UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

The Homeland's Long Arm:
Diaspora Politics and the Limits of Global China

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree
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Sociology

by

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The dissertation of Jiaqi Liu is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

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Abstract of the Dissertation

The Homeland's Long Arm:
Diaspora Politics and the Limits of Global China

by

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Over the past two decades, Chinese diasporas have become increasingly important in China's strategies for global ascendancy. Beijing designates diaspora elites as "grassroots ambassadors" to promote China's national interests abroad, enhance Chinese ethnic communities, and suppress émigré dissidents. These homeland-diaspora ties, however, push Chinese migrants to the center of Sino-West tensions and become victims of rising Sinophobic sentiment and anti-China discrimination. Between Chinese politicization and Western suspicions, what is missing are

the lived experiences and agential practices of Chinese migrants and ethnographic insights into the actual effectiveness of China's diaspora governance.

Drawing on interviews and ethnographic data, collected in two years of fieldwork in China and Europe, this dissertation argues that China's diaspora politics do not lead to unidirectional domination by the homeland but rather produce dynamic state-diaspora interactions and negotiations across borders. I conceptualize this process as *transborder state-building*, defined as the bureaucratic, technological, and discursive mechanisms of extending and challenging the state's institutional capacity and symbolic legitimacy beyond state boundaries. Following the neo-Weberian institutional approach in political sociology, I expand the scope of research on state-building to *cross-border* domains and delves into the making and remaking of transborder states and how they interact with emigrant citizens in foreign soil.

I argue that a relational political ethnography, which pays closer attention to the mundane struggles of grassroots actors than the macro-level high politics, holds the key to understanding the real-world impacts of Global China. Transborder state-building is a complex process that involves a plethora of actors, including the central Chinese leadership, local officials, diaspora leaders, and rank-and-file migrants, whose cross-border interplay and contestations produce complex outcomes of Global China. To transcend superficial knowledge of China's overseas outreach based on oft-exaggerated policy data, I uncover its operational specificities and everyday workings by identifying three channels through which China generates and sustains transborder state-building: diaspora associations, digital technologies, and political discourses. I demonstrate that far from being a uniform or absolute expansionist project, China's transborder state-building is shaped by the robust agency of grassroots actors and fraught with internal inconsistencies within the Chinese bureaucracy and Western host societies.

Introduction

When Dexin, a 56-year-old Chinese migrant entrepreneur in Odessa, Ukraine, handed me his delicately designed business card in a café in November 2021, I was amazed but also amused by his larger-than-life titles and social positions that filled the entire card. Besides being the CEO of his eponymous trading company, he was also the founding director of an Odessa-based Chinese diaspora association, an honorary director of another diaspora association in the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv, a council member of the Public Diplomacy Association in his hometown of Qingtian County in southeast China, and a member of the People's Political Consultative Conference in southwest China's Guizhou Province, which is hundreds of kilometers away from Qingtian and even further from Ukraine. As I was about to ask how he juggled this dizzying array of responsibilities across such great distances, he told me matter-of-factly, "Turn it over. There's more on the other side [of the business card]."

The back of Dexin's business card was crowded with six more social roles in China and Ukraine. "I could have listed more, but the space [on a business card] is limited," Dexin asserted. After I tucked the business card away in my interview notebook, Dexin began recounting his humble upbringing as a farmer in rural Qingtian. He also spoke about his life-threatening journey of leaving China for Europe as an irregular migrant in the 1990s and his entrepreneurial success of importing cheap Chinese goods to post-independence Ukraine. Most importantly, he stressed that over the past two decades, he had devoted himself to what he called "charity work" (*zuo cishan*), which involved organizing diaspora associations to bridge the hometown authorities in Qingtian with Ukrainian governments and Chinese migrants in Ukraine. As a result of his efforts, he was awarded ceremonial titles that he proudly showcased on his business card. These roles

paved the way for his accumulation of more economic, political, social, and symbolic capital in diaspora-homeland liaisons.

Emigrant elites like Dexin, often dubbed "diaspora leaders" (*qiaoling*, or emigrants who assume leadership roles in diaspora communities), have become the new face for a rising China, one of the world's largest sending countries and an emerging global power[1]. With close ties to the Chinese state, diaspora leaders keenly promote Chinese soft power abroad, expand homeland services to emigrant communities, and foster ethnic solidarity against growing anti-Chinese sentiments. Despite being physically distant from the Chinese homeland, diasporas have long been a vital link in China's nation-building and state development.

In fact, deep-rooted and quasi-primordial myths dating back to the early 20th century imagine emigrants as an integral part of the globally dispersed Chinese nation (*zhonghua minzu*) whose "rejuvenation" relies on support from compatriots both inside and outside China[2]. Following a geopolitical reorientation in the new millennium, China has officially incorporated diasporas into its ambitious strategies for global ascendancy[3]. Most remarkably, the incumbent Xi Jinping leadership delegates to diaspora leaders the singular role of "grassroots ambassadors" (*minjian dashi*) to promote public diplomacy in private capacities, facilitate China's transborder state-building among rank-and-file emigrants, and clandestinely repress overseas dissidents[4]. By mobilizing diasporas as a political means, the Chinese state seeks to amplify its overseas clout at the grassroots level[5].

These close ties between China and Chinese diasporas, however, raise suspicions among politicians in host countries who are wary of a rising China with increasingly assertive strategies for geopolitical dominance. After decades of rapid economic growth, China is now eager to pursue global aspirations through more aggressive outward investments, infrastructure projects, media

propaganda, and territorial claims. Sociologist C.K. Lee terms this phenomenon as "Global China"[6]. While China has always been globally connected, Global China represents a new set of ambitions, worldviews, and complexities marked by not only China's more extensive engagements abroad but also concerns over Beijing's overseas influence. Such concerns are especially salient in countries along the so-called Belt and Road, as well as in Western states whose long-held world hegemony is challenged head-on[7].

In the context of Sino-Western tensions, China's intensified politicization of diasporas risks rekindling host countries' Cold War-era suspicion of Chinese immigrants as the "fifth column"[8] - a subversive force that covertly engages in espionage or sabotage from within. In the United States, for instance, former secretary of state Mike Pompeo labelled a Chinese diaspora association that advocates for Mainland China's peaceful unification with Taiwan as a "foreign mission" and restricted their activities[9]. In Europe, Japan, and North America, accusations of Chinese emigrant leaders' alleged roles in running China's "secret police stations" overseas pushed these diaspora community leaders to the forefront of China-bashing and geopolitical hostilities[10]. Other members of the broadly defined Chinese diaspora[11], especially Chinese overseas students and Chinese-origin scientists, are victimized in host governments' politically motivated investigations for spying and intellectual property theft linked to China[12]. Amid this highly charged geopolitical atmosphere, sensationalist media and political hyperbole intricately entangle Chinese emigrants in alarmist narratives, portraying them as China's proxies in destination countries[13].

These sinophobic discourses and anti-Chinese policies in host countries exacerbate the long-standing discrimination faced by Chinese migrants by reducing them to voiceless clients of the Chinese party-state. In addition to geopolitical strife, the COVID-19 pandemic has seen a resurgence of xenophobic hatred and violence that stigmatizes Chinese migrants for supposedly

spreading the "China virus" and worsens their day-to-day precarity across Europe and North America. The increasing vulnerability of Chinese migrants in host societies compels many of them to seek support from their homeland and collaborate with the Chinese state for alternative sources of social status and emotional belonging. Rather than downplaying the alienating effects of host governments and blaming China's predatory diaspora policies, we need to gain insights into the lived experiences and active practices of Chinese migrants vis-à-vis state-imposed framings in both origin and destination countries.

Moreover, the prevailing discourse of "China threat" tends to essentialize the Chinese party-state as a political behemoth with a coherent set of aggressive policies that pose an omnipresent menace to Western liberal democracies[14]. Yet, China's diaspora bureaucracy is far from unified. Local bureaucrats in migrant-sending regions exert a high degree of autonomy in policy implementation and improvisation[15]. Due to frontline cadres' grassroots interests and the complex power dynamics within the administrative hierarchy, the top leadership's policy expectations may not align with the realities on the ground in diaspora hometowns. To inquire into the actual effectiveness of China's diaspora governance requires an ethnographic perspective that transcends the headline-grabbing officialese and focuses on street-level migration functionaries as they handle national grand strategies and interact with ordinary emigrants abroad on a daily basis.

1. Transborder state-building

Drawing on a diverse range of data, including interviews, ethnographic studies, and policy research gathered during two years of multisited fieldwork across China and Europe, I argue that China's diaspora politics do not lead to unidirectional domination by the homeland but rather

produce dynamic state-diaspora interactions and negotiations across borders. I conceptualize this process as *transborder state-building*, defined as the bureaucratic, technological, and discursive mechanisms of extending and challenging the state's institutional capacity and symbolic legitimacy beyond state boundaries. Following Weber, social scientists have adopted an institutional lens to examine state-building, a sociopolitical process of cultivating the bureaucratic, infrastructural, and symbolic power to govern societal forces[16]. Much of this literature, however, follows the Westphalian assumption of territorially bound nation-states and limits its scope *within* state boundaries[17]. Prior studies pay insufficient attention to how states "cage"[18] citizens *overseas* and provide civil services *abroad*[19]. This dissertation expands the scope of research on state-building to *cross-border* domains and delves into the making and remaking of transborder states and how they interact with emigrant citizens in foreign soil.

This dissertation contends that far from being a uniform or absolute expansionist project, China's transborder state-building is a contested practice that faces challenges from grassroots actors and is fraught with internal inconsistencies within the Chinese bureaucracy and Western host societies. Instead of depicting China as a distinct and homogeneous "Other" or vilifying its contest with Western nations for global dominance, I adopt a neo-Weberian institutional approach[20] to examine China's transborder state-building as a meticulous and expansive venture that liberal democracies in the Global North and origin states in the Global South alike have long pursued[21]. Although China's authoritarian regime possesses more coercive power domestically than democracies do, its efforts of transborder repression tend to be constrained abroad under the legal principle of national sovereignty[22]. Moving beyond the conventional dichotomy of democracy versus authoritarianism[23], this dissertation perceives China's suppression of overseas dissent as an integral part of its broader practices of transborder state-building that also exist in

other sending contexts. Prominent homeland governments, such as India[24], Mexico[25], Turkey[26], South Korea[27], Egypt[28], and Jordan[29], adopt similar measures to not only project coercion but also foster legitimacy and elicit compliance among their diasporas.

To transcend superficial knowledge of China's overseas outreach based on oft-exaggerated policy data[30], I uncover its operational specificities and everyday workings by identifying three channels through which China generates and sustains transborder state-building: diaspora associations, digital technologies, and political discourses. Building on the infrastructural turn in social science[31], I refer to these "systematically interlinked technologies, institutions, and actors" as infrastructures [32] and explore how institutional, technological, and discursive infrastructures mediate and undergird China's diaspora politics. However, these infrastructures do not solely facilitate China's long-distance administration of emigrants; they also open the door for emigrants to actively leverage or manipulate China's overseas expansion and negotiate transborder belonging in the widening chasm between their home and host governments. Far from wielding absolute or inescapable governmental control, transborder state-building engenders and activates dynamic homeland-diaspora interactions and contestations that were previously impossible due to geographical, technological, and logistical constraints.

I argue that a relational political ethnography[33], which pays closer attention to the mundane struggles of grassroots actors than the macro-level high politics, holds the key to understanding the real-world impacts of Global China. Transborder state-building cannot be reduced to isolated events of China's top-down control or emigrants' passive reactions. It is, instead, a complex process that involves a plethora of actors, including the central Chinese leadership, local officials, diaspora leaders, and rank-and-file migrants, who constantly interact and bargain with one another. By highlighting the reciprocal and emergent nature of state-diaspora interactions, we can challenge

the dominant focus on central governments in rhetorical debates surrounding China's overseas influence. It is crucial to acknowledge the robust agency of seemingly mundane actors, such as ordinary migrants and street-level bureaucrats, who are often rendered invisible in the polemic meta-narratives on China's quest for global supremacy.

2. Reterritorializing nation-states

For millennia, the state has transformed through various types of political organization, including tribal states, city-states, feudal states, empires, to modern nation-states. Despite its localized features and non-linear developments, the state is generally understood to consist of three fundamental elements: political authority, territory, and population. For instance, Weber defines the state as a polity that "(successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory"[34], underscoring the significance of a bounded territory for the state's exercise of coercive power.

Building on this territorial theorization, neo-Weberian scholars attach great importance to well-defined territories as a necessary condition for state-building, which is the process of constructing state infrastructures and governing capacities. For example, Giddens compares the state to a "container" that generates administrative power by "containing" social and political resources within a given space[35]. When elaborating on his famous argument "war made the state, and the state made war," Tilly stresses that the means of coercion derived from war cannot operate without a clear delineation of territorial borders[36]. Similarly, Mann uses the metaphor of "social caging" to illustrate how the state regulates social forces within "clear, fixed, confined social and territorial boundaries"[37]. As modern nation-states enhance their infrastructural penetration within

sovereign borders, Mann argues that the territoriality of the state is further strengthened by the centralization of political authority, the rationalization of state bureaucracy, and the growth of communication technology[38]. For neo-Weberian theorists, state-building takes place *within* state boundaries and is anchored in the development of *domestic* infrastructures, such as roads, post offices, print media, and identity documents [39].

While the neo-Weberian scholarship offers valuable insights into state-building, it tends to overlook *transborder* state-building, which I refer to as the efforts of states to construct logistical and organizational capabilities to exercise control and provide civil services abroad. This form of state-building beyond state territories is particularly evident in the domain of diaspora governance. For instance, Alonso documents how Mexico, through its 50 consulates across the United States, goes beyond traditional practices of consular protection to provide a wide range of everyday welfare services, including education, health, banking, and language acquisition, to its emigrants in a foreign country[40]. Turkey provides a more restrictive example of transborder state-building, where it cultivates and collaborates with diaspora associations abroad to carry out a global purge of Turkish emigrants who supported the anti-regime Gulen movement following the 2016 coup d'état[41]. In the same vein, other sending countries, including Libya, Syria, Egypt, and Jordan, are eager to develop overseas institutions and infrastructures, such as foreign branches of political parties, cultural and language institutes, and Internet-based surveillance systems, to influence diaspora communities and repress émigré dissidents[42].

However, the extra-territorial endeavors of state-building do not imply that nation-states are *de*territorialized[43]. Since the 1990s, transnationalist scholars have written how migrants' transborder ties with their ancestral homelands lead to the deterritorialization of nation-states[44]. Along the same lines, postnationalist researchers have also noted such deterritorialization based

on the fact that migrants can derive their human rights from international or supranational laws, such as the European Union's Charter of Fundamental Rights, rather than from national laws[45]. Yet, as sociologist David FitzGerald points out, the territoriality of nation-states is reconfigured, instead of eliminated[46]. While transborder state-building transcends the territorial confines of homeland states, it cautiously avoids violating the sovereignty of host countries. Unlike colonial rule or military occupation, where a state wields coercive power upon a *foreign population*, transborder state-building aims to expand governance to a state's *emigrant citizens* abroad. Nation-states are not just territorial entities but also membership organizations[47]. Although emigrant citizens live in foreign jurisdictions, they still fall under their home countries' sovereignty, as long as they retain their original nationality.

However, homeland states' attempts to reach out to their citizens overseas do not always strictly follow the line of nationality and may extend to emigrants who have naturalized and lost their original citizenship. Nonetheless, the homeland states often view these non-citizen emigrants as part of the broader imagined diaspora community[48]. In Chapter 4, I demonstrate how this form of transborder state-building among non-citizen members of the diaspora can cause diplomatic disputes with host governments. The distinction between legal citizenship and diasporic membership can be easily blurred and crossed. Therefore, despite the prevalence of the transnationalism paradigm[49], I opt for the term "transborder" – rather than "transnational" – to underscore that this overseas form of state-building operates beyond the administrative and geographic boundaries of *states*, although it is established within a single imagined *nation* with a globally dispersed population[50].

This dissertation sheds light on China's exercise of state power among diasporas and challenges the notion that territory, population, and authority are seamlessly blended in the

Westphalian international state system[51]. Specifically, in the following sections, I operationalize the concept of transborder state-building by articulating its various actors and infrastructures. These players and mechanisms of state-diaspora interplay are not unique to China and can be observed in other sending states[52]. By providing a detailed framework for analyzing these multilevel and multimodal processes, this dissertation offers a generalizable approach to studying diaspora politics in diverse regional contexts, political regimes, and geopolitical conditions.

3. Actors

In this dissertation, I adopt an interactive approach that goes beyond traditional state- and society-centered perspectives on politics.[53] I argue that transborder state-building does not result from disconnected or unidirectional actions of state and non-state actors. Instead, it is shaped by the reciprocal influence and contested interactions of both state and societal forces. I refrain from perceiving the Chinese state as a homogenous entity, instead closely examining different actors in the administrative hierarchy and their intra-bureaucracy conflicts. Similarly, Chinese diaspora communities are composed of diverse members with varying levels of interest, resources, and beliefs, which may bring about heterogenous strategies for engaging or clashing with an expansive homeland. The multilevel homeland state and the stratified diaspora community are deeply intertwined and play interlocked roles in shaping China's transborder state-building.

This focus on reciprocal state-diaspora interactions is particularly important in studies of China's overseas influence, as many media reports and sensationalist accounts of "Global China" are based on uncritical analysis of China's official rhetoric without regard for the reality of political outcomes[54]. Such studies often overlook the convoluted bureaucratic structures of the Chinese

government and the agency of emigrants in negotiating their own transborder wellbeing with both host and home governments[55]. Through an interactive and relational account, this dissertation not only sheds light on how the Chinese central state expands its governance abroad but also analyzes how this extended form of governance is experienced, interpreted, questioned, and manipulated by domestic officials and emigrants abroad. In what follows, I discuss the four main actors involved in China's transborder state-building: ordinary emigrants, diaspora leaders, the central state leadership, and local migration bureaucrats.

3.1. Ordinary emigrants

Who are diasporas? Although scholars in humanities and social sciences have long debated the meanings of diasporas[56], this concept was originally reserved to describe a few specific groups who dispersed from their homelands due to catastrophic events but manage to keep their identity intact in foreign lands. Examples include the paradigmatic cases of Jews and Armenians[57]. From the outset, this term has been emotionally charged with emigrants' nostalgic yearning for a historic homeland, or what political scientist Benedict Anderson calls "long-distance nationalism"[58].

In recent decades, sending states have increasingly employed the term "diaspora" in policies toward emigrants, while discarding its original association with "victimhood" to neutralize this notion[59]. For example, the Chinese language lacks a functional equivalent for the English word "emigrants." The notion of *yimin*, or "migrants," does not specify the direction of outward or inward migration and often denotes citizens internally displaced by infrastructure projects, especially the construction of hydro dams. Instead, Chinese official phraseology uses "*huaqiao*,"

or Chinese diasporas, to collectively refer to emigrants abroad and calls emigrant individuals "*qiaobao*," meaning diasporic compatriots.

In this dissertation, I use the terms "diaspora members" and "emigrants" interchangeably to denote migrants of Chinese nationality or descent who live abroad and maintain transborder ties with China. Heeding sociologist Rogers Brubaker's call for a constructivist retheorization of diasporas[60], this dissertation avoids perceiving diasporas as ontologically distinctive from other migrants per se. I argue, instead, that the distinction of diasporas is constructed in the discursive process of singling out a specific subgroup within migrants for strategic reasons. While Chinese official discourses claim Chinese diasporas as its own and homogenize diasporas as uniformly "patriotic" and quintessentially "Chinese"[61], this dissertation dives into the heterogenous nature of Chinese diasporas and problematizing their proclaimed "Chineseness" and homeland connections.

I show that Chinese diasporas are stratified and diverse communities whose members have divergent motivations and resources, or lack thereof, to engage with an ambitious and expansive homeland. While diaspora leaders, or more affluent migrants who take an active part in diaspora associations, are more inclined to maintain close ties with China, ordinary migrants from less privileged socioeconomic backgrounds tend to be more indifferent to a rising China and only get in touch with homeland authorities in times of crisis, such as political unrest, public health emergencies, and widespread discrimination in host countries. These nuances in homeland-diaspora relations debunk the prevailing myth in Chinese state imagination that all members of Chinese diasporas are inherently "compatriots" whose immotal "Chinese blood is thicker than water"[62]. By studying both migrants who liaise with Global China and those who do not, this study departs from the selection bias in previous studies of diaspora politics and yields a more fine-grained understanding of the stratification of diaspora-homeland engagement.

Through a relational ethnography, I closely examine ordinary migrants' robust agency in navigating China's transborder state-building. Chinese diasporas are not only *subjects* of China's administrative expansion but also *brokers* in mediating or confronting China's geopolitical strategies in their everyday lives. On the one hand, as China develop capacities and institutional mechanisms to exert political control abroad and provide civil services to diasporic citizens, emigrants have become subjects of this new mode of homeland outreach. On the other hand, emigrants cultivate grassroots strategies to tap into China's overseas soft power projects and leverage homeland support to fight against racial discrimination in host societies. This dynamic interplay between an expansionist homeland state and agentic emigrants over a long distance reterritorializes state-society relations in the age of global connectivity.

3.2. Diaspora leaders

In China's official lexicon, diaspora leaders (*qiaoling*) are defined as emigrants who actively participate in diaspora associations, hold leadership positions in diaspora communities, and maintain strong connections with their homeland state. Typically, the level of involvement and leadership status of these migrants correspond with their socioeconomic backgrounds. A majority of diaspora leaders are successful business owners from the higher socioeconomic strata of the Chinese diaspora. However, despite their entrepreneurial wealth, diaspora leaders often face chronic racial discrimination from European natives due to their minority status and language barriers. As a result, these elites may seek recognition and prestige from their homeland state to compensate for their perceived loss of status in host societies[63]. Contrary to one-sided media depictions[64], European societies are not merely innocent bystanders that passively endure the

impacts of China's heightened diaspora liaisons. Host countries' social marginalization and sinophobic sentiments constitute decisive push factors in causing migrant elites to seek alternative sources of symbolic capital from China in the first place.

At the same time, as a rising global power, China has sought to acquire more symbolic and material resources. After four decades of full-throttle economic boom, the incumbent Xi Jinping leadership is no longer content with China's reputation as the world's manufacturing floor. To further its geopolitical ambitions, China increasingly recruits diaspora leaders as so-called "public diplomats" to enhance China's appeal and promote Chinese influence among foreign locals at the grassroots level. Additionally, a powerful homeland state also furnishes Chinese diasporas with much-needed national pride, enabling them to resist discrimination from host societies and overcome the historical trauma of China's "century of humiliation"[65].

To incentivize and reward diaspora leaders, the Chinese government bestows them with kaleidoscopic honorary titles and ceremonial roles to fulfil their quest for fame and stature, as exemplified by the case of Dexin. China also invites diaspora leaders to perform ribbon cuttings, attend groundbreaking ceremonies, and pose for photo shoots. In the official propaganda, migrant elites are glorified as self-made role models characterized by their patriotic spirits, cosmopolitan visions, entrepreneurial acumen, and Western/modern lifestyles. This reward system provides bountiful symbolic capital that host societies fail to offer, creating a strong stimulus for migrant elites to engage more closely with a rising Global China.

I conceptualize the cross-border exchange of prestige and influence between a homeland state and its diasporas as *symbolic remittances*. This notion builds on the wealth of literature on social remittances, which sociologist Peggy Levitt defines as "the ideas, behaviors, identities, and social capital that flow from receiving- to sending-country communities"[66]. Since its introduction

in the late 1990s, this concept has inspired a long string of research into the non-monetary forms of migrant remittances and shed light on global migration's multifarious impacts on sending societies' politics, culture, society, and ideologies[67].

Although insightful, the scholarship on remittances is constrained by two drawbacks. First, existing theories of remittances suffer from a Western-centric bias and assume one-way flows from receiving to sending countries. Although some studies address so-called "reverse remittances"[68], they still presume flows from the Global North to the Global South as the unproblematic default but lose sight of reciprocal and back-and-forth exchange between host and home communities[69]. Additionally, despite a growing typology of remittances that includes political[70], emotional[71], professional[72], and even criminal remittances[73], the remitting of what Bourdieu calls symbolic capital[74], such as fame, prestige, and recognition, remains poorly understood[75].

My conceptualization of symbolic remittances remedies these flaws by foregrounding homeland governments and diasporas as equal participants in the dynamic and two-way flows of symbolic capital. Drawing on Weber's discussion of status[76] and Bourdieu's theories on capital[77], I argue that symbolic remittances occur at individual, communal, national, and geopolitical levels and can convert into other forms of capital, such as political clout, economic benefits, and social connections. In line with the interactive nature of transborder state-building, symbolic remittances are fundamentally relational. Both state and non-state actors carry out these mutual remitting practices to gain distinction from their peers and constantly adjust their aspirations for symbolic capital in relation to their changing social milieux.

