhn's *Chinese among Others* is the most comprehensive synthetic account of the saga of the modern Chinese diaspora. Nobody else before him has captured the long and complicated process of the Chinese diaspora so clearly and so insightfully. This book represents a landmark in the study of this extremely important topic. Scholars of the Chinese diaspora have tended to focus on individual national or regional settings. Kuhn's global perspectives and comparative insights will help bridge their often disconnected scholarships that are often written in different languages.

Covering a period of five centuries, Kuhn divides the Chinese diasporic world into three distinctive environments (p. 2): the tropical and subtropical colonial regimes of Asia and the Americas and of their post-colonial successor states, the settler societies of the New World and Australia, and what he calls the colonial and postcolonial metropolises located mostly in Europe. Much

of the book is focused on the countries around the Pacific Ocean, the central stage of the Chinese diaspora.

Chapter 1 examines the political, socioeconomic, and cultural conditions in China that help to explain the motivation and characteristics of early modern Chinese emigration. Pursuing opportunities or being pressured by land shortage, millions of people were on the move, making migration a constant part of Chinese life by the eighteenth century. While people in the inland migrated to other parts of the country, those of the southern coastal regions went overseas. Kuhn divides the seafaring populations into different dialect groups, including the Hokkien groups from Fujian province, the Cantonese from the Pearl River Delta, the Teochius from the Chaozhou prefecture in Guangdong province, and the Hakka from frontier borderlands. People within each of these groups shared not only a common dialect but often also occupational specialization. Here Kuhn also notes that lack of government support set the Chinese apart from the European explorer-merchants.

Chapter 2 investigates the varied contexts of Southeast Asia, which has been the largest destination of overseas Chinese emigration, and the different kinds of Chinese communities established therein. In places colonized by Europeans, Chinese merchants stood between the colonialists and the indigenous peoples. The Europeans needed the Chinese but also used various measures, including massacres, to control and contain them. Various creole communities emerged among the Chinese, who were called *Peranakan* (meaning *local born*) in

Malay) in Java, *Baba* in Singapore, and Mestizo in the Philippines. In independent kingdoms such as Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and Burma, Chinese also became important players in the local economies. Besides, the Chinese created their own independent regimes, known as *republics*, in places like Borneo.

Chapters 3 through 5 investigate the period of mass Chinese emigration from the mid-1800s through the 1920s. He categorizes the immigrants into four types based on their respective degrees of freedom. In Southeast Asia, the arrival of newcomers increased the diversity of the Chinese communities, and they and the creole populations started to form their own separate communities, as the competition between the two also grew. In the Philippines, most Mestizos were forced out of sectors like retail and whole. In this period, the Chinese also emigrated to new venues, such as California, Canada, and Australia. Kuhn discusses the experiences of the Chinese, especially anti-Chinese discrimination, in those settler societies initially populated by European immigrants. In comparison with the United States, Kuhn argues, the Australian conception of the *Chinese threat* was less focused on *slave labor*, it simply depicted the Chinese as *a pagan and inferior race* (p. 222).

The topic of chapter 6 is Chinese nationalism that had emerged by the early twentieth century and was accompanied by changes in China's attitudes toward its overseas emigrants. It is common knowledge that Chinese nationalism was embraced by the Chinese in the diaspora. Kuhn's nuanced analysis reminds us that the old-time regional/local focus remained strong in the pan-Chinese mobilization and the nationalism of overseas Chinese was different from that of those in China in intensity and vision.

Chapter 7 is focused on Chinese communities in Southeast Asia in the postcolonial era, noting that anti-Chinese discrimination against Chinese minorities has accompanied nation-building of the region. Kuhn mentions publicly expressed anti-Chinese sentiments and repressive economic and policies. But these policies were not always entirely successful, especially in the economic arena. In Malaysia, for example, the economic strength of the Chinese continued to grow from 1970 to 1990 when the Malay-centric New Economic Policy was in force.

The last chapter, chapter 8, deals with the *new migration* that started in the 1960s.

Again, Kuhn fruitfully places the subject in the context of global changes, noting that it has been shaped by four major events: the abolition of exclusion policies in

the settler societies, the end of Maoism in China, the collapse of the Soviet bloc and reconfiguration of Europe, and new Chinese policies toward emigration. He also argues that while some old patterns have continued, there are new developments. For example, there have appeared new kinds of immigrants, including students and those from communities without a long tradition of emigration such as *Changle* in Fujian province. Besides, new forms of *affinity groups* have also emerged, such as the *World Chinese Entrepreneurs* (p. 274). Kuhn concludes that *Chinese overseas* are now officially valued not only as investors of capital but also as conduits of information and as cultural brokers with the rest of the world *roles* they have been filling unofficially for centuries (p. 382).

This well-researched and well-written book represents a monumental step toward establishing the studies of the Chinese diaspora as a coherent field of inquiry. Kuhn does not intend to offer a complete history of the entire modern Chinese diaspora *indeed* there are apparent *holes* in its coverage, such as the Chinese communities in India, South Africa, pre-1960 Europe, and post-1980 Japan. What Kuhn offers, instead, is a historically imaginative and intellectually fruitful framework through which to understand and compare the various Chinese diasporic communities and the global and local forces that helped to create them.

The volume shows the far-reaching importance of the Chinese diaspora in modern world history. As Kuhn shows, the Chinese diaspora in what he calls the age of mass Chinese emigration was significantly related to mega global developments such as Western colonialism and imperialism. The formation and transformation of diasporic Chinese communities also constituted a central element in the nation building process in many venue nations, such as the United States, Australia, Thailand, and the Philippines. Furthermore, Kuhn's book also serves as a forceful reminder that in order fully to understand the Chinese community in one region, we must place it in a larger context and see its broader connections. Kuhn has done a superb job in revealing the extraordinary importance of modern Chinese history in the development of the diaspora. For example, he gives convincingly evidence to show that overseas emigration has had important connections to internal migration. Needless to say, finally, this book will help readers more fully appreciate the benefits of a comparative perspective in studying the Chinese in the diaspora.

Because of the magnitude of its coverage and com-

plexity of its topics, this book also contains elements that will generate scholarly debates. The first concerns Kuhn's emphasis on the sojourner mentality among the emigrants as part of the Chinese culture. Kuhn notes more than once that "the Chinese have no equivalent [to the English word emigrant]" (p. 4). His failure to clarify that such a mentality also prevailed among non-Chinese immigrants in many other contexts in the modern world creates the impression that this was uniquely Chinese. Furthermore, historians of Chinese America, who understand the racist nature and the broad appeal of America's anti-Chinese sentiments, will certainly disagree with Kuhn's assertion that "in the United States, the fear of Chinese was economic (depression of wages and slave labor) and political (unsuitability for American democracy)" (p. 234). Kuhn has not always been sufficiently critical of anti-Chinese racism. In a number of

places, his statements even seem to suggest that the Chinese themselves generated anti-Chinese hostility. In the chapter on Chinese nationalism, for example, he notes that "newly evident practices and symbols of 'Chineseness' (Chinese schools, newspapers, voluntary associations, and ritual practices) along with political activism related to China were obtrusive enough to cause resentment among indigenous peoples" (p. 354). This kind of suggestion ignores and distorts the historical fact that it was anti-Chinese discrimination that made Chinese nationalism so popular in the diaspora. Finally, the "References Cited" section does not list all the works cited.

The few imperfections by no means diminish the extraordinary value of this volume. Students of the ethnic Chinese communities around the world will benefit from Kuhn's fruitful labor for a long time.

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