The notion of symbolic remittances also brings to light migrants' transborder agency in navigating political opportunities in home countries to overcome structural restraints in host societies. Despite migrant elites' ostentatious behavior in consumption and self-promotion, their

pursuit of symbolic remittances should not be dismissed as merely personal acts or pretentious show-off. Rather, this dissertation uncovers the sociological factors – status constraints in host countries and political opportunities in the home country – that drive Chinese migrants to embrace China's geopolitical ascent to compensate their long-lost social recognition.

3.3. The homeland state

Due to limited administrative capacity and porous borders, for the most part of history, state governments had little control over migration into or out of their territories[78], let alone maintain ties with emigrants in the far distance. The formation of the Westphalian state system in the 17th-century feudal Europe sowed the seed of a new state ideology on the correspondence between mutually exclusive territory, state authority, and national membership[79]. The state became not just a territorial organization but also a membership grouping to which citizens must pledge loyalty and foster belonging[80]. Therefore, the presence of citizens on foreign soil poses a challenge to the sedentary order of territory-based national identity. Emigrants, as I demonstrate in Chapter 2, were long stigmatized in political discourse as "vagabonds" or "traitors" and frowned upon by homeland rulers. In pre-modern Europe, religious minorities such as French Huguenots, Sephardic Jews, and Mennonites were expelled by dynastic states or multiethnic empires and hardly reclaimed by their homelands[81].

It was when nation-states emerged as the dominant principle for organizing the world political order in the 20th century that national discourses on diasporas came to be salient. Diasporas and nation-states are not antithetical but rather co-constitutive in the demarcation of inclusion or exclusion, diasporic or foreign, and insiders or outsiders[82]. Instead of a pre-given

category or a natural phenomenon, diasporas are generated, courted, and claimed as part of the broader process of nation-state building[83].

The co-evolution of diasporas and nation-states as modern political arrangements is contingent not only on nationalist ideals but also on the growing roles of emigration states in world politics[84]. In recent decades, sending states have been scrambling to extend socioeconomic and membership entitlements to absent emigrants, allowing former nationals to participate in domestic politics, and supporting the growth of migrant associations in host societies[85]. In a seminal review, political scientists Fiona Adamson and Gerasimos Tsourapas put forward a tripartite typology to summarize these diverse emigration regimes in the Global South[86]: the *nationalizing* model in which exchanges, expulsions, and returns of migrants constitute an integral part of state formation and nation-building; the *developmental* model in which migration promotes economic growth through remittances of financial, human, and cultural capital; and the *neoliberal* model in which migration is monetized through citizenship-by-investment schemes and asylum cooperative agreements. However, what may be underemphasized in this comprehensive framework is a *geopolitical* model whereby sending countries instrumentalize diasporas as geopolitical pawns and, equally importantly, grassroots actors react to and reshape homeland geopolitics to their own advantage.

Empirically, conventional studies on diasporas focus either on countries with limited global ambitions, such as small island countries in the Caribbean, Tunisia, and Morocco[87], or on states that direct their diaspora policies toward a single destination country or neighboring region, such as Mexico, Jordan, Turkey, and Hungary[88]. However, the scarcity of empirical research on emigration states with rising global trajectories and aspirations limits our collective knowledge about how these states redefine their relations with emigrants amid geopolitical transformations.

Given China's efforts to incorporate diasporas into its increasingly dominant geopolitical strategies, its transborder state-building initiatives offer a promising avenue to analyze diaspora governance at the intersection of geopolitical contests, sovereign reterritorialization, and state-citizen relations.

My conceptualization of transborder state-building challenges conventional political sociology by engaging in a more profound dialogue with migration studies and critically rethinking territorially bound nation-states. Despite extensive debates on the relations between migrants and state governments[89], such scholarly endeavors overconcentrate on immigration states in the Global North, with much less attention devoted to sending countries[90]. Due to this deep-rooted Western-centrism and immigration bias, prior research mainly focuses on how state policies impact the integration or assimilation of immigrants in host societies[91]. Although the "transnational" turn in social sciences over the past three decades brings to fore migrants' continuous ties with sending communities[92], the transnationalism scholarship overwhelmingly focuses on individual- or family-level hometown connections but overlooks the role of homeland states and how they construct, claim, and strategize about diasporas[93].

Building on the burgeoning literature on diaspora policies[94], this dissertation gives special weight to homeland governments and examines homeland-diaspora interplay as an overseas extension of state-citizen relations, a topic central to canonical studies of the state and politics[95]. By reconceptualizing diaspora politics through the lens of political sociology, I advance knowledge on diaspora policies, institutions, and practices as systematic endeavors of state-building in a transborder arena. I contend that state-society relations are not necessarily confined within nation-states' physical borders. State-building can also take place over a long distance and hinges upon institutional, technological, and discursive infrastructures to stimulate vigorous diasporic engagement and contestations in an overseas iteration of state-citizen interplay.

3.4. Local bureaucrats

The prevailing view of China's rise and its global impacts often assumes that the Chinese government has complete capacity to govern diasporas remotely[96]. Western media and NGO reports often sensationalize this issue and cite Chinese official statements and press releases as direct evidence of China's aggressive plans to infiltrate host countries through Chinese diasporas[97]. However, taking Chinese officialese at face value presumes high levels of unity and effectiveness of the Chinese bureaucracy, as if a wicked, powerful mastermind in Beijing could singlehandedly dictate political decisions and oversee coherent implementation[98]. This essentialized depiction of China as a monolithic authoritarian leviathan neglects the internal complexity of Chinese political machine, resurrecting centuries-old Orientalist tropes of China Threat.

In reality, Chinese bureaucracy is plagued with inconsistency, friction, and formalities. As shown in Chapter 3, Chinese public statements and propaganda materials are known to exaggerate the scope, depth, and impacts of policies to help cadres stand out in a competitive bureaucratic field and impress upper-level superiors. The convoluted power struggle within the Chinese bureaucracy calls for a departure from simplistic assumptions of the scale and efficacy of Global China. This dissertation carries out a relational ethnography to examine the ambitions and anxieties, convergence and collision, as well as aspiration and desperation among bureaucrats who steer the course of diaspora politics in everyday operation. Drawing on the neo-pluralist approach to statecraft[99], I disaggregate China's emigration regime into two dimensions: vertical and horizontal.

First, the multilevel structure of Chinese bureaucracy creates fragmentation across the central, provincial, municipal, and county levels of administration. While variations between

central and local governments exist in all polities, political scientists characterize China's administrative hierarchy as "fragmented authoritarianism"[100]. According to this theory, China's political system, despite being a uniform authoritarian regime, is driven by constant political bargaining between the central leadership that holds the final power of policy-making and various vertical agencies and spatial regions that are tasked with policy implementation[101]. This means that local political actors are not passive followers of national policies. Instead, grassroots officials play active roles in reconfiguring policy outcomes at the implementation stage and may deviate from top-down policies to promote parochial bureaucratic interests[102].

In China's diaspora bureaucracy, fragmented authoritarianism is particularly pronounced in major migrant-sending regions (known as *qiaoxiang* or diaspora hometowns), such as Guangdong Province, and Fujian Province, and Qingtian County and Wenzhou Prefecture in Zhejiang Province. Due to their large diaspora populations, these localities stand at the forefront of China's diaspora politics, as evidenced by their pivotal roles in the experimentation and diffusion of new diaspora policies. Although local bureaucrats in these diaspora hometowns are mandated to follow national policies in principle, they enjoy a high level of autonomy to adapt to grassroots needs and manage day-to-day diaspora governance. However, given their position at the bottom of the administrative pyramid, local bureaucrats frequently engage in what political scientist Iza Ding calls "performative governance" – the theatrical deployment of language, symbols, and gestures to foster an impression of effective governance[103] – to gain more organizational and political resources from upper-level superiors. Instead of dogmatically adhering to top-down policies, street-level officials prioritize practical interests and career advancement, improvising and performing everyday diaspora politics.

Second, China's intra-bureaucracy fragmentation also arises horizontally from power struggles between different diaspora institutions, which are state agencies specialized in diaspora politics. In fact, the past few decades have seen a worldwide proliferation of diaspora institutions[104]. Several sending countries, such as China[105], Morocco[106] and Lebanon[107], establish multiple diaspora institutions to serve different segments of their diasporas. The neo-pluralist perspective provides new avenues for an inquiry into the *intra*state plurality among diaspora institutions or, to rephrase social scientists Morgan and Orloff's metaphor, "the many hands of the homeland state"[108]. Whereas Dahl's classical pluralist approach emphasizes the role of competing interest groups in operationalizing democracies[109], neo-pluralism extends this focus to interest-based power conflicts in *non*-democratic states where unequal power relations between state incumbents may also trigger institutional rivalry[110].

Despite being a non-democratic party-state, the Chinese government comprises a constellation of state agencies with multiple, and sometimes conflicting, interests, orientations, and working philosophies. In the domain of diaspora politics, various institutions have distinctive strengths and working methods, designed to fulfill a sophisticated set of bureaucratic goals in both domestic and foreign spheres. As demonstrated in Chapters 4 and 5, these organizational variations not only give rise to fierce inter-institutional competition but also stimulate policy innovations and political entrepreneurship. Rather than a homogenous administrative mass, this dissertation disentangles the Chinese diaspora bureaucracy into various component units and examines how their competition for political power, prestige, and authority shapes the complex outcomes of China's diaspora policies.

In summary, this dissertation argues that transborder state-building is a relational process shaped by reciprocal and contested interactions among four sets of actors: ordinary emigrants,

diaspora leaders, the homeland central state, and local officials. This interactive approach brings into dialogue scholars who follow philosopher Giorgio Agamben, emphasizing sovereign power that rules over migrant lives[111], and scholars who adopt the "autonomy of migration" framework, stressing migrants' agency vis-à-vis state control[112]. By making a foray into examining state-citizen relations in cross-border contexts, I move beyond the "methodological nationalism"[113] that confines political sociology within the boundaries of nation-states. How do these actors interact and conflict with one another across great distances? In the following section, I elucidate three infrastructures through which transborder state-building is mediated and channeled.

4. Infrastructures

Social scientists have extensively researched how essential infrastructures, such as mass media, hierarchical bureaucracy, transportation networks, and standardized languages, contribute to the formation and consolidation of states within their territories. However, these infrastructures have little effect on *transborder* state-building. States face a variety of legal, geographical, and logistical obstacles to establish the same level of infrastructure in foreign countries as they do domestically. In this section, I illuminate how China mobilize diaspora institutions, information and communication technologies (ICTs), and political discourses to make transborder state-building possible.

Drawing on the burgeoning scholarship on "infrastructures"[114], I conceptualize these institutional, technological, and discursive channels as infrastructures that mediate and undergird transborder state-building. Drawing on anthropologist Brian Larkin, I define infrastructures as "built networks that facilitate the flow of goods, people, or ideas and allow for their exchange over

space"[115]. I argue that these infrastructures hold the key to engendering and sustaining transborder state-building by providing platforms for reterritorializing the areas of interaction between an expansive homeland state and its diasporas abroad. Compared to their domestic equivalents, transborder infrastructures are more elusive and malleable, enabling diverse cross-border actors to navigate the interstitial and sometimes tense space between host and home countries.

More importantly, transborder infrastructures are merely one-way avenues for homeland states' long-distance governance. I find that once established, these infrastructures also create opportunities for homeland officials, diaspora leaders, and ordinary emigrants to pursue their own bureaucratic, symbolic, and material interests. These emergent acts of grassroots maneuvering transform transborder infrastructures into contentious spaces for robust state-diaspora interactions and negotiations. By foregrounding the agency of grassroots actors in repurposing and manipulating these infrastructures to their advantage, I highlight the reciprocal and open-ended nature of transborder infrastructures in enabling both top-down control and bottom-up interplay. To avoid the assumption that China's overseas expansion is always effective and all-encompassing, this dissertation delves into the mundane exchange and bargaining that reshape Global China's governing infrastructures in their everyday operation.

4.1. Diaspora associations

Transborder state-building needs infrastructures in host countries to locally mediate the relations between homeland governments and diaspora communities. However, the principle of mutually exclusive sovereignty under international law leaves homeland states little room for maneuver in their extra-territorial reach to diasporas. Although embassies and consulates have

long been the most visible infrastructure through which homeland states directly interact with emigrant citizens, these formal outposts have to steer a particularly cautious course in diaspora governance to avoid diplomatic disputes with host countries. The legal sensitivity surrounding consular institutions compels homeland states to turn to less obstructive channels, including diaspora associations and quasi-official organizations, for indirect diaspora liaisons[116].

I define diaspora associations as registered and unregistered civil organizations managed and joined by diaspora members in host countries, based on common kinship, hometowns, gender, profession, hobbies, and political goals. These entities provide the necessary institutional platform and organizational capacity to mediate the encounters between diaspora individuals and homeland governments. Compared to macro-level forces, such as structural constraints and opportunity structures, and micro-level factors, such as individual calculations and emotions, the meso-level element of diaspora organizations remain relatively neglected in migration studies[117]. Sociologist Min Zhou and her colleagues argue that an explicit generational divide characterizes Chinese diaspora associations in the U.S.[118]. There are three types of traditional organizations, including family associations based on kinship, hometown associations based on place of origin, and merchant guilds based on sworn brotherhood[119]. These earlier organizations tend to gather in ethnic enclaves, such as Chinatowns, and serve simultaneously as guardians of the ethnic community and the gateway to engage with the broader reception context[120].

However, this traditional/modern divide in the organizational patterns of U.S.-based diaspora associations may not exist among their European equivalents. Chinese immigration to continental Europe has much shorter history, lower intensity, and less diversity than to the U.S.[121]. Chinese migrants face more structural constraints and less upward social mobility, compelling them to resort to active symbolic remittances with China. Chapter 3 demonstrates how diaspora

associations offer the institutional infrastructure to facilitating cross-border communication between hometown officials and diaspora members.

4.2. Digital technologies

The immense geographic distance between homeland states and diasporas poses practical challenges for various aspects of the everyday operation of transborder state-building, such as communication, community organization, political mobilization, and service provision. How can home countries regulate emigrants in foreign countries and provide civil services from afar? In this dissertation, I highlight the role of ICTs in facilitating state-building across borders. ICTs provide a vital virtual space where homeland officials, diaspora leaders, and ordinary emigrants can connect and negotiate with one another on a daily basis.

In recent decades, states have added digital technologies into their growing repertoires, such as census, passports, and print media, to penetrate and govern hard-to-reach communities[122]. The digitalization of state-society relations is particularly salient in migration management, as Western countries deploy biometric technologies to securitize borders amid the post-9/11 "war on terror"[123]. Migrants' bodily characteristics and personal history are reassembled into a series of discrete flows stored in databases – including the Schengen Information System in Europe and the US-Visit program in the United States – for risk profiling, criminalization, and deportation[124]. Yet, constrained by the prevailing immigration bias and Western-centrism, previous research casts disproportionate attention to how *receiving* countries in the developed world utilize cutting-edge information and communication technologies (ICTs) to surveil inbound migratory flows. In comparison, insights into *sending* states' ICT use for diaspora governance remain incipient[125].

Meanwhile, ICTs also afford subversive properties for migrants to navigate inhospitable mobility restrictions and gain emotional support across places of origin, transit, and destination. For example, ICTs serve as a lifeline in Syrian refugees' "digital passage" to Europe by offering navigation information on a perilous journey[126]. However, these digital affordances also expose migrants to European states' big-data surveillance and smugglers' constant control. On the affective level, ICTs enable emotional connectivity, or "virtual intimacy"[127], between migrants and their relatives back home in day-to-day online chats and mobile remittances.

To combine these state-centric and migrant-oriented perspectives of digital migration studies, this dissertation emphasizes ICTs' open-ended impacts on transborder state-building, contingent on the dynamic interactions between digital technologies, state and non-state actors, as well as their broader social contexts. I highlight how China has deployed ICTs as an infrastructural scaffold on which its various projects of transborder state-building, such as digital census, online surveillance, telehealth consultation, and virtual courts, are put into practice. Despite ICTs' revolutionary effects in expanding China's administrative reach overseas, state-diaspora interactions on ICTs are far from unidirectional. Digital technologies also lay the technopolitical groundwork for emigrants' subtle but impactful acts of resistance diffused in their quotidian encounters with Chinese officials.

5. Methods

This dissertation draws on two years of fieldwork with Qingtian diasporas in China and Europe. Qingtian is a prominent emigrant community in southeast China's Zhejiang Province. With a local population of 550,000, Qingtian boasts 330,000 members of diasporas across the

world. Most of Qingtian diasporas concentrate in Western Europe. Spain and Italy are major destinations, with approximately 100,000 Qingtian migrants in each country. While emigration from Qingtian began in the early 20th century, most migrants left China after the country's economic reforms and exit liberalization in the mid-1980s. The bulk of Qingtian migrants are economic migrants and hail from relatively underprivileged socioeconomic backgrounds in China.

I conducted fieldwork in Qingtian from June to September 2019 and from August 2020 to January 2022. I carried out 100 interviews, including 50 interviews with bureaucrats and another 50 interviews with migrants. I also engaged in ethnography with bureaucrats and migrants to closely observe their day-to-day workings and interactions. In each empirical chapter, I detail my methodologies for data collection and analysis.

Following my doctoral defense, I will turn this dissertation into a book to be published at a major university press. I will conduct extra fieldwork in Europe in Summer 2023 and Winter 2024 to study the on-the-ground mechanisms and conflicts of transborder state-building. I will focus on writing this book during my postdoctoral fellowship at Princeton University in 2024-2025.

6. Organization of the dissertation

The empirical chapters of this dissertation consist of five articles published or under review in peer-reviewed journals as well as a newly written chapter on my ethnography in a diaspora museum. In Chapter 1, I examine the legal construction of emigrants and diasporas by analyzing China's deprivation and restoration of emigrants' domestic citizenship, or *hukou*. I illustrate that the Chinese state first revokes emigrants' citizenship and then imposes selective conditions on its

restoration upon their return. China's otherwise domestically oriented *hukou* regime works similarly as an international immigration regime by selecting and documenting potential citizens. This chapter sheds light on the understudied external control of the *hukou* system by examining how it limits emigrants' right of resettlement and proscribes overseas dual residency. I argue that citizenship is anything but an enduring, unproblematic demographic fact. It is, in essence, a revocable, precarious politico-legal accomplishment. These malleable processes enable the state to redefine the citizenship of absent and returned members, reinsert the congruence between nationality and residency, and reinforce control over transborder populations.

In chapter 2, I examine the diaspora-featured urban reconstruction in Qingtian. I argue that the dispersion of emigrants per se does not make the urban space of Qingtian inherently "diasporic." Rather, a "diasporic place" can be strategically constructed by local sociopolitical actors, a process I conceptualize as "diasporic placemaking." To create an international city branding and boost the consumption-based urban economy, the local state promoted Western architectural forms and imagines globalization as a new way of life. To understand how migrants and local residents make sense of diasporic placemaking, I analyze deep-running tensions between their diverse self-perceptions and state construction. Instead of an innocent project, diasporic placemaking is replete with ambitions, achievements, and anxieties in post-socialist China.

Chapter 3 probes how China envisions diaspora politics amid geopolitical transformations. I argue that China's changing strategies toward Chinese emigrants, triggered by the state's geopolitical vicissitudes, have reshaped and repurposed diaspora institutions. I find that since the 2010s, China's diaspora policies have shifted away from soliciting diasporic support for domestic economic growth and national unification and toward liaising externally with migrants to expand Chinese soft power abroad. In consequence, diaspora institutions with more extensive overseas

connections and flexible working experiences have taken precedence over formal state agencies specialized in domestic policymaking. Following neo-pluralism, I examine China's diaspora bureaucracy as composed of a diverse set of state entities with distinctive, or even contradictory, interests, orientations, and philosophies. These organizational variations shape diaspora institutions' different strengths and fluctuating significance in China's shifting geopolitical strategies. Moreover, by situating emigrants and diaspora institutions in the macrohistorical framework of world politics, this chapter pushes research on diaspora politics into more profound dialogue with the world-systems theory. Rather than assuming an asymmetric interdependence between weaker emigration countries and hegemonic immigration countries, I demonstrate how an aspirational homeland state seeks to challenge this established world order and accomplish its geopolitical ascendancy through diaspora re-strategizing and institutional reshuffling.

In chapter 4, I examine the politics of international student migration in China. I argue that student migrants can be integrated into China's broader diaspora politics to serve *economic, governmental,* and *geopolitical* policy objectives. These diverse, sometimes-clashing, interests are predicated upon China's domestic politics and global positioning. To establish a conceptual bridge between ISM and diaspora studies, I depart from the mobility paradigm's emphases on neoliberalism and de-regulation and, instead, foreground nation-states' changing, yet-unabating, interests in regulating and strategizing about overseas students. I find that following decades of prioritizing the *economic* and *governmental* impacts of student returnees (*haigui*, or colloquially "sea turtles") in boosting the domestic economy and maintaining political stability, China now attaches growing importance to student migrants' *geopolitical* value as "grassroots ambassadors" (*minjian dashi*) in expanding China's global influence and enhancing its national image abroad. This geopolitics-focused national reorientation, however, may not be well received by student

migrants themselves or fully implemented by street-level migration bureaucrats. By examining tensions between the central Chinese state, student migrants, and frontline local officials, this chapter sheds new light on ISM as a dynamic policy arena where state ambitions crosscut individual desires and national grand plans are confronted with flexible local improvisation.

[1] Unlike other emigration states that have been thoroughly researched in North Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America, China does not have a wealthy and labor-hungry neighboring country or region that significantly draws migrant outflows. This has led to the scattering of Chinese diasporas across the globe, with sizable communities in Southeast Asia, the Americas, and Europe. A comparable case is India, see Agarwala, *The Migration-Development Regime*.
[2] Wang, *The Chinese Overseas*.
[3] Chen, "Harden the Hardline, Soften the Softline."
[4] Liu, "When Diaspora Politics Meet Global Ambitions."
[5] Thunø, "China's New Global Position."
[6] Lee, *The Specter of Global China*.
[7] Franceschini and Loubere, "Global China as Method."
[8] Fitzgerald, "China and the Overseas Chinese."
[9] Pompeo, "Designation of the National Association for China's Peaceful Unification (NACPU) as a Foreign Mission of the PRC."
[10] Nast, "China Operates Secret 'Police Stations' in Other Countries."
[11] I define members of Chinese diasporas as those living outside China who trace ethnic or cultural origins to China and maintain ties with the communities or governments of China. For more discussion on this notion, see Chapter XX.
[12] Mervis, "Controversial U.S. China Initiative Gets New Name, Tighter Focus on Industrial Espionage"; Liu, "From 'Sea Turtles' to 'Grassroots Ambassadors.'"
[13] Reuters, "The Long Arm of China."
[14] Franceschini and Loubere, "Global China as Method."
[15] Liu, "When Diaspora Politics Meet Global Ambitions."
[16] Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1990*; Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*; Mann, "The Autonomous Power of the State"; Torpey, *The Invention of the Passport*; Loveman, "The Modern State and the Primitive Accumulation of Symbolic Power."
[17] Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence*, 1987.
[18] Mann, "The Autonomous Power of the State."
[19] Kim, *Contested Embrace*; Alonso, *From Here and There*.
[20] Mann, "The Autonomous Power of the State"; Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*; Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1990*.
[21] Lee, "Global China at 20," 317.
[22] Baser and Féron, "Host State Reactions to Home State Diaspora Engagement Policies."
[23] Glasius, "Extraterritorial Authoritarian Practices."
[24] Naujoks, *Migration, Citizenship, and Development*.
[25] FitzGerald, *A Nation of Emigrants*; Alonso, *From Here and There*; Smith, "Migrant Membership as an Instituted Process."
[26] Adamson, "Sending States and the Making of Intra-Diasporic Politics"; Baser and Féron, "Host State Reactions to Home State Diaspora Engagement Policies."
[27] Kim, *Contested Embrace*.

[28] Tsourapas, *The Politics of Migration in Modern Egypt*.
[29] Brand, *Citizens Abroad*.
[30] Chen, "Harden the Hardline, Soften the Softline."
[31] Larkin, "The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure."
[32] Xiang and Lindquist, "Migration Infrastructure."
[33] Annavarapu and Levenson, "The Social Life of the State."
[34] Weber, *From Max Weber*, 78.
[35] Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence*, 1987, 13.
[36] Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1990*, 17.
[37] Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*, 38.
[38] Mann, "The Autonomous Power of the State"; Mann, "Infrastructural Power Revisited."
[39] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Torpey, *The Invention of the Passport*; Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*; Mukerji, "The Territorial State as a Figured World of Power."
[40] Alonso, *From Here and There*.
[41] Baser and Féron, "Host State Reactions to Home State Diaspora Engagement Policies."
[42] Tsourapas, *The Politics of Migration in Modern Egypt*; Tsourapas, "Theorizing State-Diaspora Relations in the Middle East"; Moss, "The Ties That Bind"; Moss, *The Arab Spring Abroad*.
[43] FitzGerald, *A Nation of Emigrants*.
[44] Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton-Blanc, *Nations Unbound*.
[45] Soysal, *Limits of Citizenship*.
[46] FitzGerald, *A Nation of Emigrants*, 29.
[47] Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany*.
[48] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.
[49] Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton-Blanc, *Nations Unbound*.
[50] Fitzgerald, "Colonies of the Little Motherland," 146; Kim, *Contested Embrace*, 8.
[51] FitzGerald, *A Nation of Emigrants*, 17.
[52] FitzGerald, *A Nation of Emigrants*; Brand, *Citizens Abroad*; Alonso, *From Here and There*; Tsourapas, *The Politics of Migration in Modern Egypt*; Adamson, "Sending States and the Making of Intra-Diasporic Politics"; Parreñas, "Discipline and Empower"; Agarwala, *The Migration-Development Regime*.
[53] Annavarapu and Levenson, "The Social Life of the State."
[54] Lee, "What Is Global China?"
[55] Chen, "Harden the Hardline, Soften the Softline"; Lee, *The Specter of Global China*.
[56] Tölölyan, "The Nation-State and Its Others"; Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies"; Clifford, "Diasporas"; Cohen, *Global Diasporas*.
[57] Gamlen, *Human Geopolitics*; Varadarajan, *The Domestic Abroad*.
[58] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.
[59] Brubaker, "The 'Diaspora' Diaspora."
[60] Brubaker; Brubaker, "Revisiting 'The "Diaspora" Diaspora.'"
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Chapter 1 Regulating Emigrants' Hukou in China

International migration disrupts the neat congruence between nation, state, population, and territory that characterizes the contemporary state system [1]. Whereas destination countries seek to govern non-member immigrants under territorial jurisdiction, emigration states struggle to control their absent members. How states respond to the ruptures in their control over transborder populations has emerged as a key question in migration studies. Transnationalism and postnationalism scholars emphasize the weakening of nation-states due to mechanisms such as "deterritorialized nations" [2], "postnational citizenship" [3], and "denationalized citizenship" [4]. Other scholars suggest that state control is not undermined, but instead *transformed* through strategic realignments of emigrant citizenship [5]. For instance, FitzGerald (2012) takes account of the mechanism of "citizenship à la carte" whereby states add more citizenship rights "on the menu" from which migrants can shop and choose.

I argue for the changing, yet unabating, state control, as shown by states' malleable manipulation of emigrant citizenship. Building on FitzGerald (2012), I argue that state control can be consolidated through the even more dynamic mechanism of taking citizenship "on and off the menu." By first stripping emigrants of their citizenship and then imposing strict conditions for its restoration, states reinsert control over transborder populations through restriction and selection. I caution against perceiving citizenship as a given, static status, or "citizen-*ness*," that is inherent, unchanged in a state's nationals. Instead, I dive deep into the dynamism of "citizen-*ization*" in the unmaking and remaking of emigrant citizenship. Rather than a unidirectional, irreversible entitlement, citizenship is shaped by the state through a constellation of fluctuated legal

codification and exploitative bureaucratic practices. Hence, citizenship is predicated upon the quintessential state power over populations and their movements [6].

I illustrate these arguments through the case study of China, based on a two-pronged analysis: first, a genealogical interrogation of China's citizenship laws over the past six decades; second, three months of fieldwork in Qingtian County[7], China from June to September 2019 to investigate the on-the-ground bureaucratic practices. I discover that China not only prohibits dual nationality but goes even further to prevent emigrants from possessing dual residency. Whereas emigrants who have naturalized abroad simultaneously lose their Chinese nationality and citizenship, my focus in this chapter lies in those who retain their Chinese nationality. For these Chinese emigrants, nationality and citizenship are separate. Nationality takes the physical form of passports, while their Chinese citizenship is determined by the *hukou* system and demonstrated by resident identity cards or household registers (*hukou bu*). According to citizenship laws, emigrants who are still Chinese nationals but have established foreign residency are required to relinquish their local household registration (*hukou*) and revoke their Chinese citizenship. Without *hukou*, emigrants are ineligible for the fundamental rights of public education, healthcare, and even unable to open a bank account, register for phone numbers, or obtain a driver's license in China. Hence, citizenship deprivation gives rise to the considerable deflation of emigrant citizenship and necessitates citizenship restoration if emigrants seek to return to China.

However, citizenship restoration is by no means automatic. Emigrants have to meet a set of selective and documentary criteria so that only economically well-off and properly documented migrants can resettle in China. Hence, I suggest a critical rethinking of China's citizenship regime, namely, the *hukou* system, as a population control tool not just for domestic migrants but also transborder migrants. I show that the otherwise domestically oriented *hukou* system indeed works

similarly as international immigration regimes by precluding dual residency and selecting and documenting potential citizens.

In the following sections, I first review existing studies on citizenship and international migration to identify the knowledge gap regarding the dynamic mechanisms of depriving and restoring emigrant citizenship. After explaining the contextual background of emigrant citizenship in China, I spell out my research design and then delve into a historical investigation of citizenship laws. The following section is devoted to a study of how these policies are implemented in Qingtian County in practice.

1. The deprivation and restoration of emigrant citizenship

Canonical theorists in the political sociology of citizenship suggest that the state is not only a territorial entity but also a membership organization [8]. Drawing on the Weberian concept of "social closure" [9], Brubaker points to the duality of citizenship as "internally inclusive," guaranteeing equal membership for insiders, and "externally exclusive," shutting off membership from outsiders [10]. Brubaker's *tour de force* provides a promising takeoff point for the examination of citizenship and international migration [11].

Indeed, international migration impinges upon states' mutually exclusive control over their populations. Transnationalism and postnationalism scholars paint a bleak picture of eroded state control and diminishing significance of states in membership politics. Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton-Blanc (2005) contend that emigration states have become "deterritorialized nations" due to the decoupling of emigrants' presence in the state territory and their membership in the political community. Jacobson (1996) and Soysal (1994) propose the concept of "postnational citizenship" to lay stress upon the international human rights regime as an alternative source of citizenship

rights. Similarly, Bosniak (2000) and Sassen (2002) coin the term "denationalized citizenship" to delineate the disruptive implications of globalization upon the state control over citizenship.

FitzGerald (2012), however, insists that far from undermining state control, the renegotiation of the social contract between states and their members indeed strengthens the robustness of the nation-state system in the new millennium. This results in more voluntaristic ties between emigrants and sending states through "citizenship à la carte." In this mechanism, states embrace emigrants by allowing for, or even promoting, multiple national affiliations. In the same vein, other scholars argue for the persistently pivotal role of states by recounting four readjustment mechanisms in the direction of either an expansion or a restriction.

The first mechanism is the *extension* of transnational citizenship [12]. Following the classical liberal thinking of T.H. Marshall (1964), these scholars delineate a progressive liberalization of immigrants' transnational citizenship or denizenship on the basis of their residence and social and tax contributions. Some states also grant extraterritorial citizenship, especially the enfranchisement of the right to vote in absentia [13]. The second expansionist mechanism is the growing recognition of *dual nationality*. By 2019, over 75 percent of all countries were tolerant of multiple nationalities [14]. In particular, emigration states take advantage of migrants' multi-sited belonging to attract economic resources and political support [15].

The third and fourth mechanisms are the restrictionist *denationalization* [16] and *revocation of citizenship* [17] whereby emigrant membership is taken away from countries that permit dual nationality. In history, exorcising citizens has been a conventional punishment for a wide range of crimes [18]. The rise of international human rights rhetoric and conventions since WWII, however, increasingly links such deprivation with totalitarian regimes [19]. More recently, the post-9/11 Western society has witnessed a revival of these practices to curb homegrown terrorists, many of

whom are naturalized citizens or second-generation immigrants [20]. Moreover, Pedroza and Palop-García (2017) find that multiple belonging may subtract citizenship from nationality by restricting the rights of dual nationals.

Extant literature, however, fails to explore the more malleable mechanism of first taking away emigrant citizenship and then restoring citizenship for returnees. In this chapter, I pay special attention to the elastic way in which states manipulate emigrant citizenship while keeping the nationality intact. My argument is that states can reimpose control over emigrants through the deliberate juxtaposition of citizenship deprivation and restoration. In the case of China, the state first deprives emigrants of their domestic citizenship and then require citizenship restoration upon emigrants' return. Thus, China not only precludes dual residency but also uses domestic citizenship regimes in the same manner as international immigration regimes to select and document future citizens. I argue that there is nothing natural in emigrants' citizenship in their countries of nationality. Instead, it is the state's bureaucratic practices and codification of citizenization laws that shape emigrant citizenship, rendering them "citizen-less" or "citizen-full" in their home community. I give special weight to the gap between nationality and citizenship and interrogate how states widen and narrow this gap to reinforce their control over absent emigrants.

2. Emigrant citizenship in China

In China, the deprivation and restoration of emigrant citizenship hinge upon two conditions: first, a strict citizenship regime that bans dual residency, and, second, a restrictive nationality regime that proscribes dual nationality. On the one hand, China's *hukou* system shapes the contours of a suppressive emigrant citizenship regime. The classical Marshallian rights-based conceptualization of citizenship has become increasingly polyvalent to encompass the various

facets of citizenship as a status, rights, political engagement, and identity [21]. In this framework, *hukou* can be seen as an identity marker that ties citizens to a localized set of status and rights in a given locality, except that political engagement rarely takes place in authoritarian China [22]. In China's draconian *hukou* system, citizenship is fundamentally tied to residency [23]. Dubbed as China's "internal passport system" [24], the *hukou* system imposes a crucial constraint on citizens' freedom of residency by restricting their legal status and socioeconomic rights to the specific locality where they are registered [25].

Although scholars have long scrutinized *hukou* as a population control tool to restrain *internal* migration [26], how the state deploys this system to govern *transborder* migrants' remains a blind spot [27]. In this chapter, drawing upon Vortherms's (2015) trailblazing comparison of the *hukou* system with international immigration regimes, I throw into sharp relief the oft-neglected *external* dimension of the *hukou* system. I argue that the otherwise domestically oriented citizenship regime serves to govern emigrant citizenship in an instrumental approach that bears a striking resemblance to international immigration regimes.

According to China's citizenship laws, which will be discussed in detail below, emigrants who retain their Chinese nationality but establish residency abroad are stripped of their Chinese *hukou*, thus facing considerable obstacles in civic life in China. First and foremost, they are ineligible to obtain Chinese resident identity cards (*jumin shenfenzheng*), the only acceptable legal document to obtain driver's licenses, open bank accounts, register for mobile phone numbers, and apply for tertiary education in China. Article 14 of the 2012 Exit and Entry Administrative Law provides that emigrants can use their Chinese passports for identification purposes within China. Yet, even the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (OCAO), which is the paramount institution in managing China's diaspora affairs, admitted that this stipulation had not been fully enforced and

migrants without resident IDs were considerably underprivileged in China [28]. Moreover, emigrants without *hukou* are excluded from the majority of localized citizenship rights, including healthcare, public education, and pensions. A similar case is the British Overseas Citizenship which detaches citizenship from nationality. Holders of this status are British nationals but not British citizens, hence no right of abode in Britain [29].

These bureaucratic impediments indicate that as Chinese nationals, emigrants only have the universally recognized right of return, namely, the right of any individuals to return to their country of nationality [30]. But emigrants without *hukou* have no right of resettlement in China [31]. The state disentangles "return", the process of reentering China, from "resettle," the process of reestablishing *hukou* and residency in China. In other words, after being stripped of *hukou*, citizen-less emigrants can only reenter China, but their residency in China hinges upon the restoration of *hukou* and shall be validated upon the state's approval.

On the other hand, according to an internal training booklet on migration policies, citizenship deprivation and restoration are also preconditioned upon a ban on dual nationality [32]. A major shortcoming in the existing scholarship of citizenship and international migration lies in its prevalent focus on countries where dual or multiple nationalities are allowed [33], while little to date has been written about states that do not recognize dual nationality. In fact, state power reaches the apogee when manipulating with full potency the membership of mono-nationals who have no alternative political communities to claim protection.

China is a case in point. By precluding dual nationality, China exerts full control over mono-nationals as the sole sovereign state of nationality. According to article 9 of China's Nationality Law, Chinese nationals who obtain a foreign nationality autonomically lose their Chinese nationality. Hence, emigrants who retain their Chinese nationality usually rely on foreign

permanent or long-term residency to reside abroad, while using their Chinese passports to enter and exit China. Nonetheless, the Chinese state is not satisfied with a ban on dual *nationality* alone, but actively seeks to prohibit dual *residency* altogether. On the one hand, it withdraws the *hukou* of emigrants who have established residency abroad, thus forbidding their second residency in China. On the other hand, the state conditions citizenship restoration upon the revocation of foreign residency, ensuring that returnees have Chinese residency only.

Therefore, coupled with the prohibition on dual nationality, the *hukou* system provides the institutional underpinning upon which emigrant citizenship is shaped and formalized. By examining emigrant citizenship in a country that only recognizes single nationality, I study state power at its zenith. As the sole state of nationality, China's unrivaled power over mono-nationals enables it to preclude dual residency and reassert exclusive control over transborder populations.

3. Methods

China is one of the largest emigration countries, accounting for 4% of the global emigrant population, while return migration has seen an upward trend [34]. More specifically, Qingtian County is a prominent emigrant community. According to official statistics, over 40% of its registered population resides abroad. The County Government began withdrawing emigrants' local *hukou* in the early 1980s. Since the 2000s, reestablishing citizenship for returned nationals became an all-the-more important priority for the local diaspora apparatus (*qiaowu xitong*). Hence, the County Government has nearly four decades of experience in citizenship deprivation and over fifteen years of practices in citizenship restoration. These conditions make Qingtian County an ideal field site to carry out archival research and interviews.

First, I surveyed all relevant national-level laws and administrative rules in China from 1958 to 2019. More recent laws could be found online, while others were collected from the official archive in Qingtian County. Because the implementation of these policies has been mainly carried out by the OCAO and the Bureau of Public Security (BPS) of Qingtian County, I examined all annual catalogs produced by these two institutions from 1949, when the People's Republic of China was established, to 2019. Then I selected and photocopied over 200 pages of pertinent documents, including national and local laws and policies, internal reports, upper-level instructions, as well as administrative dossiers.

I also conducted fieldwork in Qingtian County from June to September 2019 to closely interrogate how these policies have been enforced on the ground. First, I carried out thirty-seven interviews with nearly all officials in the migration apparatus (*qiaowu xitong*). They work in thirteen state agencies, including the OCAO, the BPS, the Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese, and the Department of Organization. The Chief of Staff at the OCAO acted as the gatekeeper who arranged interviews for me. These bureaucrat interviewees all had working knowledge and experience in handling emigrant citizenship issues. I asked them about their understandings of the rationale behind citizenship deprivation and restoration policies and how local implementation transformed over the past decades.

Second, I conducted twenty-two interviews with three groups of migrants: those who had already returned, those who were in the administrative process to restore citizenship, and those who had no intention to return. I recruited first interviewees through personal networks and then adopted the snowball strategy to yield a selective sample composed of emigrants in all four categories of Qingtian County's citizenship restoration policy. I asked migrants about their

experiences in the citizenship deprivation and restoration procedures. All interviews with officials and migrants were semi-structured, conducted in Mandarin Chinese, and lasted on average an hour.

4. Depriving absent members of citizenship

The citizenship deprivation policy stemmed from the 1958 Household Registration Regulation, the very regulation that created the *hukou* system. Its article 10 provides that citizens who move out of the jurisdiction where their *hukou* is registered have to register their out-migration and withdraw their original *hukou*. This stipulation, however, targeted domestic migrants within China, instead of transborder migrants, given the fact that emigration abroad was considered as a betrayal of the socialist regime and therefore seldom took place in the Maoist era [35]. It was not until the onset of the economic reform era in the early 1980s that two legal documents eventually opened up legal channels for Chinese citizens to emigrate abroad [36]. Then the question of whether this stipulation also applies to transborder migrants ensued.

The 1986 Administrative Law on the Exit and Entry of Citizens (hereafter 1986 Exit and Entry Law) provided the answer. It was the first national law that offered the institutional scaffoldings for Chinese citizens' freedom of emigration, while hinting at their limited right of return. Its article 10 obliged Chinese nationals abroad to "*apply for* return" (emphasis added), implying that return was conditioned upon permission from the state. This requirement was further spelled out in the 1986 administrative rule on the implementation of the 1986 Exit and Entry Law. Its article 7 provided that Chinese nationals who have "settled down abroad" (*dingju*) have to withdraw their local *hukou* and that migrants who plan to return to China have to first apply for their return and then restore their *hukou* in the home locality.

Nonetheless, official definitions of "settle down abroad" have oscillated in a variegated array of legal documents published as early as 1957. That year, a legal document used the term 'sojourn' (*qiaoju*) in determining whether emigration was established [37]. The concept of "sojourn," however, was cloaked in ideological and geopolitical considerations of the nascent communist regime, as the criteria for "sojourn" were closely associated with the political backgrounds of emigrants. Since the 1980s, economic pragmatism began to occupy the central place of the membership politics in reformist China. As a consequence, the overall tendency has been to adopt increasingly specific and narrower definitions for "settle down abroad".

In 1984, an amendment to the 1957 document clearly defined "settle down abroad" as "having obtained the right of residency, or having resided and earned a living abroad," rendering all emigrants susceptible to citizenship deprivation, regardless of how long they have resided abroad or what their legal statuses are [38]. In 2005, a legal explanation narrowed the definition of "settle down abroad" to "having obtained a long-term or permanent residency permit," thus exempting those holding short-term residency permits from citizenship revocation [39]. In 2009, this definition was further narrowed down, adding the additional requirement of actual residence abroad for over eighteen months in two consecutive years [40]. Hence, emigrants who hold residency permits abroad but do not actually reside abroad can still avoid losing *hukou*. Notwithstanding the continuous narrowing of citizenship deprivation definitions over time, the bulk of emigrants are still subject to this policy as long as they reside abroad for a prolonged period.

It remains equivocal, however, to what extent citizenship deprivation policies are still valid or actually enforced on the ground. The 1986 Exit and Entry Law was abolished by the 2012 Exit-Entry Administration Law, which is the current primary migration statute in China. The 2012 new law does not explicitly require citizenship deprivation after emigrants establish foreign residency

and its more specific administrative implementation rules had not been issued as of May 2020. But it can be implied that citizenship deprivation is still mandatory. According to a legal explanation, provisions in the 1986 administrative rule remain valid, as long as they do not contradict with the 2012 Exit-Entry Administration Law [41]. Given that the 2012 law contains a similar provision (article 13) akin to article 10 of the 1986 Law, it can be assumed that citizenship deprivation remains binding under the new law. Nevertheless, the *hukou* system is highly decentralized [42] and the implementation of *hukou* revocation may vary in different localities. Local governments exert a varying degree of autonomy in designing local rules and implementing national policies based on local conditions. As I will demonstrate in the case of Qingtian County, some localities with sizable emigrant communities may suspend the practice of citizenship revocations in order to facilitate emigration and return migration, running counter to the national policy.

In a nutshell, citizenship deprivation widens the gap between emigrants' Chinese nationality and citizenship by taking away their Chinese citizenship. It enables the Chinese state to maintain the delicate congruence between state power, territory, and population by excluding absent emigrants from the domestic membership community. More importantly, citizenship deprivation also serves as the prerequisite for its restoration and paves the way for even more rigorous control over emigrant citizenship. It is the antecedent practice of citizenship deprivation that necessitates restoration.

5. Restoring citizenship for returned nationals

In the Maoist era, emigration abroad was nearly impossible, making the return of Chinese nationals even less likely. The sporadic return migration that did occur, especially the "refugee return" of ethnic Chinese minorities from Southeast Asia (*guinanqiao*), was dealt with in an *ad*

hoc manner for specific geopolitical or ideological purposes [43]. After the 1955 Bandung conference in Indonesia, China established the official stance of disfavoring the Overseas Chinese's return migration while encouraging their naturalization and integration in host countries [44]. In comparison, in the postsocialist era, return migration emerged not only as a favorable policy promoted by the state, aimed at attracting foreign investment for economic development [45], but also a new problematic to be solved, so that citizen-less emigrants can return and resettle.

The citizenship restoration policy first appeared in a 1985 legal notice which exempted Chinese nationals who temporarily return to China from the requirement of applying for entry visas, yet obliging those who seek to permanently resettle in China to *apply for* their resettlement [46]. Article 3 of this notice also demands "rigorous control" (*congyan guanli*) over the approval of resettlements of Chinese emigrants from North Korea, Mongolia, and the Soviet Union, because the number of returnees from these countries was "too large" and the government had to "avoid difficulties of their resettlement in China." In other words, the state deliberately confined Chinese nationals' right of resettlement to shun its responsibilities towards potential citizens.

Nevertheless, restrictions over the state's approval apply not only for returnees from these three countries but anyone whom the state deems economically unproductive and socially burdensome. According to an internal document issued in the same year,

> If a Chinese citizen who has settled abroad asks for a return to China to settle down, the examination and approval departments *must strictly control it* and do not advocate for the principle of "falling leaves return to the roots" (*luoyeguigen*). In particular, for those who do not have any expertise and those who have lost their ability to work and only seek to return for retirement purposes, [the government] should *try its best to politely reject them and avoid increasing the burden on the state*. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Overseas Chinese Affairs Office, and Ministry of Public Security 1985, emphases added)

Here, the state laid bare its intension of controlling return migration in the official examination and approval procedures. Most notably, it dismissed the principle of "falling leaves return to the roots" which was often used by local governments to woo Chinese diasporas for investments and remittances in the era of economic takeoff [47]. It specifically singled out low-skilled, unproductive, and elder emigrants as potential burdens for the state and stressed "polite rejection" (*wanju*) as a practical method to camouflage the state's refusal of resettling its own nationals who were deemed "burdensome."

Two years later, the OCAO admitted that this mode of "rigorous control" was "too stringent," "unfair and unreasonable" (*youshi qingli*), and "not conducive to unite the Overseas Chinese and their relatives" [48]. It nonetheless held on to the principle of "rigorous control" and only added a few exceptions for widowed senior emigrants and others who could provide social welfare on their own. These instrumentalist policies fell a long way short of the hospitable official stance in publicly promulgated laws. For instance, article 5 of the 1990 Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Returned Overseas Chinese and Family Members and its 2009 amendment both guarantee the right of return for Overseas Chinese and the state's obligation of "making arrangements" (*anzhi*) accordingly.

To meet this objective of controlling return migration, the state establishes a two-step procedure for *hukou* restoration in chapter 3 of the implementation rule for the 1986 Exit and Entry Law and article 13 of the 2012 Exit-Entry Administration Law. The first step is to obtain a certificate of return and resettlement (*huiguodingjuzheng*) from Chinese embassies or consulates in the country where emigrants have settled down. The next step is to register *hukou* at the local BPS with this certificate within thirty days upon arrival in China. Hence, the process of restoring emigrants' Chinese citizenship often begins in foreign countries even before the physical return

migration takes place. Notwithstanding a domestic status and entitlement, emigrant citizenship's bureaucratic tentacle reaches far out into the transborder population in host societies.

There are also a series of preconditions for citizenship restoration, the primary one being the revocation of permanent residency abroad. Returnees have to sign a statement for voluntary withdrawal of foreign residency. By forcing them to renounce foreign residency before reestablishing *hukou*, the citizenship restoration policy again bars Chinese nationals from possessing dual residency. Returnees also need to fulfill two specific residence and livelihood requirements provided in a 2013 regulation: first, continuous residence in China for a certain period of time; second, stable livelihood guarantees and legal fixed residence in China [49]. These requirements select only economically well-off emigrants to resettle in China and hinder returnees from adding extra burden to the Chinese public welfare system. This selective restoration of citizenship has the earmarks of an international immigration regime driven by a contractual logic of granting citizenship only to socioeconomically favorable migrants [50]. Hence, the Chinese citizenship no longer constitutes innate rights enjoyed by equal members, but is turned into an earned privilege bestowed by the state [51].

Overall, this genealogical examination of *hukou* deprivation and restoration indicates that emigrant citizenship is profoundly produced by an onerous, fluctuating process of legal construction and codification. The state's painstaking efforts of codifying and institutionalizing emigrant citizenship are based on its deliberate calculations of who should be excluded and who should be embraced [52]. Instead of an inherent, natural characteristic, emigrant citizenship is, in essence, a politico-legal construct by the home state to reestablish control over absent or returned members.

This politico-legal construct, however, is far from uniform across China. According to Zhou's (2016) estimate, as of December 30, 2015, 29 out of 34 provincial-level governments had issued local rules on *hukou* restoration for emigrants. These rules differ significantly in substantive and procedural requirements for citizenship restoration. Given the decentralized, or, more precisely, fractured nature of China's citizenship regime [53], we need a more nuanced understanding of emigrant citizenship policies in their on-the-ground operation. In the following section, I redirect the focus to the implementation of these policies in Qingtian County.

6. Governing emigrant citizenship in Qingtian County

Emigration surfaced in Qingtian County in the early 20th century, but large-scale emigration took off only in the 1980s after China embarked on economic reforms. The County Government began systematically enforcing citizenship deprivation as soon as emigration boomed. The thorniest practical issue was to identify emigrants who had settled abroad. An official at the BPS explained that this was achieved through a collaboration with village chiefs in Qingtian County and Chinese embassies abroad:

> Every time we conducted a census or mid-year reports, we asked village chiefs to report their village's population and how many had emigrated. These village chiefs sent officials to each household to examine if there were any missing family members. We conducted surveys like this every half a year. The *hukou* of those who were absent for more than half a year would be de-registered. We also received information from our embassies about emigrants whom they had dealt with. However, embassies belong to the foreign affairs apparatus and they occupy much higher-level positions in terms of their administrative standing. So, they only sporadically shared information with us.

Another official in the BPS added that sometimes when the Chinese customs at international airports detected that Chinese citizens were using foreign residency permits, rather

than visas, to exit China, which implied that they had settled abroad, the customs would pass this information to the provincial government which then notified the County Government. Despite a local bureaucratic practice, the execution of citizenship deprivation, in fact, involves multiple institutions across different administrative levels within and beyond China.

When asked about the rationale for citizenship deprivation, officials pointed to the principle of "consistency between registered and actual residencies" (*renhuyizhi*), which refers to the requirement of keeping citizens' *hukou* up to date with their actual legal and residential status. The underlying logic is that if emigrants have established residency abroad and transcended China's state control, their *hukou* should also be withdrawn. Whereas scholars only analyze how the *hukou* system anchors citizens at their registered locality within China, this chapter shows that the state also deploys its domestic citizenship regime as a population control instrument to fix the overseas "floating populations" and prohibit their dual residency. What is even more potent are Qingtian County's citizenship restoration practices that essentially work as a selective international immigration regime.

As first-generation emigrants approached the retirement age in the 2000s, emigration declined, while return migration commenced. After the 2007-08 financial crisis that swept through major Western destination countries, return migration was in full swing. In response, the County Government began regranting *hukou* to returnees in the early 2000s and providing financial support to returnee entrepreneurs to boost the local economy. Although citizenship deprivation policies remained valid by law across China as of 2019, Qingtian County discontinued this practice locally in 2003. When I asked BPS bureaucrats about the rationale behind this abrupt local decision of suspending *hukou* deprivation, they cited an administrative decision of the Ministry of Public Security in 2003. That decision did state that the government should stop revoking the *hukou* of

Chinese nationals who have gone abroad for over one year, but it also clearly excluded from this provision emigrants who have resettled abroad [54]. In other words, the County Government misinterpreted the national government's decision to justify local practices. Although the genuine reason for this local suspension of *hukou* revocation remains unknown, its timing might point to the combined factors of dwindling emigration and rising return migration in the early 2000s.

Meanwhile, the County Government began reestablishing *hukou* for returned Chinese nationals. According to an internal BPS report, as of December 2018, more than 40,000 emigrants had restored their *hukou*, making up over 15% of the total emigrant population from Qingtian County. When officials talked about the local suspension of citizenship deprivation and the subsequent expansion of citizenship restoration, they always emphasized that it is the local government's mercy and enthusiasm for "serving the people" (*weirenminfuwu*) that led to these "generous" policies. Nevertheless, they omitted the fact that the very emergence of emigrants' "*hukou* problem" was an outstanding state success in and of itself to create a new political reality of citizen-less emigrants yearning for citizenship. This problematic reality is manipulated to be so serious as to provide a compelling rationale for the fortification of state control in classifying, disciplining, and surveilling emigrants.

The County Government imposes differentiated requirements over four categories of citizen-less nationals: first, those who were born in China and emigrated after 2003; second, those who were born in China and emigrated before 2003; third, those who were born abroad and are under eighteen years old; fourth, those who were born abroad and are over eighteen years old. The reason why the birthplace matters is that, according to an OCAO official, migrants who are born in China have to submit their birth certificates to the BPS and thus can be traced to their "root records" (*di'ce*). In comparison, foreign-born nationals are presumably "illegible" [55] in the eyes of

the Chinese state. In the citizenship restoration process, the state reimposes control over absent members by putting in place again the legibility of transborder floating populations.

Because the first group emigrated after the citizenship deprivation practice was suspended, they are able to retain their *hukou* and hence no need for restoration. The County Government unconditionally restores *hukou* for the second and third groups, except for the rigid documentation requirement. Returnees in these categories have to produce at least fifteen documents to establish their proper identity, including passports, foreign residency permits, and their translated Chinese version and notarized version issued by Chinese embassies, records of exit and entry issued by the BPS, property ownership certificates, income certificates or bank statements. These documents serve to reestablish return migrants as knowable, nameable figures and turn them into objects of surveillance and discipline [56], before readmitting them into the membership community of China.

This hardline stance towards documentation stands in sharp contrast with the County Government's leniency towards document frauds during the emigration era. The overwhelming majority of my migrant respondents told me that they emigrated in the 1980s and 1990s through the underground channels of human smuggling and document distortion. Human smugglers distorted their identity and confiscated or destroyed their genuine documents. Several senior officials, however, admitted that back then, they were personally acquainted with human smugglers. The local government not only turned a blind eye, but even went so far as to protect human smugglers from legal punishments, "because they made tremendous contributions to the local economy." These practices of state-sponsored irregular migration were not unheard-of, but, in fact, widely existed in major emigration regions in China [57]. Whereas the local government might have promoted document frauds and human smuggling in the emigration era, it nonetheless demands each migrant to retrieve an appropriate identity upon their return. This *ex post facto*

documentation requirement lays the firm bureaucratic foundation for state control over potential citizens.

It is the fourth group, however, that faces the most draconian conditions. A local official told me that because emigrants who fall into this category are neither born nor raised in China and only claim Chinese citizenship after reaching adulthood, they are least connected with China and thus "need to be screened against more conditions." In fact, these Chinese nationals have never had Chinese citizenship and the gap between their nationality and citizenship is the widest, providing the opening for the state's most exploitative citizenship requirements. In Qingtian County, foreign-born adult nationals were only eligible to obtain *hukou* since 2018. A local policy issued that year spells out three routes for *hukou*: first, invest RMB 500,000 (or USD 72,650) or pay tax of RMB 50,000 (or USD 7,265) in Qingtian County; second, marry a local and rely on the marital sponsorship for the *hukou* application; third, get recruited by local employers as high-caliber talents (*gaocengci rencai*). These criteria bear a striking resemblance to categories of immigration based on investment, marriage, and high human capital respectively in international immigration regimes.

The key difference, however, lies in the fact that Qingtian County Government deploys this regime to target Chinese nationals, rather than foreign immigrants. I met a second-generation migrant born and raised in Austria in the *hukou* restoration administrative procedures at the BPS, and she complained, "in Europe, we are treated as second-class citizens. But what I didn't know was that I'm not even a citizen in my home country." However, most migrant interviewees stated that they would acquiesce to the citizenship restoration requirements, because they had no alternative options in order to return and resettle in their hometown. The adoption of international immigration regimes in the domestic citizenship politics serves as an all-powerful exclusionary

mechanism to cautiously fence in the Chinese membership community and displays the omnipotence of the home state in blurring the boundary between "domestic" and "transborder" population control.

7. Conclusion

In the past decade, prominent scholars in this field, such as Bauböck (2009) and Joppke (2019), have realigned their analytic foci towards emigration states and laid out a blueprint for future studies of emigrants' so-called "external citizenship" in origin countries. This welcoming development brings to the fore a crucial observation that immigration and emigration are two sides of the same coin that we call "international migration." Immigrants in receiving countries are simultaneously absent members in their homeland. Building on this momentum, I illustrate through the case study of China that analyses of emigration are crucial for debates on citizenship and state power. I argue that emigrant citizenship is a dynamic process orchestrated by the state to reinforce control over transborder populations.

I find that the Chinese state first revokes emigrants' citizenship and then imposes selective conditions on the restoration of citizenship upon their return. Rather than simply a measure of giving up control, citizenship deprivation is a strategic response to forcibly delink emigrants from their country of nationality. Through the unmaking of emigrant citizenship, the state forbids missing nationals from enjoying domestic rights and statuses. The construction of citizen-less nationals lays the groundwork for the state's reinsertion of emigrants into the matrices of sovereign power. The state sets in motion a string of bureaucratic processes to restart extracting from these long-absent members the necessary resources to reproduce the state itself, such as verified knowledge about populations, foreign direct investments, and high human capital yields from brain

gain. The state reactivates its capacity of keeping track of the populations' identity and movements, rendering them legible again and readily available for state control.

Despite a domestic administrative procedure, the citizenship restoration policy adopts the model of international immigration regimes to select and document potential citizens. These selection and screening processes offer a sturdy bureaucratic undergirding for the state's demarcation of boundaries between "us" and "them," "members" and "non-members." The fact that this line is drawn internally among equal nationals indicates the potent power of states in governing transborder populations. The deliberate revamping of domestic citizenship regimes leads to the dynamic unmaking and remaking of emigrant citizenship.

Citizenship is thus anything but a substantial, enduring politico-demographic fact. It is, in essence, a revocable, precarious political accomplishment. These malleable processes of codification and institutionalization enable states to redefine the citizenship of absent and returned members, reinstate the correspondence between nationality and residency, and reassure their unequivocal control over populations anchored upon the national territory [58]. These processes also exploit the elasticity of the gap between emigrants' citizenship and nationality. Whereas citizenship deprivation broadens the gulf between nationality and citizenship, citizenship restoration reestablishes their congruence.

Building on extant literature of China's citizenship regime [59], this chapter represents one of the first attempts to probe into the external dimension of the *hukou* system. I analyze how China's domestic citizenship regime is used to control the movement of not only domestic migrants but also transborder emigrants. The past decade has witnessed significant *hukou* reforms in two aspects: first, abolishing the rural-urban divide; second, relaxing *hukou* restrictions in lower-tier cities while keeping in place strict control over population influxes in large cities [60]. This

chapter sheds new light on the understudied external control of the *hukou* system and add more levels of complexity to our understanding of its recent institutional transformations. While the domestic impacts of *hukou* may have weakened in recent reforms, its control over emigrants remains robust at both national and local levels, especially in terms of citizenship restoration. By imposing selective criteria and documentary requirements, the *hukou* system limits emigrants' right of resettlement, proscribes transborder dual residency, and extends the state's bureaucratic reach far beyond China.

China's *hukou* system is indeed not *sui generis*. Similar household registration systems exist or used to exist in countries influenced by Chinese imperial Confucianism, including Japan, North Korea, South Korea, Vietnam, and Taiwan [61], many of which are traditional source countries of emigrants and have increasingly become destination countries in the Global South [62]. Similarly, in the Global North, the UK and France recently used citizenship revocation as an administrative barrier to prohibit former ISIS soldiers from returning home [63]. Emigrant citizenship has become a key mechanism for states across the globe to manage transborder populations and strengthen state control. Moreover, the deployment of documentation and legal codification to locate and authenticate international migrants constitutes part and parcel of state efforts in limiting migrant rights and reinforcing control [64]. This chapter of China's *hukou* revocation and restoration may have implications for these similar mechanisms of emigrant citizenship in other parts of the world.

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Chapter 2 Diasporic Placemaking

International migration profoundly reshapes the urban landscape and built environments in both sending and receiving countries [1]. Migration-related urban transformations can be initiated by either migrants or the local state. In destination countries, migrants transplant hometown streetscapes and ways of life to create "ethnic enclaves," such as Chinatowns, Little Italy, and Koreatowns [2]. Whereas earlier ethnic enclaves were essentialized as inferior space rife with vice, depravity, and moral failure [3], contemporary city governments are keen on reconstructing these "exotic" places in a sanitized form to boost urban tourism and consumer capitalism [4]. This architectural "staging" of ethno-cultural diversity [5] provides places of leisure and consumption for cosmopolitan urbanites [6] as well as an opening for their voyeuristic gaze into the quotidian life and business of an exotic "other."

On the other hand, in countries of origin, migrants build "remittance houses" [7] to show off their newly gained wealth and anchor their emotional belonging in the hometown [8]. Featured by extravagant Western architectural styles and decorative forms, migrant houses are visible articulations of the owners' conspicuous consumption and their strong desire to mark distinction and establish prestige [9].

In comparison, there is scarce scholarly attention devoted to state-led urban transformations in emigration contexts. In this chapter, based on three months of fieldwork in Qingtian County[10], a prominent hometown of Overseas Chinese (*qiaoxiang*), I argue that the demographic dispersion of emigrants per se does not make its urban space naturally "diasporic." Rather, a "diasporic place" can be constructed by local sociopolitical actors, a process I conceptualize as "diasporic placemaking." To conjure up an international city branding and boost

the consumption-based urban economy, the migrant hometown capitalizes on diasporic resources and imagines globalization as a new way of life in a quintessentially "diasporic" space.

This finding also unsettles the prevalent idea in migration studies, especially among scholars examining economic, social, cultural, and political remittances, that changes observed at home come exogenously from migrants [11]. Instead, I bring to the fore the migrant hometown's self-initiated urban transformations in which diasporas are centrally featured yet playing only marginal roles as the window dressing. The internationality and modernity of urban space are not brought back by diasporas but constructed endogenously by local actors in the dual processes of cosmopolitan subject-making and diasporic placemaking.

In fact, countless cities and towns across China have engaged in a reconstruction fad to market their distinction as "international cities" (*guojihua chengshi*) [12]. Dilapidated residential complexes built by socialist work units (*danwei*) before the 1990s are widely demolished, giving way to high-end gated communities named after Western landmarks, such as "Caesars Palace," "Oriental Paris," "Thames Villa," and "Rhine Mansion" [13]. Shabby, narrow alleys are replaced by multilane boulevards lined with physics-defying skyscrapers, sleek shopping malls, and museums designed by renowned Western architects, all powerful tokens of China's march towards modernity, progress, and prosperity [14].

While leading Chinese metropolises, such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou, can claim an "internationality" from their global connections and transnational professional class [15], smaller cities and towns face difficulties justifying their efforts of "internationalization," due to their lack of world-city networks [16] and the creative class [17]. Therefore, diasporic placemaking also provides an opportunity for the otherwise mediocre migrant hometown of Qingtian to catch up in this urban "internationalization" frenzy. By adopting Western architectural and decorative forms and

promoting Western lifestyles, diasporic placemaking enables the local state to orient itself in the politico-aesthetic hierarchies of "progressive" and "backward," "modern" and "traditional," "international" and "isolated."

At the same time, I seek to understand how migrants and local residents make sense of diasporic placemaking. My interview data reveal the deep-running tensions between state construction and ordinary citizens' diverse self-perceptions. While some residents relish the constructed diasporic milieu and consumerist capitalism, others remain critical as to the authenticity of such claims and the increasing social stratification inscribed in the commodification of urban space. Therefore, diasporic placemaking is by no means an innocent or neutral project [18]. Rather, it is replete with ambitions, achievements, and anxieties among the local state and residents amid rapid urban and social changes of post-socialist China [19].

In what follows, I first take stock of extant literature on how international migration shapes or is featured in urban changes of both receiving and sending communities. After pointing to the scarcity of insights into how the state in migrant hometowns renovates the urban space, I bring into conversation a constructivist approach to diaspora studies and draw attention to the poorly understood diaspora construction in the domain of urban space. Following an outline of my methodologies, I delve into the case of Qingtian County by examining how diasporic placemaking is implemented in spatial and experiential aspects, justified through the construction of a "modern" diaspora, and contested by migrants and local residents. This chapter ends with a call for a more constructivist examination of diasporic placemaking from the perspective of spatial sociology.

1. International migration and urban transformations

The intersection between international migration and urban transformations has taken root in sociological scrutiny since the beginning of the discipline. Early Chicago School scholars developed an "urban ecology" to account for the impacts of immigration and rural-urban migration on urban development [20]. In the 1970s and 1980s, studies of "ethnic enclaves" rekindled the cross-fertilization between migration studies and urban sociology by probing into distinctive settlement areas established by post-1965 immigrants in American cities and suburbs (Light 1973; Logan and Molotch 1987; Light and Bonacich 1988).

Ethnic enclaves are not only an economic institution that channels immigrants into the societal mainstream through the ethnic economy [21] but also a spatial structure that plays vital symbolic roles in boundary-making and nation-building projects [22]. While earlier ethnic enclaves were often depicted in an image of moral decay with opium dens, dimly lit brothels, and gang violence, contemporary city governments erase this racist, colonialist past and remodel these "exotic" spaces for ethnic tourism and multicultural branding in Western metropolises [23]. Therefore, migration-related urban transformations in receiving countries are shifting away from an urban formation led by migrants themselves for social solidarity, and increasingly toward state-driven efforts for urban consumption.

In sending countries, international migration also fundamentally reshapes the urban landscape both from below, i.e., as a migrant-led endeavor, as well as from above, i.e., as a state-led enterprise. On the one hand, it is widely documented that migrants tend to build posh houses in their hometown for a wide array of social and symbolic reasons [24]. These so-called "remittance houses" [25] improve migrant relatives' living conditions and provide strong emotional support as the mooring for migrants' future return [26]. More importantly, often spacious, luxurious, and exotic, these mansions symbolize their owners' entrepreneurial success and distinctive social status [27].

On the other hand, however, research on the role of hometown governments in shaping urban changes remains incipient. Like their counterparts of *im*migration countries, *e*migration states can exert extensive influence in remaking what I refer to as "diasporic urban space." Similar to the contemporary re-creation of Chinatowns in Western metropolises, diasporic placemaking in migrant hometowns also stimulates exotic tourism and leisure consumption, while projecting a Western-oriented imagining of modern lifestyles. Through a case study of Qingtian County, China, I argue that diasporic space is by no means natural or unproblematic in and of itself even in migrant hometowns. Instead, "becoming diasporic" hinges upon local social and political agents' active construction. Then the ensuing questions are, how diasporic space can be constructed and, more fundamentally, who or what is diasporic?

2. Diaspora construction in urban space

Emigration states around the world are busy establishing transborder ties with migrants and their descendants in the name of "diaspora engagement policies" [28]. The term "diaspora" was originally reserved to describe a few specific groups who dispersed from their homelands due to catastrophic events but keep their identity intact in foreign lands, such as Jews and Armenians [29]. Therefore, this term has been emotionally charged with a nostalgic yearning for the historic homeland and semantically distinguished from the more neutral term of "emigrant." Sending states increasingly adopt the discourse of "diaspora" in their policies towards emigrants, while neutralizing this notion by discarding its original element of "victimhood" [30].

Similarly, successive regimes in China since the 20th century, including the late Qing dynasty, the Republic of China, and the incumbent People's Republic of China, have all mobilized the representation of Chinese emigrants as "sojourners" or "Overseas Chinese" (*huaqiao*), but

seldom called them "emigrants" (*yimin*). Beneath the discourse of "Overseas Chinese" is the state's heavy emphasis on emigrants' two idealized traits, namely, their global scattering and connections with the homeland [31]. China disfavors the connotations of "leaving home" in the concept of "emigrant," while romanticizing their timeless, nonchanging membership in the ethno-nationalist community of "Chinese nation" (*zhonghua minzu*) [32]. These features of the "Overseas Chinese" discourse echo semantically and theoretically with the notion of "diaspora," allowing for an examination of the "Overseas Chinese" policies through the conceptual lens of diaspora construction [33].

Accompanying the rise of "diaspora engagement policies" is the prodigious growth of diaspora studies and the dispersion of the very term "diaspora" itself in semantic and conceptual terms. While some scholars make fixed, essentialized depictions of diasporas as "bona fide actual entities" [34], Brubaker calls for a constructivist retheorization of diasporas as "an idiom, a stance, a claim" (2005:13). The central goal for diaspora studies is to scrutinize the political, social, and symbolic construction whereby putative diasporas come into existence. Twelve years later, Brubaker restresses the state's deployment of the performative language of diaspora aimed at mobilizing "knowledge, experience, and economic resources" (2017, 1560).

Building on this constructivist momentum, I refrain from perceiving diasporas as ontologically distinctive from migrants per se. Instead, their distinctions are constructed in sociopolitical processes. Diaspora construction is a deliberate practice of singling out a specific subgroup within migrants for strategic reasons. Attached to desirable motifs, emblems, and symbols, diasporas are valorized as positive, favorable figures capable of "making claims and legitimating projects" [35]. My empirical research demonstrates that, however, diasporas themselves may play a rather insignificant role in this primarily state-led process.

In the same vein, scholars have unraveled how diasporas are constructed for developmental, neoliberal, and nation-building purposes [36]. There is a paucity of research, however, into diaspora construction in the realm of urban transformations. In fact, two romanticized features of diasporas, namely, their global dispersion and ethno-cultural ties with the homeland, may be particularly appealing to city governments hungry for an international standing in the age of globalization.

Indeed, even in migrant hometowns, diasporic place and the associated lifestyle do not manifest themselves as natural, unproblematic qualities. Instead, they are contingent upon sociopolitical construction. In turn, the local state develops the consumption-based urban economy and meets the middle class's rising demands for Western materialist comforts. Hence, the diasporic space is not only built, but also felt, perceived, interpreted, and imagined as a way of life [37]. I conceptualize this process as "diasporic placemaking," in which migrant hometowns attach the urban space with stereotyped "diasporic" elements and mark it allegedly distinguishable from non-diasporic places where emigration is not prominent.

3. Methods

Qingtian County, China provides an ideal prism through which we can examine how diasporic placemaking is conceived of and contested in the narratives, imaginations, and practices of local actors. With over forty-five million emigrants and their descendants around the world, China is one of the largest diasporic home countries [38]. More specifically, Qingtian County boasts one of the largest new diasporas (*xinqiao*) from China. According to official statistics, over forty percent of its total registered population of 600,000 reside in over a hundred countries, with the vast majority concentrating in Europe. They migrated to Europe following China's loosening of emigration control in the 1980s and engage mostly in low-skilled entrepreneurial businesses, such

as restaurants, laundries, convenient stores, and garment factories. Qingtian's County Government has maintained closed ties with diasporas for roots tourism, foreign investments, grassroots diplomacy, and diasporic placemaking.

From June to September 2019, I conducted fieldwork in Qingtian County using three qualitative methods, including interviews with officials and ordinary citizens, participant observation, and text analysis. First, I carried out thirty-seven semi-structured interviews with nearly all officials within the diaspora affairs apparatus (*qiaowu xitong*), which consists of numerous institutions across executive and legislative branches that involve in diaspora policymaking. In particular, I held in-depth interviews with principal architects behind Qingtian's diasporic placemaking projects, including officials from the Section of Land-Use Planning, the Bureau of Urban Construction, and the People's Political Consultative Conference.

Following my interviews, some officials invited me to participate in their field research trips (*shidi diaoyan*) to examine a wide range of issues, such as how to design a local Museum of Overseas Chinese History, how to develop a tourist resort featuring architectural styles of more than twenty European countries, and how to highlight diasporic elements in the festive decorations for the seventieth anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China. In these field trips, I participated as an external expert who visited field sites alongside diaspora bureaucrats, attended closed-door meetings, joined social gatherings between officials and diaspora guests, and offered independent advice in forums (*zuotanhui*). By "shadowing" [39] diaspora bureaucrats on these occasions, I obtained first-hand knowledge of their imagination and projection of Qingtian County as a "diasporic" place.

Moreover, to inquire into how migrants and local residents make sense of diasporic placemaking, I conducted twenty-two unstructured interviews with ordinary citizens in Qingtian

County. I recruited first interviewees through personal connections and then adopted the snowball sampling strategy, while selectively diversifying their age, gender, occupations, and degrees of exposure to Western culture. I began the interviews by asking them the open-ended question of how they liked Qingtian's Western buildings and sculptures and then dug deep into their perceptions of the town, the diaspora, as well as residents themselves. All interviews were held in Mandarin Chinese and lasted on average half an hour.

I also collected news reports from the *Qiaobao* (or literally "Diaspora Press"), the local media outlet of the Communist Party of China, on pertinent projects, conferences, and events in Qingtian County since the 2000s. Bureaucrat interviewees also provided comprehensive urban planning documents, internal reports, publicity materials, and photos of the historical urban landscape. I thematically coded interview transcripts, field notes, and textual data using NVivo software. More specifically, I adopted the abductive coding scheme [40] to yield unanticipated empirical discoveries based on my familiarity with preconceived theories and my repeated exposure to both data and new theories throughout the entire research process.

4. "Internationalizing" the urban space

A tour of Chinese cities and towns is indeed a grand tour of European and American landmarks. Local governments across China entered a construction frenzy to build grandiose, Western-style office buildings, including a life-size replica of the Capitol Building housing a prefectural government, a White House-style office building in a heavily indebted county, and the office complex of a state-owned enterprise modeled after Louis XIV's Versailles castle [41]. Underlying these eye-catching, awe-inspiring symbols of state power and political aesthetics is

local governments' debt-fueled spending on urban infrastructure projects aimed at "internationalizing" China's urban landscape [42].

According to Yin and Qian (2020), this wave of "copycat architecture" construction originated in the early 2000s. Under the Hu-Wen administration, the accelerated capitalist reforms led to the formation of "entrepreneurial cities" [43] that sought to transform the urban image "from blue-collar manufacturing to services and financial industries" [44]. While a series of anti-corruption campaigns under the new leadership of Xi Jinping has largely put a halt to the construction of pharaonic government compounds [45], real estate developers fervently picked up this xenophilic penchant to "package" a middle-class, Western lifestyle for the emerging upscale homebuyers [46]. Some residential neighborhoods faithfully duplicated the Eiffel tower, Venetian canals and gondoliers, and the Sphinx, while others airlifted the entire Austrian town of Hallstatt onto the Chinese soil [47].

These lived "theme parks" turn cities into "growth machines" [48] by pushing up the monetized and symbolic values of urban areas [49]. More broadly, the Western architectural iconography is specularized as monuments of China's newly gained national wealth and global supremacy in the post-socialist era [50]. "Becoming an international city" has emerged as a principal goal for cities – big and small – across China. In particular, top-tier metropolises, such as Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen, project their international ambitions through mega international events, including the 2008 Olympic Games and the Expo 2010, as well as state-of-the-art high-rises, towers, stadiums, and museums, designed by renowned Western architects [51].

In comparison, smaller cities and towns do not have bountiful logistical and symbolic resources to claim an "internationality." For instance, located in a relatively isolated, mountainous region, Qingtian County lacks arable land or efficient transportation systems to develop the local

economy. It only got rid of the labeling of "underdeveloped county" (*qianfada xian*) in 2015. Geographic isolation and economic underdevelopment have inculcated a strong sense of "lagging behind" (*luohou*) among local bureaucrats and residents. These practical obstacles, however, do not impede Qingtian from dreaming of "internationalization." The key lies in its status of "Hometown of Overseas Chinese" (*qiaoxiang*).

Yet, despite Qingtian's century-long emigration history and mass emigration since the 1980s, few architectural elements before the 2000s were associated with diasporas or the West. My analysis of historical photos shows that Qingtian's urban landscape had long been characterized by socialist, or Soviet, architectural styles. Most residential buildings were constructed by work units (*danwei*) with gray concrete façades and minimalist decorations. Although some landmarks were financed by donations from overseas Chinese, they were architecturally indistinguishable from nearby structures. This mundane urban landscape in a prominent migrant hometown can be attributed to the strong ideological and architectural legacies of the socialist era centered around frugalism and egalitarianism [52]. What really demarcated the boundary between diasporic and non-diasporic spaces is largely the product of the local state's heavy intervention in the new millennium.

Since the mid-2000s, Qingtian initiated the "European Continental Style" (*oulu fengqing*) and "World Qingtian" (*Shijie Qingtian*) projects. The concept of "European Continental Style" first appeared in the 2006 comprehensive urban plan and took nine years to come to fruition. In 2015, the County Government created a leadership group composed of high-ranking local officials and began the large-scale urban "upgrading and renovation" (*shengji gaizao*). Over a ten-month span in 2015, it invested seventy-five million yuan (eleven million USD) in two specific projects.

The first project was to renovate thirty-five official and residential buildings along a street designated as "The Street of European Continental Style" (*oulu fengqing yitiaojie*). Several landmark buildings previously featured by a solemn soviet style, including the County Library, the Labor Union Building, the Bureau of Urban Construction, the Clock Tower, and the Courthouse, were remodeled in the highly refined Beaux-Arts style. The ornamentation uses a motley of baroque, renaissance, and neoclassical elements with Roman columns, sculpted façades, flying angles, and hemispherical domes. The previously monotonic, undistinguished socialist urban landscape was transformed into exotic, transplanted mosaics built on stereotypical European aesthetics.

The second project led to the installation of dozens of Western sculptures and landmarks. A gigantic Dutch windmill was erected near the entrance to a major bridge. Statues of historical European celebrities, such as Beethoven, Johann Strauss II, Columbus, and Napoléon, along with cultural sculptures, such as Manneken Pis, Heracles, and Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, kaleidoscopically dot parks, crossroads, and street corners. According to the 2015 implementation plan of these projects, Qingtian would no longer be a small, backward county enclosed by hills and mountains, but become an international town where people could "visit Europe freely without leaving home" (*zubuchuhu, changyou ouzhou*).

More importantly, diasporic placemaking makes possible the conversion of symbolic capital into economic capital. As critical geographers have argued, the social production of space is increasingly dominated by capitalist interests and incorporated into class struggles in the post-Fordist world [53]. This neo-Marxist approach is particularly illustrative in the case of Qingtian to lay bare the economic logic behind diasporic placemaking. An official adopted the discourse of

"lagging behind" (*luohou*) to justify the local state's strenuous promotion of exotic tourism and commodified urban economy,

> Qingtian is a mountainous small town. We don't have rich land or natural resources to develop the economy. Without a strong manufacturing industry, we can only catch up with other cities by focusing on developing the service sector, especially foreign trade and retail. We have to come up with something to mark our distinction. So we need to play the diaspora card smartly (*dahao qiaopai*).

Therefore, dressed in the architectural languages of openness and internationality are indeed articulations of the local state's developmentalist strategies. Diasporic space is a "growth machine" [54] fueled by the County Government's strong impulses for reversing its late development and catching up on both material and aesthetic fronts. Diasporic placemaking provides a new set of spatial grammars to narrate consumption-oriented economic plans and the popular "international" city branding in post-socialist China [55].

The local state perceives a "modern" diaspora and "diasporic" urban landscape as key enabling factors for the development of urban tourism and commodity trade. The County Government widely publicizes Qingtian's diasporic atmosphere and Western lifestyle to attract tourists and boost local consumption. Since early 2019, the County Government has encouraged hotels and agritainment companies to renovate their facilities in "essentially exotic styles" (*yiyu fengqing*) by reimbursing fifteen percent of the decoration costs. It grants preferential financial support to the construction of "European pastoral complexes" (*oushi tianyuan zongheti*) and rewards restaurants with tax reductions for their employment of foreign waiters. Qingtian also actively promotes the wholesale trade of wine as a pillar industry. A widely used slogan on buses, signposts, and billboards portrays Qingtian as a unique tourist destination where visitors can "shop globally and tour globally" (*mai quanqiu, guang quanqiu*).

The "upgrading" of urban landscape and economy from its original Chinese, or socialist, style to Western paradigms indicates a hierarchical aesthetics in which the West takes precedence over the Chinese. A popular Chinese saying sums up this widespread xenophilic mentality – "the moon is much rounder abroad than in China" (*guowai de yueliang bijiao yuan*). Despite the celebratory framing of the Qingtian diaspora as scattered in over a hundred countries, only European cultures and lifestyles are glorified. Those from the developing world are curiously ignored or even frowned upon. This Europhilia cannot be explained alone by the overwhelming concentration of the Qingtian diaspora in Europe. Instead, it is part and parcel of diasporic placemaking as a performative practice at both material and symbolic levels.

5. Performing authenticity

What really stands out in Qingtian County's diasporic placemaking project is the local state's great emphasis on the authenticity of its internationality as a "Hometown of Overseas Chinese" (*qiaoxiang*). According to local officials, Qingtian's genuine internationality stands in stark contrast with the so-called "fake, Las Vegas-style exoticism" in non-diasporic cities and towns.

Over the course of my fieldwork, several provinces issued administrative orders to require real estate developers to change place names that are "grandiose" (*da*), "exotic" (*yang*), "bizarre" (*guai*), and "imitative" (*chong*) [56]. In response, a residential neighborhood in Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province readjusted its title from "Manhattan" to the more Chinese-sounding "Manha Town." I asked an official if Qingtian County should be concerned and whether it would issue similar orders. He laughed at my question and answered confidently,

> Qingtian is different from other places. They blindly worship anything foreign and exotic. But our internationality is grounded in our culture. It runs in the blood of Qingtian people who disperse (*sanju*) around the world. We don't need to change anything. We only need to maintain our distinction.

Hence, an "authentic" internationality has allegedly become Qingtian's outstanding symbolic capital [57]. Local officials dismiss the exotic urban landscape in non-diasporic places as nothing more than knockoffs while taking pride in their own version of "internationality" as culturally natural and politically unproblematic. The status of an eminent migrant hometown avowedly legitimates what may otherwise look exotic and bizarre as an organic part of Qingtian's diasporic ambience.

Another official was more outspoken about Qingtian's "spiritual" internationality vis-à-vis other cities' "superficial" internationality,

> Qingtian isn't the only city that pursues the European Continental Style. Other cities may have even more Western-style buildings. It's like assembling parts into a machine. As long as you have the formula, anyone can do that. However, every city needs a spirit. Qingtian's spirit is our diaspora. What we are aiming for is "the harmony between form and spirit" (*xingshenjianbei*). Without a spirit (*shen*), the form (*xing*) in other cities can only be specious.

In fact, Qingtian's diasporic placemaking project goes far beyond the physical objects of buildings and art installations. Its agenda is all-encompassing. According to the officials, the authenticity of Qingtian County's "internationality" is amply demonstrated by the fact that it not only exudes from the superficial appearance of physical buildings but also permeates the quotidian behavior and mentality of local people from all walks of life. Whereas non-diasporic cities' internationality is limited at the atmospheric level and showcased by artificial objects, the genuine "internationality" in Qingtian is allegedly experiential in the sense that it is effectively enacted in

the day-to-day life of ordinary inhabitants. An official exemplified this "everyday internationality" of Qingtian by depicting the "typical" local lifestyle,

> We eat Western cuisines and appreciate buildings with the European Continental exoticism. We begin our day with a sip of coffee. We eat not only wheat pancakes stuffed with pork[58] but also pizzas and jamón[59]. We drink not only yellow wine with egg silk[60] but also original wine imported from La Rioja, Tuscany, and Bordeaux[61]. We understand and incorporate the Western lifestyle into our daily life.

In particular, imported wine is promoted as a local specialty that exemplifies the constructed authenticity [62] of Qingtian's internationality. Although Qingtian is neither a transportation hub nor a major consumer market, it has organized two trade expos for wine. In addition to business transactions, Qingtian strives to establish itself as a promotional ambassador for the upper-class, Western lifestyle built upon red wine. An official at the Bureau of Commerce stressed the contrast between the more "international" Qingtian people and their "provincial" clients,

> We are not just selling wine, but more importantly its lifestyle. So we set up a section in the expo where clients can learn how to taste and appreciate wine. They can also eat jamón that our Overseas Chinese brought back from Spain. People from other places don't know much about wine or jamón. They would cut jamón into big, thick pieces. It's not authentic at all. But Qingtian people know how to cut and eat jamón in small, fine pieces. We have to educate our clients about all these nitty-gritties.

The County Government also facilitated numerous training programs for baristas, sommeliers, pâtissiers, and chefs of European cuisines. A 2019 policy document states that Qingtian County would fully incorporate the elements of the European Continental Style, including European architecture, wine, and coffee, build a European town (*ouzhou xiaozhen*), and develop into a "site for experiencing European boutique life" (*ouzhou jingpin shenghuo tiyandi*).

The local state envisions the "internationality" of Qingtian County to be so profound that it not only educates people from elsewhere about European lifestyles but becomes a mecca for those hoping to experience the idealized Western life.

Despite the local state's claim for "authentic internationality" inscribed in the diasporic urban space, the selection of Western decorative forms was, in fact, contingent upon local officials' willful thoughts. For instance, Qingtian's comprehensive urban design requires the overarching principle that all reconstruction projects should adopt architectural elements from European countries where most Qingtian diasporas are located. Nevertheless, my interview with Jianping Zhang, an architect and bureaucrat, showed otherwise,

> Zhang: We take into account the emblematic color of each region in Europe and incorporate them into the architectural design.
> Author: Which region does the color of umber correspond to?
> Zhang: Umber is an exception. Because Qingtian is positioned as a Town of Coffee (*kafei xiaozhen*), we use umber to represent the coffee culture here.
> Author: Why do we use red for roofs?
> Zhang: Many buildings adopt the French neoclassical style. This style uses beige for façades and gray for roofs. We do have beige façades, but we don't like gray roofs, because they look too somber in the Chinese traditional culture. So we borrow red from roofs in Scandinavia. Most roofs in Denmark are red. With beige façades and red roofs, we create our own style based on different elements from Europe. It becomes a unique characteristic of Qingtian.
> Author: But there are only a few Qingtian diasporans in Denmark or Scandinavia in general.
> Zhang: That's fine. Many roofs in Spain and Italy are also red. We can also say that red comes from the Mediterranean countries where we have large diasporas. We can always achieve mastery through flexible incorporation (*ronghuiguantong*).

Therefore, it is the desire of the local state, rather than the Qingtian diaspora, that shapes the color scheme, or, more generally, the parameters of diasporic placemaking. Rather than Qingtian diaspora's own tales of hope and chagrin, longing and belonging, compromise and perseverance in transborder journeys, what diasporic placemaking really displays are selected

Western cultural prototypes from which Chinese diasporas, as an underprivileged minority group, are often excluded and distanced. After all, as I have discussed in the beginning, Chinese migrants, along with their ethnic enclaves, have been exoticized and consumed in a long-standing othering process in the West.

The migrant hometown, on the other hand, might have accomplished what Harvey (1992) describes as "time/space compression," because of its proclaimed temporal "progress" towards modernity and spatial "upgrading" towards internationality. The proclaimed heightened authenticity of its diasporic placemaking efforts begs the question of where this so-called "genuine" internationality comes from.

6. Constructing a "modern" diaspora

The answer lies in the cosmopolitan subject-making of Qingtian emigrants as modern diasporans. In the local state's performative and discursive practices, Qingtian diasporans are characterized as modern urbanites with "advanced" Western ideas and global horizons as well as ambassadors of European culture and high-society lifestyle.

The County Government has organized four "Global Qingtian People Conferences" with the aims of "promoting the reflux of diasporic elements" and "forging the county economy with a world thinking." In these conferences, diaspora individuals received honorary titles from the local state, such as "honorary citizen," "outstanding village sage," and "distinguished migrant elite," in recognition of their contribution to remitting economic, cultural, and symbolic resources from Europe back to Qingtian for urban development. In my interviews and publicity materials of these ritualized events, officials repeatedly extolled the Qingtian diaspora's modernity and globality,

> They have seen the world and mind the world. Their worldviews are cosmopolitan. They are open-minded (*kaifang*) and generous (*daqi*). They are influenced by the advanced ideas and social order in the West. They have experienced the modern lifestyle and can bring back Western ideas, values, and behavior.

A highlight of the second Global Qingtian People Conference in 2015 was a ceremony in which high-ranking officials and Overseas Chinese representatives pulled five jars of water collected from five continents across the globe into a tank with water from the "mother river" of Qingtian. According to the official press release, this ceremony manifested the "open-minded, receptive, entrepreneurial, and cosmopolitan" spirits of the Qingtian diaspora and embodied their strong aspiration of bringing honor and distinction from all over the world back to their hometown. Through political rituals and performative representations, the Qingtian diaspora allegedly acquires the peculiar qualities of "modernity." Moreover, as active ambassadors of Sino-West exchanges, diasporas are also said to have played pivotal roles in the transmission of their modern and international qualities to Qingtian, thus justifying its diasporic placemaking project.

When asked how Qingtian County achieved the leapfrogging from a "European Continental" town to "World Qingtian," officials often insisted that the increasing "internationality" was not simply an elevation of Qingtian's self-positioning from being European to being worldly. They told me that as the Qingtian diaspora becomes more international, so does Qingtian. By depicting its diaspora as intermediaries who actively channel back the much-needed "internationality," the local state makes great efforts of "worlding" [63] itself as an "international small town" (*guojihua xiaoxiancheng*).

Due to their dispersion in the socioeconomically better-off West, the Qingtian diaspora is valorized as business and cultural elites equipped with the more favorable Western know-how and modern spirits. They fulfill a modernist imagining of the border-crossing, jet-setting life with

substantial physical and social mobility. They have come to be associated with the supposedly upscale Western lifestyles, tastes, and wealth vis-à-vis the indigenous, mundane, traditional, or even backward ways of life and beliefs in the developing world. Meanwhile, the Qingtian diaspora is portrayed as the embodiment of positive traditional Chinese values, including a strong work ethic, frugality, familialism, and business acumen, which form the "secret sauce" for their hard-won success in foreign lands.

Therefore, straddling the line between the timeless, unchanging traditional culture and the Western essence of boundless modernism, the Qingtian diaspora allegedly acts as the bridge between the past and the future, the old folk values of the homeland and the modern outlook of the West [64]. These dual characteristics allow for the construction of the diaspora as remitters who constantly send back "internationality" to the hometown. As a consequence, Qingtian itself purportedly accrues more "internationality" from these remittances and its diasporic placemaking project becomes justified and distinguished. Nonetheless, these state constructs have not gone unchallenged by diasporas themselves and local citizens.

7. Contested diasporic place

Many diaspora leaders readily accepted state-designated honorary titles and positive depictions to compensate for their status loss in host countries [65]. But they had curiously little participation in the renovation of the urban landscape, which was, after all, a project dictated by the local state. While some migrant interviewees enjoyed the coffee and wine in Qingtian, others were perplexed by its Westernized atmosphere. A migrant who frequently visits Qingtian complained, "I see these buildings every day in France. But when I'm back in my hometown, why am I still seeing them? I want to see more original tastes of Qingtian!"

In my interviews, most migrants were frank about their poor education and limited integration in Western society. A migrant who was established by the local state as a "diaspora leader" described all Overseas Chinese as "*tubalu*," or literally "the rustic Eighth Route Army," a slang to belittle someone as backward, poorly educated, ignorant of the modern lifestyle, and often hailing from rural backgrounds. This identification of "*tubalu*" belies the official discourse of a modern, urban, upper-class diaspora and exposes a rather contradictory self-perception of Qingtian diasporas as mostly composed of low-skilled migrants who struggle to absorb foreign worldviews, aesthetics, and lifestyles, let alone remitting "internationality" to their hometown.

Even officials had conflicting views of diasporas as modern subjects. A bureaucrat admitted the disparity between the reality and the official characterization of Qingtian diaspora,

> We have to recognize that the overall quality (*zonghe suzhi*) of Overseas Chinese is not high. Their knowledge structure (*zhishi jiegou*) is poor and their educational level very low. They are, by all means, more Chinese than Western.

This bureaucrat adopted the discourse of *suzhi* (quality) to regard the diaspora as "a low-quality population." Anthropologists point out that assessing the quality of an individual articulates the boundaries of social strata in post-socialist China and lies in the center of the state's neoliberal governance [66]. Similarly, the state evaluation of the diaspora's values in social hierarchies indicates that the Qingtian diaspora's "modernity" is far from a social fact, but a deliberate political designation. Notwithstanding a linchpin in the state framing, diasporas themselves play rather marginal parts in the rewriting of urban space. Instead, diasporic placemaking is principally driven by the local state hungry for economic growth as well as a rising middle class craving for distinction.

The state promotion of foreign trade in Qingtian as an "international" town met the growing demand for cross-border e-commerce (*haitao*) in the so-called "consumption upgrade" (*xiaofei shengji*) of Chinese consumers. Against the backdrop of post-socialist China's consumption revolution [67], the commodification of the urban economy converges with the appetite of Qingtian's middle class for high-end products. Longing for bourgeoisie ways of life and materialist comforts of the "First World," the majority of my interviewees readily enjoyed the influx of foreign products, as an interviewee pointed out,

> Maybe people in other [Chinese] cities also drink coffee and wine and wear clothes of foreign brands. But how many of them use shampoo, dish wash, and olive oil imported from Europe? We do. The joss papers[68] in Qingtian are not normal ghost money. We burn euros and dollars so that our ancestors can continue buying foreign products in the afterlife. These are the best examples of Qingtian's internationalization.

In this narrative, the internationality of Qingtian is other-worldly, both literally and figuratively. The burning of joss papers in foreign currency allegedly carries the locals' Western-oriented consumption habits and desires to the afterlife to achieve a supernatural indefinity beyond any individuals' physical lives.

Nonetheless, the sweeping capitalist globalization has its discontents. Whereas some residents relish the consumption of foreign goods vis-à-vis Chinese brands, others are more cautious about the increasing social stratification beneath this consumerist fever. Upon hearing my question of "do people live a Western lifestyle," a local resident answered sarcastically,

> No ordinary people drink wine or coffee every day. Overseas Chinese may love them, but they only stay in Qingtian for a couple of days every year. County officials also love them and then come up with the idea of developing Qingtian into a coffee town and a wine town, because they can use the public money (*gongkuan*) to eat and drink for free (*baichi baihe*).

> They can live a European life on bribery and corruption. But ordinary citizens (*laobaixing*) are more comfortable with eating congee[69] and drinking tea.

From this perspective, what the local state boasts as the quotidian "international" lifestyle belongs only to a small circle of privileged migrants and corrupt officials. To vaunt an experiential, rather than superficial, form of internationality, the local state aims to let Qingtian's internationality emanate not from the façades of remodeled buildings but out of the sipping of morning coffee and the swirling of wine glasses by ordinary people. Lying underneath this diasporic placemaking, however, may be a widening socioeconomic gulf between a powerful minority who dictates this project and the vast majority who actually occupies this space in their daily life.

Beyond the materialist comforts introduced by diasporic placemaking, local citizens seem more critical of the Westernized architecture. Many interviewees criticized the local state for "Western worshipping" (*chongyangmeiwai*) and abandoning the Chinese cultural core. A retired businessman penetratingly analogized the local government as "a frog in the well that knows nothing of the ocean" (*jingdizhiwa*) and its diasporic placemaking as "a blind imitation with ludicrous effects" (*dongshixiaopin*). In these accounts, diasporic placemaking is, in essence, the Westernization or internationalization of urban space with borrowed legitimacy from the status of "Hometown of Overseas Chinese." Diasporic placemaking appears more contested than imagined, as local inhabitants' diverse understandings may not always conform to the views imposed by the state.

8. Conclusion

The nexus between international migration and urban transformations has long fascinated migration scholars and urban sociologists [70]. This scholarship focuses on receiving cities in the West in their examinations of Chinatowns, Koreatowns, and other exotic urban areas. These ethnic enclaves were first formed by migrants as a result of social marginalization and ethnic community-building but later transformed by neoliberal city governments into places for leisure consumption and symbols of multiculturalism [71]. In contrast, urban changes in sending communities are relatively underexplored, except for the bourgeoning literature on remittance houses built by diasporas to establish status and prestige [72].

Through a case study of China, I foreground the role of emigration states in "diasporic placemaking," the process that turns what used to be traditional, mundane urban space into an exotic, "diasporic" place. In this imagination, the diasporic space of a migrant hometown is more than the sum of physical buildings featured by a Western architectural milieu. It is also allegedly constituted by Western lifestyles centered around wine, coffee, and other bourgeoisie symbols catering to the rising consumerist middle class. This urban metamorphosis not only lays the groundwork for the promotion of materialist consumption but also fulfills the migrant hometown's "international" self-positioning in the age of globalization.

Following the constructivist turn in diaspora studies [73], I argue against taking for granted the formation of "diasporic place" even in migrant hometowns and advance our theorization of diaspora construction as dual processes of cosmopolitan subject-making and, more importantly, diasporic place-making. Departing from the social remittances literature's overemphasis on the role of migrants in bringing back changes to hometowns [74], I underscore social agents who have never left and their endogenous efforts of capitalizing on diasporic resources and initiating migration-related urban transformations.

Diasporic placemaking appeals particularly to small migrant hometowns that are troubled with a sense of "lagging behind" in China's sweeping trend towards "internationalizing" (*guojihua*) the urban landscape [75]. Lacking the top-notch metropolises' global connections and creative and professional classes [76], the small town of Qingtian County relies instead on its status as a "Hometown of Overseas Chinese" to justify its equally ambitious urban internationalization projects aimed at "worlding" itself and becoming a quintessentially "diasporic" place. Underneath the Western architectural iconography and neon signs of coffee shops and wine bars that allegedly inject European exoticism into Qingtian's urban space is the widening gap between those who construct this space (i.e., local bureaucrats and upper-class citizens), those who are featured in this placemaking (i.e., a "modern" diaspora), as well as those who actually utilize this space in their quotidian life (i.e., ordinary residents).

While the local state takes pride in their allegedly "authentic" internationality and looks down upon "the fake, Las Vegas-style" exoticism in non-diasporic places, many migrants and local residents call into question the increasingly stratified, commodified society envisioned by diasporic placemaking. By investigating how different social and political agents make sense of this project, I push forward the "use-centered" sociology of space [77] by interrogating the users as well as those who are used in urban transformations. I also juxtapose different desires, narratives, and imaginations to unravel the mechanisms of control and conflict derived from the production, exploitation, speculation, distribution, and reconstruction of urban space [78].

Diasporic placemaking is by no means a unique practice in Qingtian County. Migrant hometowns across the developing world are enthusiastic about capitalizing on their diasporic resources and imagining globalization as a new way of life [79]. Future research on diasporic placemaking may establish a closer conceptual bridge between migration studies and the

bourgeoning "sociology of space" [80]. Crossing the dichotomies between urban and rural, here and there, homeland and hostland, spatial sociology allows for a more critical understanding of the remaking of places in migrants' transborder connections [81]. As places are never "finished" but always "becoming" [82], we need to inquire into how places are performed, practiced, and experienced not only by people on the move but also those who stay put in sending and receiving communities.

Moving beyond the physicality and materiality of ethnic enclaves, migrant houses, and diasporic places, we can take a closer look at the social and symbolic meanings, structures, and actions behind migration-related placemaking [83]. Migrants' senses of place, including exclusion and inclusion, displacement and emplacement, uprootedness and rootedness, are reshaped in their transborder movements and infused with the logic of state power. Applying spatial thinking in migration studies [84] enables us to engage in deeper dialogue with humanistic geographers in studies of whether migrants are offered or deprived of a "field of care" and homeliness [85]. How social agents invest meanings into places of emigration, transit, immigration, and return awaits more spatially inspired sociological analysis.

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[1] Çağlar and Glick Schiller, *Migrants and City-Making*.
[2] Zhou, *Chinatown*.
[3] Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown*.
[4] Cresswell, *Place*, 29.
[5] Schmiz, "Staging a 'Chinatown' in Berlin."
[6] Rath et al., "Chinatown 2.0."
[7] Boccagni and Erdal, "On the Theoretical Potential of 'Remittance Houses'"; Lopez, "The Remittance House."
[8] Boccagni, "What's in a (Migrant) House?"; Erdal, "'A Place to Stay in Pakistan.'"
[9] Lopez, *The Remittance Landscape*.
[10] To protect my interviewees, all names of places and persons are pseudonyms in this study.
[11] Levitt, "Social Remittances."
[12] Ren, *Building Globalization*.
[13] Tomba, *The Government Next Door*.
[14] Zhang, "Contesting Spatial Modernity in Late-Socialist China."
[15] Sassen, *The Global City*.
[16] Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*.
[17] Florida, *Cities and the Creative Class*.
[18] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*; Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*.
[19] Zhang, "Contesting Spatial Modernity in Late-Socialist China"; Zhang, *In Search of Paradise*.
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[28] Østergaard-Nielsen, "The Politics of Migrants' Transnational Political Practices."
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[30] Brubaker, "The 'Diaspora' Diaspora."
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[45] Bradsher, "China Orders Ban on New Government Buildings."
[46] Wu, "Gated and Packaged Suburbia."
[47] Guo, "10 White Houses, 4 Arcs de Triomphe, 2 Sphinxes ... Now China's Tower Bridge Attracts Scorn."
[48] Molotch, "The City as a Growth Machine."
[49] Zhao, Huang, and Sui, "Place Spoofing."
[50] Bosker, *Original Copies*.
[51] Ren, *Building Globalization*.
[52] Lu, *Remaking Chinese Urban Form*.
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[54] Molotch, "The City as a Growth Machine."

[55] Zhang, *In Search of Paradise*; Zhang, "Contesting Spatial Modernity in Late-Socialist China."
[56] Zhan, "Five Questions about the Rectification of Irregular Place Names: How to Change These Names? Who Bears the Cost? How Does It Impact Residents? [五问整治不规范地名：大洋怪重怎么改？成本谁担？对居民影响多大]."
[57] Bourdieu, "Symbolic Capital and Social Classes."
[58] A popular local dish for breakfast.
[59] Dry-cured ham produced in Spain.
[60] Warmed Chinese alcoholic beverages mixed with scrambled eggs.
[61] Renowned wine-making regions in Spain, Italy, and France respectively.
[62] Zukin, "Changing Landscapes of Power."
[63] Ong, "Introduction."
[64] Ong, *Flexible Citizenship*, 43–45.
[65] Zhou and Li, "Remittances for Collective Consumption and Social Status Compensation."
[66] Kipnis, "Suzhi."
[67] Davis, "Introduction: A Revolution in Consumption."
[68] The burning of joss papers is a Chinese ritual to send money and goods to deceased relatives in the afterlife.
[69] Chinese plain rice porridge.
[70] Çağlar and Glick Schiller, *Migrants and City-Making*.
[71] Rath et al., "Chinatown 2.0."
[72] Boccagni and Erdal, "On the Theoretical Potential of 'Remittance Houses.'"
[73] Brubaker, "The 'Diaspora' Diaspora"; Brubaker, "Revisiting 'The "Diaspora" Diaspora'"; Kim, *Contested Embrace*.
[74] Levitt, "Social Remittances."
[75] Ren, *Building Globalization*.
[76] Sassen, *The Global City*; Florida, *Cities and the Creative Class*; Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*.
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[82] Cresswell, *Place*.
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[84] Logan, "Making a Place for Space."
[85] Tuan, *Space and Place*; Relph, *Place and Placelessness*.

Chapter 3 Diaspora Institutions

A burgeoning literature has sought to overcome the "*im*migration" bias [1] by critically engaging with "*e*migration politics" [2] or "diaspora politics" [3]. There is relatively limited scholarly scrutiny, however, of how diaspora institutions, defined as state institutions specialized in diaspora policymaking and implementation, serve emigration states' geopolitical plans at the global scale. Conventional foci in diaspora studies include either countries with limited global ambitions, such as small island countries in the Caribbean, Tunisia, and Morocco [4], or states that orient their diaspora policies toward a single destination country or neighboring region, such as Mexico, Jordan, Turkey, and Hungary [5]. The scarcity of empirical research into emigration states with rising global trajectories and pretensions constrains collective knowledge about how a homeland state reimagines emigrants and restructures diaspora institutions in the midst of broader geopolitical transformations.

This chapter advances insights into diaspora governance through a case study of China – one of the largest emigration states and a rising global power [6] – whose diaspora institutions[7] have undergone substantial revamping in recent years. In March 2018, the Communist Party of China (hereafter, CPC or the Party) rolled out a nation-wide reform and brought about two sea-changes to China's diaspora affairs apparatus (*qiaowu xitong*) built in the late 1970s. First, the entirety of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (*Qiaoban*, hereafter, the OCAO), which had long been the paramount institution within the Chinese government apparatus responsible for designing and implementing diaspora policies, was absorbed by the United Front Work Department (*Tongzhanbu*, hereafter, the UFWD), a CPC institution tasked with co-opting political forces outside the Party [8]. Second, the OCAO's function of liaising with emigrants abroad was transferred to the Federation

of Returned Overseas Chinese (*Qiaolian*, hereafter, the FROC), a CPC-affiliated, semi-official organization [9].

Based on interviews with migration bureaucrats, policy analysis, and archival research in China, I find that, although dramatic, the 2018 restructuring of diaspora institutions was not an isolated incident. Instead, it was the culmination of a long sociopolitical process in which China strategically repositioned diaspora politics to serve its geopolitical goals of global ascendancy. Since the 2010s, China's diaspora policies have shifted away from soliciting diasporic support for the domestic economy and national unification and toward liaising externally with migrants to expand Chinese soft power abroad. This geopolitics-centered diaspora repositioning reshuffled the power dynamics among China's diaspora institutions. Due to their experience and flexibility in *external* communication with the diaspora, the UFWD and FROC acquired the stewardship of China's so-called "overseas united front" and "diasporic public diplomacy" and ascended to the peak of the bureaucratic pyramid in diaspora politics. In contrast, the OCAO, which had been the primary state entity in *domestic* policymaking, lost its institutional strength and was downgraded as a subordinate organ within the UFWD.

I argue that China's changing positioning toward Chinese emigrants, triggered by the state's geopolitical ups and downs, has reshaped and repurposed diaspora institutions. Drawing on Agnew (2003, 5), I adopt a relational definition of "geopolitics" as the global conditions that not only set limits but also provide possibilities for one state's prospects vis-à-vis others in the global arena. This chapter makes two theoretical contributions to a multilevel understanding of diaspora politics as traversing simultaneously the domestic and global political fields [10].

First, to foreground domestic state institutions as the primary subject matter in studies of diaspora politics [11], I follow FitzGerald's (2008) neo-pluralist approach to examine the homeland

state – in this case, China – as composed of diaspora institutions with diverse interests, orientations, and working philosophies [12]. The scholarship on "fragmented authoritarianism" [13] suggests that rather than a monolithic political leviathan [14], the Chinese party-state encompasses a constellation of state agencies with multiple, sometimes-conflicting, institutional advantages and bureaucratic styles across the Party and the Government apparatuses [15]. However, previous work on Chinese politics has not systematically explored China's diaspora institutions and how they shape, and are shaped by, the country's changing geopolitical strategies [16]. To fill this lacuna, I show that China's diaspora institutions have various strengths and working methods, by design, to fulfill a complicated set of bureaucratic goals in both domestic and foreign spheres. These organizational variations give rise to diaspora institutions' distinctive roles and fluctuating importance in geopolitical grand plans.

Second, by situating emigrants and diaspora institutions in the macrohistorical framework of world politics [17], this chapter pushes the growing literature on diaspora politics [18] into more profound dialogue with world-systems theory [19]. Departing from the economistic tendencies in Wallerstein's original conceptualization, I attach more importance to the state's political and cultural influence. As a homeland state moves, or aspires to move, from the periphery to the core of the world-system, diaspora politics also transform to serve overarching geopolitical objectives. While previous research on migration politics tends to assume an "asymmetric interdependence" between weaker sending countries and hegemonic receiving countries [20], I present a case in which an ambitious homeland state seeks to challenge this established world order through diaspora re-strategizing and institutional reshuffling.

This chapter is structured as follows. I begin by mapping existing scholarship on diaspora politics and point to inadequate scholarly attention to diaspora institutions and their role in serving

geopolitical goals. I, then, summarize the history of China's diaspora institutions to contextualize the effects of geopolitical vicissitudes on diaspora politics. After explaining my methodologies, I turn to an empirical analysis of how diaspora institutions were structured by China's perception of migrants as mainly material resources before the 2010s. From there, I explore how China's increasingly assertive pursuit of geopolitical power since the 2010s has led to the reimagination of migrants as primarily political assets and this policy change's impacts on diaspora institutions. I conclude by discussing these findings' policy-relevant implications, as host countries increasingly target Chinese migrants for their homeland ties in the sweeping discourse of "China threat."

1. Emigration states and geopolitical strategies

In recent years, the migration literature has witnessed a rising trend to move beyond a focus solely on immigration societies and toward attention to emigration states in the Global South [21]. Scholars find that to form closer ties with diasporas, sending states often extend socioeconomic and membership entitlements to absent emigrants, allow former nationals to participate in domestic politics, and support the growth of migrant associations in host societies [22].

To synthesize these miscellaneous diaspora policies, Adamson and Tsourapas (2020) establish a tripartite typology of migration regimes in the Global South: the *nationalizing* model in which exchanges, expulsions, and returns of migrants constitute an integral part of state formation and nation-building; the *developmental* model in which migration promotes economic growth through remittances of financial, human, and cultural capital; and the *neoliberal* model in which migration is monetized through citizenship-by-investment schemes and asylum cooperative agreements. What may be underemphasized in this comprehensive framework, however, is a

geopolitical model whereby sending countries instrumentalize diasporas as pawns in regional and global geopolitics.

In fact, migration scholars have made great strides in exploring the role of diaspora policies in world politics. FitzGerald (2008), for example, links Mexico's emigration policies with its power relations with the United States. Focusing more explicitly on authoritarian regimes, Tsourapas (2018) contends that Middle Eastern states design diaspora policies to enhance soft power, sustain regime durability, and outsource foreign policy implementation. By the same token, Waterbury (2010) analyzes diaspora policies' contingent and instrumental nature through a penetrating analysis of three sets of interests and resources represented by diasporas: economic gains, domestic and international political legitimacy, and culturo-linguistic ethnonationalism. By capitalizing on rich diasporic resources, sending countries co-opt diasporas into relationships of patronage and clientelism to "reassert sovereignty"[23].

Although insightful, existing studies of how diaspora politics enhances homeland states' international *legitimacy* hardly suffice to capture emigrants' role in fulfilling home countries' global *supremacy*. It is one thing, in other words, to deploy migrants to demonstrate the state's legitimate membership in the international state system, but another to take a giant step forward to claim leadership positions in this system. Here, a relational approach to "geopolitics" enables us to take fuller account of how a state's international standing takes shape as a result of its strategies on a wide range of world issues, including international migration[24].

Revisiting Zolberg's perceptive call for investigating migration's international politics, I propose to situate diaspora politics in the world-system. By enlarging the Marxist model of internal economic dynamics onto the world stage [25], the world-systems theory envisions the world as a network of concentric areas consisting of core, semi-peripheral, and peripheral states, depending

on their relative positions in the global ecology of capitalist production [26]. These positions, however, are neither given nor static. Rather, states constantly move across the boundaries between the core, semi-periphery, and periphery, owing to their changing technological and military edges in maintaining hegemony [27].

Despite an innovative attempt to treat the entire world as a unit of social transformation, Wallerstein's (1974) overconcentration on capitalist relations may run the risk of economic reductionism and lose sight of states' comparative strengths and weaknesses in non-economic domains, such as geopolitics, culture, and ideology [28]. To move beyond the world-systems theory's economistic determinism, I give more analytical weight to states' political and cultural influence and probe how homeland countries redesign diaspora politics to occupy a more dominant position in the global geopolitics. More specifically, I take a close look at diaspora institutions' role, either actual or desired, in realizing homeland states' geopolitical ambitions toward the world system's core superiority.

2. Diaspora institutions in geopolitics

Building on Adamson and Tsourapas's (2020, 11) proposal to connect historical processes of state development with broader international structures, this chapter establishes a conceptual bridge between domestic diaspora institutions and global geopolitical changes. I push forward a multilevel understanding of diaspora politics as embedded concurrently within domestic and global political spheres. Diaspora politics is not only shaped by home countries' geopolitical strategies but also rooted in state entities' organizational structures. To add more theoretical complexity to the burgeoning literature on diaspora institutions [29], I foreground FitzGerald's (2008)

neo-pluralist approach and investigate diaspora institutions' variegated roles and leverages in changing geopolitical contexts.

Moving beyond previous diaspora studies' overriding focus on state *policies* [30], Gamlen (2019) calls attention to the actors that make these policies possible – namely, diaspora *institutions*. In particular, Gamlen, Cummings, and Vaaler (2019) account for the worldwide diffusion of diaspora institutions in three mechanisms: "tapping" into diasporas' economic and political resources; "embracing" diasporas for the ideational and cultural construction of nations; and "governing" diasporas to fulfill expectations from the world society and maintain the nation-state's international legitimacy. Carrying forward this institutional reorientation, Mahieu (2019) develops an in-depth analysis of differentiated rationalities behind the mutually reinforcing, yet conflictual, diaspora agencies in Morocco.

These insights open new avenues for an inquiry into the *intra*state plurality among diaspora institutions or, to rephrase Morgan and Orloff's (2017) metaphor, "the many hands of the homeland state." A neo-pluralist perspective suggests that rather than a homogeneous bureaucratic mass, the homeland state should be dissected as a multilevel organization of distinct component units that compete with one another for political power, prestige, and authority [31]. Whereas Dahl's (1973) classical pluralist approach emphasizes the role of competing interest groups in operationalizing democracies, neo-pluralism extends this focus to interest-based power conflicts in *non*-democratic states, such as China [32], Morocco [33], and pre-2000 Mexico [34], where unequal power relations between state incumbents may also trigger institutional rivalry across administrative levels.

As one of the most powerful emigration states with global ambitions [35], China represents an illustrative case through which to dive deep into the interplay between diaspora politics and geopolitical strategies. Although China had been conventionally analyzed as a monolithic political

behemoth with centralized authority and a uniform power structure [36], the scholarship of "fragmented authoritarianism" debunks this Orientalist imagination and scrutinizes Chinese bureaucracy as encompassing pluralized institutions with heterogeneous targets, interests, and working philosophies [37]. A single party-state notwithstanding, the divergence between the Party (*dang*) and the Government (*zheng*) apparatuses persists, resulting in bureaucratic bargaining and power competition across Party and governmental agencies [38].

China's diaspora affairs apparatus is not immune from this institutional fragmentation. In this chapter, I present historical, policy, and grounded analyses to argue that China's diaspora institutions have been entangled in convoluted power relations configured by their relative strengths and fluctuating significance amid China's geopolitical re-strategizing.

3. The vicissitude of Chinese diaspora institutions

In this section, I provide a historical overview to contextualize how changing diaspora politics profoundly altered the sociopolitical landscape for diaspora institutions in various Chinese regimes, including the Qing dynasty, the Republic of China (ROC), and the incumbent People's Republic of China (PRC). I argue that since their birth in 1899, the rise and fall of Chinese diaspora institutions have always been intertwined with the dynamic state perceptions of Chinese diaspora and, more broadly, the geopolitical standing of the Chinese state itself. These conditions brought about complex and oscillating relations between parallel diaspora institutions.

From the 17th to mid-19th century, China's Ming and Qing dynasties imposed the "sea ban" (*haijin*) policy to prohibit maritime trade and emigration, aimed at curbing seaborne piracy and insurgency [39]. Over these two centuries, those who managed to emigrate, mostly to Southeast Asia, were labeled as "vagrants" (*liumin*) and penalized upon return [40]. This hostile policy toward

emigrants was only overturned following the Western invasions of China after 1840, as European imperial powers forced the defeated Qing to open the floodgates for labor out-migration [41]. Sizable Chinese diasporic communities sprouted across Southeast Asia and, thanks to their role as the middlemen between Western colonizers and locals, amassed great wealth [42].

Toward the end of the 19th century, the impoverished Qing court recognized the diaspora's economic value and adopted the more positive designation of "diasporic citizens" (*qiaomin*) [43]. This discursive transformation from "vagrants" to "diasporic citizens" was economically driven by China's perception of migrants as material resources, amid the collapse of the sinocentric Confucianist state system in East Asia and China's plunge into the vortex of the European colonial world-system [44]. Beginning in 1875, the Qing established consulates in host countries across Southeast Asia and Latin America to protect Chinese laborers, or "coolies," from sinophobic immigration laws and social hostility [45].

More importantly, in 1899, the first Bureau of Commerce Protection (*Baoshang ju*) was established in Xiamen, a prominent hometown of emigrants, marking the genesis of China's diaspora institutions at the local level [46]. As its name suggests, this bureau and its sister organizations in southeastern port cities were tasked with securing emigrants' business interests, issuing passports, and settling commercial disputes [47].

Chinese migrants also played vital political roles in sponsoring nationalist revolutionaries to overthrow the Qing dynasty and found the ROC in 1912 [48]. In contrast to the Qing's more defensive policies centered on diaspora protection, the new ROC regime took a more proactive approach in reaching out to migrants and encouraging them to buy treasury bonds, send remittances, and donate machinery [49].

To systematically liaise with the diaspora, the ROC established the first national-level diaspora institutions, including the Bureau of Diaspora Affairs in 1921, and its successor, the Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission (OCAC), in 1926 [50]. In 1938, the Kuomintang, which was the ROC's ruling party, created the Overseas Department (*Haiwai bu*) to garner diasporic support for the Anti-Japanese War [51]. This duo of the OCAC and the Overseas Department in the Government and Party capacities, respectively, set a far-reaching institutional precedent for the Janus-faced diaspora institutions in the subsequent PRC.

On October 22, 1949, only three weeks after the PRC's founding, the nascent socialist regime established the Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission (OCAC) and adopted the exact same name of its counterpart under the ROC [52]. Meanwhile, after its defeat in the Chinese Civil War, the ROC retreated to Taiwan and retained its OCAC [53]. Amid the communism vs. anti-communism ideological contests, two OCACs across the Taiwan Strait held a mini-Cold War by approaching the Chinese diaspora for mutually exclusive political loyalty and state legitimation [54]. Against this tense geopolitical backdrop, the mainland OCAC facilitated the return migration of Western-educated Chinese scientists and established the first Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese (FROC) in Beijing in 1950, which was later upgraded as the national FROC in 1956 [55].

In the second half of the 1950s, however, China's increasing politicization of overseas Chinese led to the stigmatization of returned migrants and diasporic families for their alleged "overseas connections" (*haiwai guanxi*) and bourgeoisie background [56]. At the height of the Cultural Revolution, in 1966, the OCAC and FROC ceased normal functioning, and in 1969, the OCAC was disbanded altogether [57]. These diaspora institutions would only be restored after China's geopolitical realignment in the late 1970s.

As this historical sketch suggests, from their very outset, the trajectories and structures of China's diaspora institutions had been tightly interwoven with the state's changing geopolitical standings. How China perceived its diaspora was predicated upon contingent national interests in given geopolitical conditions, which, in turn, configured the birth and growth of diaspora institutions. To offer more first-hand insights into how these mechanisms play out in contemporary China, I draw on interview, policy, and archival data to delve into the intricate linkage between diaspora politics, state institutions, and geopolitical transformations.

4. **Methods**

As part of a larger study on China's diaspora politics [58], this chapter draws on three months of fieldwork in Qingtian County[59] from June to September 2019. With over 50 million overseas Chinese around the world, China is one of the largest diaspora home countries [60]. Qingtian County is a renowned diaspora hometown, boasting over 330,000 emigrants of Qingtian descent, and administratively subordinate to Fengsheng Prefecture and Jianhe Province [61]. Its government has a panoply of institutions dealing with diaspora-related issues, such as propaganda, public security, commerce, education, social welfare, and finance [62]. "Because diaspora is a 'gilded signboard' (*jinzi zhaopai*) in Qingtian," a bureaucrat interviewee claimed, "every bureau is a diaspora institution one way or another."

Before entering the field site, I sensitized myself with existing theoretical repertoires and then engaged iteratively with newly collected empirical evidence and reflexive theory-building throughout the data collection process [63]. To unpack the black box of Chinese diaspora politics, I adopted three qualitative methods. First, I carried out 37 interviews with migration bureaucrats, including 26 in Qingtian County, 8 in the Fengsheng prefectural government, and 3 in the Jianhe

provincial government. Interviewees were selected based on their involvement in official diaspora affairs, and I was able to interview nearly all bureaucrats in the diaspora affairs apparatuses in Qingtian County and Fengsheng Prefecture. These semi-structured interviews were held in Mandarin Chinese and ranged from twenty minutes to three hours in length. I first gained access to the Chief of Staff in the county OCAO through personal networks, and the Chief of Staff, then, acted as the gatekeeper to arrange interviews with officials from over 13 state institutions.

Second, I conducted participant observation in numerous research field trips (*shidi diaoyan*) organized by the local People's Congress and the People's Political Consultative Conference on topics such as how to design a local Museum of Overseas Chinese History, how to celebrate the 70th national anniversary in emigrant communities, and how to attract second-generation migrants to return and invest in Qingtian County. Two directors in these institutions invited me to join these field trips, following my interviews with them. Third, I collected textual materials from the County Bureau of Archive and bureaucrat interviewees. At the official county archive, I examined all annual catalogs produced by the OCAO and FROC since the 1950s and photocopied over 200 pages of archival materials covering their historical developments. In addition, bureaucrats provided me with official policies, internal publications, and speeches of high-ranking officials.

Throughout data collection and analysis processes, I remained reflexive on my positionality as a US- and French-educated, young researcher with Chinese upbringing. This social position made me a paradoxical "outsider within" in my encounters with Chinese officials. On the one hand, given the prevalent US-China trade war, throughout fieldwork, my affiliation with a US university became a source of suspicion for the local authorities. In interviews, some officials started by questioning whether I represented US or Chinese interests. Upon hearing my statement that I do not represent any government's interests but adhere to academic neutrality, they went on

to admonish me to "be careful about the wording" (*zhuyi cuoci*), a euphemism for self-censorship. Although I was expected by the Chinese culture to obey these respondents, who embodied political authority and were a generation my senior, I strived for a critical stance by constantly reflecting on our hierarchical positionalities.

On the other hand, my foreign educational credentials, coupled with my insider knowledge of Chinese society, opened the door for immersive observation as a participant. The aforementioned directors in the local People's Congress and the People's Political Consultative Conference took pride in my participation as "a US-educated PhD" and allowed me to take notes throughout research field trips. I engaged in numerous informal conversations with the officials and closely observed how they dealt with other diaspora institutions. In the subsequent forums (*zuotanhui*) in which officials discussed the issues they discovered during field trips, the directors invited me to "speak at the end" (*yazhou fayan*), a political gesture usually reserved for the most important guests.

In terms of data analysis, I translated and analyzed interview transcripts, fieldnotes, and archival materials in NVivo software. I began the project with the intention of exploring the impacts of the 2018 organizational reform on China's diaspora institutions. As soon as the state's geopolitical strategies emerged as a theme in data analysis, however, I re-read and re-engaged with existing diaspora studies and revised my coding schemes [64]. I recoded China's official perception of migrants as moving along a spectrum between "material resources" and "political assets." As material resources, the home country conceives of emigrants as extractable capital in the forms of remittances, donations, and investments whose value can catalyze China's economic growth. As political assets, the diaspora is envisioned to consolidate the homeland state's international legitimacy and geopolitical influence. Then, I analyzed how these distinctive state perceptions of

emigrants, shaped by China's changing geopolitical grand plans, brought about the rise and fall of diaspora institutions.

5. Courting the diaspora as economic resources

After the Cultural Revolution ended, the OCAC was re-established and re-branded as the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (OCAO) in January 1978 [65]. The OCAO functioned as a ministry-level entity within the State Council, which is China's chief executive body and the highest institution within the Government apparatus. The FROC also resumed activities in December 1978 [66].

As economic development replaced political struggles to become China's national priority under the new Deng Xiaoping leadership, Chinese emigrants emerged as material resources crucial for the country's economic takeoff [67]. Following Deng's pragmatic developmentalism, China established special economic zones in traditional diasporic hometowns in Guangdong and Fujian provinces and rolled out special laws to institutionalize the diaspora's legal privileges in social welfare, economic investments, and political participation [68].

Externally, to promote domestic economic development and concentrate on the accumulation of material wealth, China adopted a non-confrontational geopolitical strategy by laying low in international politics in the late 1970s [69]. Following Deng Xiaoping's famous principle of "hiding assets and biding time" (*taoguangyanghui*), Beijing maintained a largely non-assertive profile on the global stage to avoid the costs of world leadership amid China's rapid economic growth between the 1980s and the 2000s [70].

In accordance with these domestically oriented strategies, the OCAO and FROC actively attracted diasporic remittances and investments [71]. From the perspective of migration bureaucrats,

diasporic resources not only enabled them to reap more extra-budgetary benefits but also afforded a critical opportunity for their career promotion in China's economic performance-based cadre management system [72]. Diaspora institutions' active engagement led the Chinese diaspora to furnish the world's second highest level of remittances, only after India, and to contribute the bulk of initial foreign direct investments that laid the material foundation for China's economic miracle [73].

In interviews, however, migration officials in Qingtian County often mobilized a familialist discourse of "bringing honor to ancestors" (*guangzongyaozu*) to depict migrants' remitting behaviors as self-motivated and morally obligatory while downplaying the Chinese state's active quests for such resources. A senior bureaucrat described to me what he called a "theory of visiting the parental home" (*niangjia lun*):

> Migrants are like a daughter who married into her husband's family. In China, we always say "married daughters are like splashed water" (*jiachuqu de nüer, pochuqu de shui*). Once they are married, they don't belong to the original family anymore. Because they migrated abroad, migrants belong to foreign societies and have to respect local laws. However, we also have a long tradition that a married daughter can still visit her parents' home (*hui niangjia*) with a chicken in her left hand and a duck in her right hand. It would be very impolite if she doesn't bring any gifts during her visits home. Migrants also have the responsibility of contributing to their original motherland. But we aren't expecting the daughter to take home everything from her husband's family. After all, married daughters also need to be loyal to the in-laws. From the homeland's perspective, we only ask migrants to bring back what is needed.

In this patriarchal and sexist account, the migration bureaucrat invoked Chinese feudal traditions to impose upon migrants a filial piety of supporting their homeland with necessary material resources. The moral conundrum facing migrants bears a resemblance to the good-daughter dilemma in which a "good daughter" is supposed to be loyal to the husband and in-laws while retaining family ties to the parents. Chinese migrants, thus, are expected to occupy a moral

gray zone where they are neither insiders nor outsiders yet held responsible for paying back to the homeland with remittances, donations, and investments.

China's domestically oriented grand plan shaped the orientation and organizational structure of diaspora institutions in the reform era. In addition to the OCAO and FROC, another key, yet relatively unknown, player in the diaspora affairs apparatus was the UFWD, which has courted overseas Chinese since the Yan'an period in the 1930s [74]. Although Mao Zedong praised the united front as one of three magical weapons that led the CPC to victories, little work has decoded this shadow department with espionage backgrounds [75]. Through a traditional Leninist mode of control, the UFWD aims to win wide support for the Party's political agenda and to foster compliance from non-Party political forces, including ethnic minorities, religious leaders, private business owners, and overseas Chinese [76].

Similar to the OCAC and FROC, the UFWD was dissolved during the Cultural Revolution [77]. After its reestablishment in 1979, the Deng leadership reframed "supporting economic development and national unification" as the UFWD's principal objectives [78]. To mobilize as many non-CPC social forces as possible to fulfill these goals, the UFWD restarted communicating with overseas Chinese elites and recognized them as a key target population (*tongzhan duixiang*). A 1985 party document, for instance, expanded the UFWD's purview abroad by coining the term "overseas united front" (*haiwai tongyi zhanxian*) and pushed the Chinese diaspora to center stage,

> In order to adapt to the new reality of opening up to the outside world, the united front should broaden its horizons, expand into other countries, and make friends widely. Mobilize all positive forces that can be mobilized and conduct united front work among tens of millions of overseas Chinese. [79]

Despite a seemingly expansive scope, the "overseas united front" remained domestically focused under Deng's leadership by striving for Mainland China's unification with Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau as well as a favorable environment for domestic economic growth [80]. Hence, during China's economic boom from the 1980s to the 2000s, all three diaspora institutions – the OCAO, the FROC, and the UFWD – shared a developmentalist perception of emigrants as material resources conducive to China's domestic progress [81].

6. The pre-2018 structure of diaspora institutions

United by this common goal during the three decades of rapid economic growth, three diaspora institutions were highly integrated with one another. Yet their organizational structures varied by locality. For instance, in non-diasporic places, the OCAO and the FROC were organized by the principle of "one bureaucracy, two names" (*yitao banzi, liangkuai paizi*) to share staff, workplaces, and budgets and to speak with one voice [82]. In emigrant communities like Qingtian County, by contrast, due to emigrants' enormous impacts on the local economy and cadres' career advancement, the OCAO and the FROC were run as separate institutions, albeit with close ties. A bureaucrat interviewee in the provincial FROC remarked on the unwritten division of labor between three diaspora institutions before the 2018 reform:

> The OCAO represented the Government apparatus, while the FROC is a grassroots association. If the OCAO talked to the diaspora abroad in the name of the Government, it could become very sensitive. Foreign governments might suspect that these migrants were Chinese spies. Likewise, if we send a group of UFWD staff to visit abroad, their travel permit applications would probably be denied because the UFWD represents the Party and has a strong ideological leaning. But when the FROC communicates with overseas Chinese, host governments are generally okay with it. After all, it's purely grassroots exchange (*minjian jiaowang*). It's more convenient for a people's group to handle external

> communication, so we [referring to the FROC, the UFWD, and the OCAO] could get the work done together.

In other words, to avoid foreign governments' espionage suspicions, the OCAO had to refrain from explicitly communicating with the diaspora abroad. The responsibility of bridging between the Party and emigrants lay overwhelmingly in the FROC. In addition, due to its markedly ideological background and covert working styles, the UFWD tended to operate behind the curtain and carried out overseas influence-building activities through seemingly apolitical proxy entities, such as the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries and, in the case of diasporic liaison, the FROC [83].

Bureaucrat interviewees suggested that as "the *Federation* of Returned Overseas Chinese," the FROC could conjure up among foreign audiences the less controversial image of a non-governmental organization (NGO). This name also indicates that the FROC only dealt with migrant *returnees* in its early days [84]. Over past decades, however, the FROC gradually broadened its target populations by reaching out to not only emigrants abroad but also the growing number of Chinese overseas students [85]. The FROC became a misnomer that failed to reflect its much more extensive administrative purview in reality.

An FROC official in Qingtian laughed off my observation about the misnomer and claimed that "Our creativity has no limit (*chuangyi wuxian*)." Indeed, by tapping into its flexibilities as a "federation," the FROC openly liaised with various groups of emigrants in the name of grassroots exchange between non-state entities. As the public face of China's diaspora engagement, the FROC created an uncontroversial façade to lower political risks and minimize foreign mistrusts.

Nonetheless, the relative advantages of two Party-affiliated institutions – the UFWD and the FROC – in external liaison with emigrants abroad became their weaknesses in domestic

policymaking. The pre-2018 OCAO, by contrast, possessed two outstanding advantages to occupy the peak of the bureaucratic hierarchy in diaspora politics, as I was told by an OCAO interviewee in Fengsheng Prefecture. First, while the FROC and the UFWD focused on external liaison, the OCAO was specialized in domestic policymaking [86], which was more compatible with the domestic orientation of China's broader geopolitical strategy from the 1980s to the 2000s. Second, its status as China's sole formal diaspora institution in the Government apparatus [87] granted the pre-2018 OCAO more public legitimacy and a professional image, which dwarfed the UFWD's deliberate opaqueness and the FROC's grassroots profile.

Therefore, although all three diaspora institutions worked hand in hand to court emigrants for developing the Chinese economy, their institutional variations led to differentiated strengths and shortcomings in China's non-assertive geopolitical strategy during the reform era. Under the new leadership of Xi Jinping, however, the 2010s witnessed significant changes to China's self-perception of its role in international society and, consequently, new state rethinking about Chinese diaspora. In the following sections, I examine how China's geopolitical restrategizing have repurposed emigrants and, in turn, restructured diaspora institutions since the 2010s.

7. Reframing Chinese diaspora as public diplomats

Following decades of rapid economic growth, China has gradually become an economic powerhouse seeking to wield greater geopolitical influence [88]. Initially developed by Nye (1990) to study how the United States exerted non-coercive domination, the concept of "soft power" traveled quickly to the other side of the Pacific. Although China has long exerted non-coercive campaigns abroad, "soft power" soared into China's national policy in 2007, after top leader Hu Jintao called for "an escalation of China's cultural soft power" at the 17th CPC National Congress

(Nye 2012). Drawing on resources such as traditional culture, political values, and even pandas, China's soft power strategy aims to foster more favorable perceptions of its rise and to enhance Chinese global appeal [89].

Since 2012, the new leadership under Xi Jinping has been more eager to establish China as a "great power" only rivaled by the United States. China reversed the long-standing developmentalist, low-key diplomacy and embraced an assertive geopolitical grand plan in the US-China trade war and the Belt and Road Initiative [90]. Framed within the discourses of "Chinese dream" and "community of common destiny for mankind," China sought to project a positive image of itself as a "responsible great power" [91].

China's global pursuit of soft power has placed stronger emphasis on emigrants as political assets [92]. Since the early 2010s, for example, the Party has expanded the "overseas united front" with a new mandate to more proactively promote China's geopolitical interests via the diaspora [93]. The key to fulfilling this more expansive, externally oriented project lies in emigrants' para-diplomatic activities of rallying support for China in host countries [94]. While Chinese emigrants have long carried out cultural and political projects abroad to strengthen Chinese soft power [95], their activities became all the more important under China's new geopolitical advancement since the 2010s [96]

More specifically, China actively encourages emigrants to get involved in public diplomacy, or "diasporic public diplomacy" – a strategy first proposed by Dai Bingguo, then State Councilor and top diplomat, in the 2011 National Diaspora Affairs Conference [97]. The essence of diasporic public diplomacy, Dai argued, was to "treat the diaspora as a bridge" (*yiqiao weiqiao*):

> We should encourage overseas Chinese to introduce to their host countries China's development trajectories and internal and external policies and help host societies

> objectively view and understand China's progress. It is necessary to turn our Overseas Chinese compatriots into friendly messengers to promote cooperation and exchanges between China and host countries. (Xie 2011)

Underlying this geopolitics-centered reorientation of the "overseas united front" and "diasporic public diplomacy" are contemporary diaspora policies' soft rhetoric and communicative subtleties [98]. To reduce negative responses to its growing economic clout and geopolitical prowess, Beijing allocates to emigrants the duty of "telling China's stories well" (*jianghao zhongguo gushi*) among international audiences [99].

"Because stories told in a personal tone are more moving and trustworthy," as a bureaucrat interviewee suggested, emigrants possess the unparalleled advantage in subtly implementing China's soft power project in host communities' everyday life. According to a respondent who oversaw diasporic public diplomacy in Qingtian County,

> We adopt a broad definition of diplomacy. As long as it represents China and promotes Sino-foreign friendships, it constitutes diplomacy. Public diplomacy fills the gaps that governmental institutions can't fill and helps reinforce China's overall strength. To shape people's thoughts and ideas, public diplomacy moisturizes things gently and silently (*runwuxiwusheng*). The scope of public diplomacy is very wide, including city diplomacy between sister cities and diplomacy carried out by overseas students and Chinese companies. In particular, overseas Chinese are natural messengers of public diplomacy. They always stand up for our motherland's national interests and influence the locals imperceptibly (*qianyimohua*).

Here, the diaspora's unique value in "moisturizing gently and silently" and "influencing imperceptibly" points to emigrants' inconspicuous, mundane promotion of China's soft power in the capacity of non-state actors. Unlike formal diplomats, diasporic public diplomats are ordinary citizens who live among their target audience – namely, locals in host societies. In interviews, migration bureaucrats repeatedly underscored emigrants' rooted foreign connections and

immersive understanding of local culture as their advantages for "winning [foreigners'] minds." Moreover, bureaucrat interviewees often idealized emigrants' timeless and unswerving loyalty toward their Chinese homeland. Therefore, straddling between the East and the West, emigrants are perceived as inherent public diplomats capable of augmenting China's influence and prestige in their long-term, day-to-day encounters with foreign acquaintances and officials.

Interviewees at the Qingtian Department of Publicity added that in line with this communicative and grassroots approach of soft power projection, diasporic public diplomats' duties mostly involved uncontroversial cultural events, such as kite festivals, tea tasting, Chinese calligraphy courses, and Chinese New Year performances. The hometown authorities also recruited diasporic media (*huawen meiti*) – that is, diaspora-owned newspapers, news websites, and television stations – to enhance China's overseas image (see also Yan and Li 2021). Many leaders of these diaspora media, who are elite emigrants themselves, bear multiple honorary titles bestowed by the Chinese state and shoulder informal responsibilities in diasporic public diplomacy. Each year, diaspora institutions in Qingtian invited these diaspora elites to return to China and receive two-fold training: first, practical skills, such as how to reach a wider audience through social media, and second, political knowledge about China's external propaganda strategies.

In addition to these "soft," culture-oriented activities, diasporic public diplomats also conduct more political activities under emergency circumstances. A migration bureaucrat bragged to me a "heroic" story during Xi Jinping's state visit to France in March 2019.

> We got the information that pro-Tibetan Independence activists would stage protests when President Xi's motorcade drives through the boulevards in Paris. It's inappropriate for the Chinese embassy to step in. So our diaspora leaders took the initiative. Through connections in the textile industry, they tracked down the factory that was contracted to manufacture T-shirts for the activists. You know, the kind of T-shirts that have slogans and logos of the Tibetan Independence Movement. They bought out the T-shirts at a much

> higher price, so the activists couldn't wear them. On the day of President Xi's visit, they arrived early, identified the activists, and kept an eye on them to make sure that activists wouldn't do whatever they wanted. Diaspora leaders also organized large crowds to line up on the roadside and wave Chinese flags fervently. As a result, the motorcade passed through smoothly.

While buying out T-shirts at a higher price was an economic activity that did not necessarily violate any laws or French sovereignty, this vignette shows that diasporic public diplomats played a crucial role in safeguarding Chinese national interests in non-official capacities. According to bureaucrat interviewees, emigrants' off-the-radar duties achieved heightened salience on the front line of Sino-foreign engagement because formal state institutions, such as Chinese embassies and consulates, must refrain from being directly involved in foreign countries' domestic affairs, out of concern that China might be accused of interfering with local sovereignty. As diaspora politics shifted from a singular focus on material resources to a more explicit emphasis on political assets, China's diaspora institutions also metamorphosized.

8. Diaspora institutions amid geopolitical transformations

Since the 2010s, diaspora institutions' role in external affairs has taken precedence over their domestically oriented efforts of boosting the economy and promoting national unification. On numerous occasions, Beijing commanded diaspora institutions to rethink their contributions to diasporic public diplomacy and shift their focus outward to serve China's overseas soft power strategies. For instance, Yang Jiechi, China's top diplomat, opined,

> The diaspora affairs have always been closely related to China's overall development and its international environment, as well as changes in overseas Chinese themselves. Entering a new era, the relationship between diaspora affairs and China's bigger picture is further strengthened… [Diaspora institutions] must have a global perspective…, better serve

> China's broader strategies abroad, and consolidate China's proactive position in the changing world structure. [100]

Here, by underscoring "a global perspective" and "strategies abroad," Yang drew a close connection between diaspora institutions' external liaison and China's emerging goal of achieving global supremacy. A senior bureaucrat interviewee in Fengsheng prefecture with decades of working experience in both the OCAO and the FROC concurred,

> Our world is experiencing profound changes unseen in a century. It is time for diaspora affairs bureaus to undertake new functions based on China's rising standing in the international order. When we reexamine overseas Chinese affairs, we must think outside the box and utilize the broader united front mechanism to mobilize and bring into play the enthusiasm of relevant bureaus and social organizations.

Despite its specialization in domestic policymaking, the OCAO did not lag behind in the external liaison with emigrants abroad. As early as 1994, the OCAO's official charter included, as part of its bureaucratic functions, "conducting propaganda work among overseas Chinese; supporting and communicating with overseas Chinese associations and Chinese language schools" [101]. In the 2010s, the external turn in China's diaspora politics brought about the consolidation of the OCAO's diplomatic functions through various appointments of senior diplomats to its leadership positions. For example, in 2012, He Yafei, then Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, became the OCAO's Vice Director, while Qiu Yuanping, former Executive Vice Director of the CPC Office of Foreign Affairs, was assigned as the OCAO's Director in 2013.

Nevertheless, the OCAO's public profile as a formal state agency rendered its external diasporic liaison "too politically sensitive," in the words of a senior FROC official in Qingtian. This bureaucrat explained that as a rational state bureaucracy, the pre-2018 OCAO was often guided by unequivocal policy objectives, such as specific legal provisions on diasporic privileges

and concrete targets of diasporic donations and investments. Yet this outcome-driven professional style proved less effective in China's quest for geopolitical stature, which is less quantifiable and necessitates more strategic flexibilities.

In contrast, given the UFWD and FROC's experience and flexibility in external communication, they acquired more prominent roles in diaspora politics since the 2010s. As the steward of the "overseas united front," the UFWD rose to power among three diaspora institutions and stood at the forefront of China's global influence-building, albeit in a deliberately covert manner [102]. Similarly, thanks to its grassroots status as a "federation," the FROC took the lead in "diasporic public diplomacy" to enhance Chinese soft power in the daily encounters between emigrants and their foreign acquaintances and local officials.

These institutional trajectories eventually converged in the 2018 restructuring in which the OCAO was absorbed into the UFWD and the OCAO's previous function of external liaison was transferred to the FROC. After this reshuffling, the OCAO only nominally maintains an affiliation with the State Council, while its actual bureaucracy has been dissolved into two sub-divisions within the central UFWD. For the first time in the PRC's 70-year history, diaspora institutions are all run by the Party apparatus. In Qingtian county, the OCAO was downgraded from a bureau (*ju*) within the County Government to a section (*ke*) within the UFWD. While these institutional transformations might seem dramatic, they were, in fact, deeply embedded in the long-standing sociopolitical process whereby China repurposed diaspora institutions amid its geopolitical transitions.

9. Conclusion

This chapter joins a recent wave of research that moves emigration states to the center of migration scholarship [103]. Drawing on historical, policy, and grounded analysis, I argue that China's changing geopolitical grand plans have reconfigured state perceptions of its diaspora and, in turn, restructured China's diaspora institutions. By tracing diaspora institutions' vicissitudes in the long arc of history, I demonstrate that institutional changes, even as dramatic as China's 2018 organizational reform, are long in the making. As China adopted increasingly assertive soft power projects to pursue global supremacy, Beijing gave more weight to the diaspora's political value in the so-called "overseas united front" and "diasporic public diplomacy." The ambitious homeland state envisioned emigrants as political assets to enhance China's national image and global appeal in their non-official, everyday encounters with local residents in host communities. Therefore, diaspora institutions that were more seasoned in conducting flexible, overseas political work, including the UFWD and FROC, rose to power. Meanwhile, the OCAO, as a specialized, formal state agency with a domestic focus, lost favor and was dissolved into the UFWD.

This chapter contributes to a multilevel conceptualization of diaspora politics as juxtaposed in domestic and global political arenas. First, I follow the neo-pluralist approach [104] to examine the homeland state of China through the prism of its diverse domestic institutions. This chapter closely scrutinizes how the UFWD, the FROC, and the OCAO have been collaborative as much as they are competitive, often intertwining and interfering with one another. I contend that diaspora institutions' relative strength and authority are predicated on their changing significance amid geopolitical transformations.

Second, by laying more stress upon nation-states' political and cultural influence in the world-systems theory [105], I push diaspora studies into a deeper dialogue with world politics [106] and bring to the fore the important, but understudied, role of diaspora institutions in achieving the

homeland state's global ascendancy [107]. These findings may have implications for other prominent emigration states with rising geopolitical ambitions, such as India [108] and Middle Eastern countries [109].

Furthermore, this chapter provides a glimpse into the politics of diaspora institutions that may be applicable beyond China. For instance, as Mahieu (2019) indicates, Morocco has a similar parallel structure with a formal diaspora institution coupling with a seemingly apolitical social entity. Brand (2006) argues that both diaspora institutions in Morocco are run by the same bureaucracy, with the latter playing less sensible roles in the state's external liaison with emigrants, thus bearing a striking resemblance to the FROC in China. Similarly, in Lebanon, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants and the World Lebanese Cultural Union complement each other in state and semi-state capacities, respectively [110]. To advance this line of research, we need more insights into the intricate nexus between domestic institutional variations and broader global structures of diaspora politics [111]. Migration scholars should also be more attentive to the decentralized diaspora governance and street-level bureaucrats' local improvisation of diaspora policies based on grassroots interests.

However, to what extent Chinese emigrants actually shoulder the state-designated geopolitical responsibilities needs more evidence-based examination as well. It is dangerous to assume *a priori* the intensity and efficacy of these transborder connections, which may be used by nativist host governments as the scapegoat for domestic societal problems and render diasporas even more vulnerable. For instance, at the height of US-China tensions in October 2020, the Trump administration designated the Washington DC branch of the Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification (*Tongcuhui*, or CPPNR), a diaspora organization aimed at promoting Mainland China's unification with Taiwan, as a foreign mission of the Chinese state [112]. This move

invoked widespread fear among Chinese diaspora communities that their political activities had become enmeshed with Western countries' power contest with China and confronted with indiscriminate pushbacks from anti-China politicians [113]. As part of the "China threat" discourse, host countries increasingly deprive Chinese migrants of their legitimate freedoms of association and political belief in the name of national security.

As previous research has shown, however, it is often the host society's marginalization and discrimination against immigrants that push the latter to establish transborder ties with sending communities for social, emotional, and symbolic compensations [114]. Instead of labelling diaspora organizations as foreign missions and deteriorating migrants' political vulnerability, immigration states should grant immigrants more political freedom and provide a better path for their social integration. China, on the other hand, needs to be more cautious in reaching out to diaspora members in accordance with the principles of national sovereignty. While this chapter presents a state-centered examination, future research may uncover diasporas' own agentic power and examine how homeland states' diaspora strategies are perceived or contested abroad.

Chapter 3, in full, is a reprint of Liu, Jiaqi M. 2022. "From 'Sea Turtles' to 'Grassroots Ambassadors': The Chinese Politics of Outbound Student Migration." *International Migration Review* 56(3): 702–26.

[1] Adamson and Tsourapas, "The Migration State in the Global South," September 1, 2020.
[2] FitzGerald, *A Nation of Emigrants*.

[3] Naujoks, *Migration, Citizenship, and Development*.
[4] Brand, *Citizens Abroad*; Mahieu, "Competing Origin-Country Perspectives on Emigrant Descendants."
[5] Adamson, "Sending States and the Making of Intra-Diasporic Politics"; FitzGerald, *A Nation of Emigrants*; Waterbury, *Between State and Nation*.
[6] Thunø, "China's New Global Position"; Liu, "From 'Sea Turtles' to 'Grassroots Ambassadors.'"
[7] The Chinese state claims that there are five diaspora institutions (*wuqiao*) in China: the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (OCAO), the Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese (FROC), the Overseas Chinese Committee within the National People's Congress, the Committee on Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, and Overseas Chinese within the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, and the China Zhi Gong Party Thunø, "Reaching Out and Incorporating Chinese Overseas.". In practice, however, the latter three institutions play largely consultative and ceremonial roles. In this article, I transcend the official depictions and examine the OCAO, the FROC, and the United Front Work Department (UFWD) as three major diaspora institutions in China.
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[10] Adamson and Tsourapas, "The Migration State in the Global South," September 1, 2020.
[11] Mahieu, "Competing Origin-Country Perspectives on Emigrant Descendants."
[12] Morgan and Orloff, "Introduction."
[13] Lieberthal, "Introduction: The 'fragmented Authoritarianism' Model and Its Limitations"; Mertha, "'Fragmented Authoritarianism 2.0.'"
[14] Lary, *Region and Nation*.
[15] Zheng, *Party vs. State in Post-1949 China*.
[16] Thunø, "China's New Global Position."
[17] Zolberg, "1."
[18] Gamlen, *Human Geopolitics*; Gamlen, Cummings, and Vaaler, "Explaining the Rise of Diaspora Institutions," March 12, 2019.
[19] Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System I*; Wallerstein, "Marx, Marxism-Leninism, and Socialist Experiences in the Modern World-System."
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[24] Agnew, *Geopolitics*.
[25] Wallerstein, "Marx, Marxism-Leninism, and Socialist Experiences in the Modern World-System."
[26] Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System I*.
[27] Wallerstein.
[28] Morgan and Orloff, "Introduction," 16.
[29] Mahieu, "Competing Origin-Country Perspectives on Emigrant Descendants"; Gamlen, *Human Geopolitics*; Gamlen, Cummings, and Vaaler, "Explaining the Rise of Diaspora Institutions," March 12, 2019.
[30] Brand, *Citizens Abroad*; Mahieu, "Competing Origin-Country Perspectives on Emigrant Descendants."
[31] FitzGerald, *A Nation of Emigrants*, 260.
[32] Liu, "From 'Sea Turtles' to 'Grassroots Ambassadors.'"
[33] Mahieu, "Competing Origin-Country Perspectives on Emigrant Descendants."
[34] FitzGerald, *A Nation of Emigrants*.
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[36] Lary, *Region and Nation*.
[37] Lieberthal, "Introduction: The 'fragmented Authoritarianism' Model and Its Limitations"; Mertha, "'Fragmented Authoritarianism 2.0.'"
[38] Zheng, *Party vs. State in Post-1949 China*; Cheng, "United Front Work and Mechanisms of Countermobilization in Hong Kong."
[39] Wang, *The Chinese Overseas*.
[40] Chan, *Diaspora's Homeland*.
[41] Peterson, *Overseas Chinese in the People's Republic of China*.

[42] Wang, *The Chinese Overseas*.
[43] Yen, "The Qing Dynasty's Protection of Returned Overseas Chinese after 1893 [1893 年以后清朝对归国华侨的保护]."
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[57] FROC, "Brief Introduction of China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese [中国侨联简况]."
[58] Liu, "Citizenship on the Move," February 17, 2021; Liu, "From 'Sea Turtles' to 'Grassroots Ambassadors'"; Liu, "Diasporic Placemaking," December 29, 2020.
[59] To protect interviewees' safety, I use pseudonyms for all place names and redact any potentially identifying information.
[60] Thunø, "China's New Global Position."
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[65] Thunø, "Reaching Out and Incorporating Chinese Overseas."
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Chapter 4 The Politics of International Student Migration

Global student migration is on the rise [1]. As of 2017, over six-million tertiary students were studying outside their origin countries [2]. International students exert enormous economic impacts, contributing $45 billion to the US economy alone in 2018 [3]. On the other side of the migratory channel, China has steadily established itself as the world's largest source country of student migrants[4] since 1998, when the earliest UNESCO data are available, with the global percentage of Chinese student migrants more than doubling from 7% in 1998 to 17% in 2017.

Given that China is the world's most populous country, it may not be surprising that China also has the largest number of overseas students. However, the mammoth size of the Chinese student population abroad is not a historical constant [5]. In 1978, when China began promoting large-scale outbound student migration (OSM), it had only 860 overseas students. In less than four decades, this number ballooned by 535 times to 460,000 in 2014. Scholars attribute this dramatic growth to a constellation of domestic factors, including the rising Chinese middle class and their conversion of economic capital into cultural capital [6], China's competitive domestic education system [7], the Confucian pursuit of better education [8], the brokerage of commercial education agents [9], and pull factors in destination countries [10].

Nonetheless, the existing literature on international student migration/mobility (ISM) pays scant attention to China's changing OSM policies.[11] Constrained by the prevalent immigration bias in migration studies [12], scholars tend to focus on *host* countries' international education and post-graduation employment policies regarding *in*bound student migrants, while casting less attention on *sending* countries [13]. This chapter, by examining China, the largest origin country of student

migrants in the world, illuminates how home countries regulate and strategize about overseas students.

Utilizing three qualitative methods, including a historical policy review, an ethnography in state-organized summer camps for overseas students, and interviews with student migrants and migration officials, I propose two main arguments. First, I argue that the Chinese outbound student migration politics – which I define as the collectivity of the homeland state's policies, practices, and rhetorics toward overseas students – serves three policy objectives: economic, governmental, and geopolitical. These objectives, however, are not set in stone. Rather, their relative significance ebbs and flows, depending on the sending country's specific socioeconomic and political conditions. As I show, following decades of prioritizing the economic and governmental impacts of student returnees (*haigui*, or colloquially "sea turtles") in boosting the domestic economy and maintaining political stability, the Chinese state now gives growing weight to student migrants' geopolitical value as "grassroots ambassadors" (*minjian dashi*) in expanding China's global influence and enhancing national image abroad. This geopolitical reorientation has become particularly salient under the Xi Jinping leadership, as China adopts more assertive soft power strategies in pursuit of global supremacy.

Drawing on ethnographic and interview data, my second argument suggests that the geopolitics-focused reorientation of China's OSM policy may not be well received among student migrants nor fully implemented by migration officials at the grassroots or local level. Whereas Chinese students faced surging espionage accusations across the world in recent years [14], I refrain from taking for granted the close political ties between the Chinese state and overseas students, as depicted in rhetorical flourish by the Western media and Chinese national strategies [15]. Instead, I examine the on-the-ground disjuncture between the central Chinese state, student migrants, and

frontline bureaucrats. Based on grounded empirical research, I shed new light on the OSM politics as a contentious field where state ambitions crosscut individual desires and where national grand plans are confronted with flexible local improvisation.

My tripartite model of OSM politics – economic, governmental, and geopolitical – strives to facilitate scholarly dialogue between ISM and diaspora studies. While the burgeoning mobility paradigm [16] emphasizes neoliberalism's crucial role in promoting the transition from international education to labor immigration in destination countries [17], this chapter pushes China to center stage and examines the homeland state's changing, yet-unabating, interests in regulating and positioning overseas students in both national policies and local implementation.

In following sections, I map the ISM literature to identify a knowledge gap on sending countries' policies toward overseas students. To address this lacuna, I spell out my tripartite model of OSM through the lens of diaspora politics. After introducing my methodologies, I dive into a policy review and empirical analysis. I first probe China's changing interests in the national OSM policies and then examine the variegated responses and interests of local bureaucrats and student migrants. I conclude this chapter by calling for more research on ISM from sending countries' perspectives and centering international students in studies of diaspora politics.

1. **Mapping student migration**

International student migration has long come under the spotlight in both education and migration studies [18]. Focusing on the increasingly neoliberal nature of international student mobilities [19], the existing literature has identified four main actors driving the rise of ISM since the mid-20th century: students and their families [20], Western universities [21], receiving countries [22], and the education-migration industry [23].

The first factor that propels ISM is student migrants and their families. Across the developing world, ISM has become a child-centered strategy for aspiring middle- and upper-class families to accumulate and reproduce cultural and human capital through foreign educational credentials [24]. In globalized professional contexts, the prestige attached to Anglo-American and European universities makes Western education a distinctive class marker and an ideal means for student migrants to achieve elevated social capital [25].

Second, the proliferation of ISM also results from the corporatization and commodification of Western universities [26]. Confronted with sharply diminishing state funding in neoliberal states, especially the United States and Britain, financially challenged "entrepreneurial universities" must attract fee-paying foreign students to gain an indispensable source of revenue, reduce reliance on the public purse, and remain financially solvent [27]. The presence of large numbers of international students also boosts universities' images as multicultural and cosmopolitan, helping them stay competitive in a crowded educational market [28]. Nevertheless, despite its insightfulness in pointing out the neoliberalization of higher education [29], this emphasis on neoliberalism may run the risk of overestimating the level of de-regulation worldwide and ignoring state strategies, particularly those of sending countries, in managing ISM.

Third, and partly due to a deeply entrenched immigration bias and Western-centrism in migration literatures [30], most attention in ISM studies has focused on host countries in the developed world [31]. Western states have been eager to facilitate student migrants' transition from education to labor migration, or what Robertson (2013) calls the "education-migration nexus." For instance, Liu-Farrer (2009) offers critical scrutiny of Japan's import of student "trainees" to fulfill domestic labor shortage, enabling its anti-immigration regime to avoid openly embracing foreign labor. Following a "two-step" approach [32], the emerging mobility paradigm perceives ISM as a *de*

facto channel in neoliberal global labor flows, producing economic agents who can more easily integrate into destination societies [33]. In addition, receiving countries may also turn ISM into a political tool. For example, China grants Taiwanese students exceptional scholarships and privileged access to college admission to cultivate a pro-China attitude and promote Mainland China's unification with Taiwan [34]. By the same token, the European Union's (EU) Erasmus program plays a key political role in instilling a European identity and bolstering EU integration [35].

Fourth, the diverse interests of student migrants and families, receiving countries, and Western universities must be brokered, creating the conditions for an education-migration industry [36]. Based on a classic "supply-demand" model, Findlay (2011) stresses the role of intermediaries, including education agents, recruiters, money lenders, and standardized test institutions, in mediating the flows of information, capital, and students *qua* consumers [37]. These seemingly facilitative brokers often perpetuate social inequalities by either endorsing neoliberal ethics such as self-responsibility and self-improvement [38] or advising based on assumptions about their clients' class status [39].

These four actors jointly shape ISM as a simultaneously desirable, profitable, and exploitable migration flow. What is missing in the burgeoning ISM scholarship, however, are systematic accounts of sending states and their OSM policies [40]. Except for studies of how home countries address "brain drain" by promoting overseas students' return migration [41], there are insufficient insights into student migrants' positioning in sending countries' overall diaspora politics [42]. Although Robertson (2013) breaks ground by taking a holistic view of the "education-migration nexus," what she really means by "migration" is "*im*migration," as evidenced by her focus on post-graduation labor policies in *receiving* countries. Without sending countries'

perspectives, we have only a partial picture of international students' in- and out-migration as a continuous transborder process. To transcend this limit, this chapter foregrounds the significant, yet underresearched, role of *sending* states and places OSM policies in the broader framework of diaspora politics.

2. Student migration and diaspora politics

It may seem unlikely, at first glance, that outbound student migration can be incorporated into diaspora politics. After all, there is a temporal difference between student migrants and diasporas. While the former entails a relatively temporary migratory status oriented toward a specific educational purpose, the latter denotes longer-term emigrants who maintain close socio-cultural and political bonds with the homeland [43]. However, student migrants are versatile figures who not only build ties with the broader destination society beyond the school context but also retain transborder connections with home communities [44].

Furthermore, following a constructivist turn in diaspora studies [45], scholars have largely abandoned an essentialist depiction of diasporas as "bona fide actual entities" [46] and shifted the analytical focus toward the sociopolitical construction of diasporas for strategic goals [47]. Home countries may deliberately mold student migrants into the diaspora to tap into their economic, governmental, and geopolitical resources [48]. The social construction of diasporas, coupled with overseas students' transborder ties with the homeland, establishes a conceptual bridge between ISM and diaspora studies, allowing for critical rethinking of ISM through the prism of diaspora politics in sending countries.

The literature on diaspora politics documents home countries' growing engagement with emigrants and their descendants for a constellation of ethno-national, cultural, economic, and

geopolitical objectives [49]. In a perceptive overview, Adamson and Tsourapas (2020) establish a three-fold typology of nationalizing, developmental, and neoliberal sending states in the Global South. By adapting this framework to better account for the specificities of student migrants, I argue that from sending countries' viewpoints, OSM policies can be integrated into the broader diaspora politics to serve three vital domestic and international aims - namely, economic, governmental, and geopolitical.

First, OSM can yield bountiful *economic* benefits for sending countries [50]. Student migrants, most of whom are high skilled and resourceful, can make direct economic contributions through financial remittances from their post-graduation employment. More importantly, sending countries across the Global South, especially China and India, are keen to reverse the "brain drain" caused by the loss of tertiary talents [51] and actively promote "brain circulation" [52] in the forms of technology transfer, entrepreneurial partnering, and return migration. For instance, Chinese and Indian entrepreneurs in Silicon Valley accelerated the development of IT industries in Beijing, Bangalore, and Hyderabad through close alliances with growth-driven local policymakers [53].

Second, when home countries perceive overseas students as potential security threats, student migration policies may seek to produce *governmental* effects in maintaining domestic stability and regime hegemony. For centuries, China has periodically regarded outgoing migrants as foreign spies and challenges to the prevailing official ideology (Ho 2018, 5). Similarly, Kazakhstan established the Bolashak program to sponsor overseas studies for the dual purposes of developing the economy and bolstering authoritarian stability [54]. In these cases, non-democratic home countries are concerned about overseas students' foreign exposure and strive to repress students' potential anti-regime activities. Meanwhile, home states roll out favorable student return

privileges to co-opt foreign-educated elites back into the bureaucracy and reproduce the political rule [55].

Third, in contrast to the *economic* and *governmental* models' domestic focus, sending countries may also seek to strengthen *geopolitical* influence in destination countries through overseas students. In fact, prior to the neoliberal marketization of Western tertiary education, ISM was primarily a foreign policy tool and played geopolitical roles in the Cold War [56]. The US and Australian governments, for example, launched the Fulbright Program and Colombo Plan, respectively, first to counter the Axis propaganda threat and then to extend their geopolitical influence through "educational aids" as "soft diplomacy" [57]. Fast forward to the present day, East Asian, Central Asian, and Middle Eastern states incorporate overseas students into national strategies of "public diplomacy" [58] to enhance home countries' national image abroad and conduct external propaganda campaigns at the grassroots level [59].

These economic, governmental, and geopolitical models of OSM politics are not exhaustive or mutually exclusive, nor are they given equal weight in different sociopolitical contexts or across administrative levels. Instead, these diverse, sometimes-clashing, interests are predicated upon the homeland state's specific conditions of domestic politics and global positioning, resulting in their fluctuating importance within broader diaspora politics. By tracing OSM policies in the larger historical framework, we can unpack the changing, rather than dwindling [60], role of nation-states in reshaping ISM [61].

Moreover, building on FitzGerald's (2008) pluralist approach to diaspora politics, I delve into the interplay of various actors in the field of OSM politics, including the central state, street-level bureaucrats, and student migrants themselves. The central-local variation is embedded in any polity's administrative fragmentation, including that of China [62], where the policy objectives

pursued by national grand plans may not resonate with street-level bureaucrats. As grassroots or local officials take charge of enforcing state policies on the ground, they may deviate from national strategies to improvise based on specific local conditions and interests.

I also attach great importance to overseas students' own perceptions and narratives through grounded empirical research. Following King and Raghuram (2013, 134), I perceive student migrants as "complex subjects who are much more than just students whose only function is life in higher education" and foreground the migration aspect of the Janus-faced figure of "student-migrants." As I demonstrate, like other migrants, student migrants carry with them an assemblage of social relations across national borders. They have their own ideas, voices, and agendas and are not only subject to but may also challenge their home country's narratives [63]. By paying close attention to how the distinct goals of student migrants and the multi-level state converge and collide in their real-world encounters, I conceptualize OSM as a dynamic political arena where both macrohistorical changes and interactional conflicts abound.

3. Methods

This chapter draws from a case study of China, conducted in Qingtian County[64] in Summer 2019, as part of a broader project to investigate Chinese diaspora politics [65]. I selected Qingtian County as my field site, due to its status as a prominent hometown of overseas Chinese (*qiaoxiang*) and a community of origin for a growing number of overseas students [66]. Qingtian County is an administrative subdivision of Fengsheng Prefecture. Following interviews with the organizers of state-run, voluntary retreats for overseas students, I was invited by these migration officials to participate in three such events. These retreats included a trip to Fuzhou, organized by the Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese (FROC) of Fengsheng Prefecture, a trip to Nanchang

and Mount Lu, organized by the Overseas Students and Families Association (OSFA) of Qingtian County, and a trip within Fengsheng Prefecture, organized by the United Front Work Department (UFWD) of Fengsheng Prefecture. In the end, I carried out over 100 hours of participant observation in these trips over July and August 2019. The summer trips provided an ideal lens to closely examine the quotidian operation of OSM policies, as well as the deep-running tensions between national grand plans, local bureaucratic improvisation, and student migrants' own desires.

Each trip lasted approximately five days and included ten to twenty overseas student participants and one or two bureaucrat guides. Student participants were registered undergraduate or graduate students at European and North American universities. Most were spending the summer break in their natal or ancestral hometown and ranged in age from nineteen to thirty-one. This age group is representative of the vast majority of student migrants from China [67]. All costs associated with the trips, including meals, entrance fees, transportation, and accommodations, were fully covered by organizing entities. Because my participant observation data are solely based on what I observed in public places and no minors were involved, I was not required by the agreement with my university's Institutional Review Board to obtain consent for this part of ethnographic data. In the presentation of data, I redacted any potentially identifying information of student participants and bureaucrat interviewees.

Within a month after the trips, I conducted fifteen in-person interviews with student participants in Qingtian County. Some participants proactively approached me after learning about my research interest in international migration during our informal conversations throughout the trips. I recruited other student interviewees to diversify my sample in terms of gender, age, destination countries, and years of living abroad. I am of similar age as student participants and have a Western educational background, which helped me build rapport with student interviewees.

All student participants that I approached gave consent for interviews. I also interviewed twelve bureaucrats who worked in Qingtian County and Fengsheng Prefecture's diaspora apparatuses. Semi-structured interviews with both student participants and migration officials were held in Mandarin Chinese and lasted on average thirty minutes. In them, I probed how student participants and frontline bureaucrats made sense of the trips and, more broadly, China's OSM policies.

To situate this research in a longer arc of history, I also searched for and examined over 300 pages of China's published official materials on overseas students from the 1990s to the present, including laws and regulations, policy documents, and political speeches. Most materials were found online, while some statistics were retrieved from the library archive of University of California, San Diego.

Data analysis began in NVivo software with open coding by reading all textual materials, fieldnotes, and transcripts. Following the abductive approach [68], I, then, conducted numerous rounds of thematical coding to engage iteratively between collected data and theoretical repertoires. Eventually, I identified three underlying logics behind China's shifting student migration policies – economic, governmental, and geopolitical – and traced their fluctuations in relative significance in different historical and ethnographic contexts.

4. Contextualizing student migration in 20th-century China

Before diving into the contemporary Chinese politics of OSM, a brief historical overview can help contextualize the ups and downs of economic, governmental, and geopolitical interests in state strategies in the longue durée. In fact, prior to the 20th century, China mostly received, rather than sent, large numbers of student migrants, due to its cultural hegemony in Confucianism and economic prowess in global trade [69]. It was not until the late-19th century, when China's imperial

order was on the verge of collapse, that the wobbly Qing court sent students to Japan, Europe, and the United States [70]. Many key revolutionary figures in the 20th century, including Sun Yat-sen, Zhou Enlai, and Deng Xiaoping, were educated abroad [71].

After the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, China sent students to the Soviet Union and other communist allies [72]. At the heart of the Maoist student migration policy was the developmentalist state thinking that overseas students would bring back advanced technological and ideological know-how to revitalize the Chinese economy [73]. Nonetheless, this *economy-oriented* policy was checked by the nascent socialist regime's deep *governmental* concerns. Fearing that overseas students might be brainwashed abroad by rival forces to work against their home country, China strictly controlled the ideology and overall number of student migrants [74]. After the Cultural Revolution broke out in 1966, OSM ceased altogether, and overseas students were ordered to return for ideological struggles [75]. Only in 1972 was student migration reinitiated on a much smaller scale [76].

A seismic shift came in 1978, when Deng Xiaoping prioritized education reforms as the harbinger of his all-out modernization project [77]. Under Deng's *developmentalism*, student migration was seen as a crucial catalyst for China's economic take-off [78]. In 1984, for the first time in PRC history, the Chinese state allowed self-sponsored (*zifei*) overseas studies as a legitimate means of exit [79]. Self-funded students quickly outnumbered state-sponsored ones, propelling China's meteoric growth into the world's largest source country of student migrants [80].

Deng's open-door policy also reduced student migrants' reliance on the state's financial and logistical support [81]. Without ideological constraints, student migrants were able to more freely develop their own political opinions, some of which inevitably ran counter to the rule of the Communist Party of China (CPC) [82]. During China's student movements for democracy in 1989,

for example, many overseas students protested across the West against the party-state and helped domestic student movement leaders escape and seek asylum abroad [83]. Moreover, the 1992 Chinese Student Protection Act in the United States and similar legislation in other destination countries granted permanent residency to Chinese students and protected them from potential persecution by the Chinese state in the aftermath of the 1989 democracy movements [84]. These factors led to the resurge of *governmental* objectives behind China's more restrictive policies toward overseas students from 1989 to 1992 and a sharp decline of student out-migration and return [85].

To mitigate economic difficulties caused by post-Tiananmen international sanctions, China re-promoted student migration by reinstating the open-door policy in 1992, regardless of overseas students' previous political opinions [86]. In 1993, the CPC established a far-reaching twelve-word principle for student migration that included "supporting studying abroad, encouraging return, and guaranteeing freedom of movement" (*zhichi liuxue, guli huiguo, laiqu ziyou*) [87]. Following this liberalized principle, the Chinese state focused on attractting student returnees (or "sea turtles") for *economic* modernization over the past three decades [88]. Meanwhile, it also learned lessons from the 1989 incident and gradually reestablished political control over student migrants to achieve the *governmental* goal of maintaining domestic security [89]. Most notably, against the backdrop of a rising China, student migrants are increasingly given the mandate to play a *geopolitical* role in elevating China's global stature.

5. Student migrants as grassroots ambassadors

Lying at the heart of OSM's emerging political agenda is a semi-official organization called the Western Returned Scholars Association (WRSA, or "*Oumei tongxuehui*"). After its founding

in 1913, the WRSA remained rather dormant until 1995, when it became a subordinate organization under the UFWD's direct supervision [90]. The UFWD is a key CPC institution tasked with managing the united front (*tongyi zhanxian*), that is, forging alliances with the CPC's potentially oppositional forces and uniting them to promote the Party's interests [91]. In 2000, the UFWD's purview was expanded to cover, for the first time, "persons who study abroad or have returned" [92]. In 2004, the CPC promulgated its first specific policy on conducting united front work with overseas students:

> Conduct ideological and political work with overseas students. Be concerned about their ideological status, guide them to adhere to the correct political direction, to carry forward the patriotic spirit. [93]

In the early 2010s, after Xi Jinping rose to power as China's supreme leader, the geopolitical reorientation of OSM policies was markedly accelerated. In a 2013 conference to celebrate the WRSA's centennial, for example, Xi expressed his "hopes" for overseas students to help China wield stronger *geopolitical* influence abroad,

> It is hoped that a large number of overseas students will give full play to their advantages, strengthen their connections with both China and foreign countries, become *grassroots ambassadors* to promote friendly exchanges between China and foreign countries, tell good stories about China using the channels and methods that ordinary people in foreign countries would hear, understand, and listen to, and let the world support China even more. (Xi [2012] 2015, emphasis added)

This speech marked a watershed moment in China's student migration policies. Guided by Deng's developmentalism, the previous policy emphasis had focused on promoting the return of overseas students for *economic* growth through projects such as the Thousand Talents Plan and Cheung Kong Scholar awards [94]. Under Xi's leadership, in contrast, student migration policies have been

increasingly realigned with the UFWD, making overseas students a critical link in China's *geopolitical* grand plans or, in Xi's stylized vocabulary, "grassroots ambassadors." Transcending the innocent figure of "students," this labeling delegates student migrants more responsibility in China's soft power network and assertive pursuit of global ascendancy.

Overseas students' importance further rose in the 2015 Central United Front Work Conference, where Xi named them as the new "center of gravity" (*zhuolidian*) for the UFWD [95]. More fundamentally, Xi extended the long-established twelve-word principle by adding the requirement of "playing a role" (*fahui zuoyong*) and encouraged overseas students to serve the motherland by *either* returning to China *or* "utilizing multiple means" (*yi duozhong fangshi*). These new policies implied that return migration is no longer a precondition and that overseas students can also serve state interests in destination countries. The remolded state-student relations *during* students' studies abroad, rather than *following* their post-study return, established closer linkage between OSM politics and China's diaspora policies.

In 2016, to reinforce the WRSA's institutional strength, a key Party document formalized Xi's instructions by designating overseas students as "new forces of grassroots diplomacy" (*minjian waijiao shenglijun*):

> Encourage and guide overseas students to tell good stories of China and act as ambassadors for friendly exchanges between China and foreign countries. Following the Party and the State's diplomatic plans, [overseas students should] strengthen contacts with Chinese embassies and consulates, and actively carry out grassroots diplomacy, serve national strategies such as the "Belt and Road" project. [96]

This stronger association between OSM and public diplomacy [97] coincided with the geopolitics-focused restructuring of China's diaspora politics. In tandem with the incorporation of student migration policies into the UFWD, diaspora politics as a whole was also brought into the

UFWD's orbit. In 2018, the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office, which had been China's paramount diaspora policymaking institution since the PRC's founding, was absorbed into the UFWD [98]. As a result, overseas students and diasporas fell into the purview of the same apparatus and constituted the core of the CPC's "overseas united front" (*haiwai tongyi zhanxian*). This organizational reshuffling allowed for the more coordinated execution of student migration policies by the centralized diaspora bureaucracy. A bureaucrat interviewee in Fengsheng Prefecture commented,

> Theoretically, overseas students haven't even become diasporans. However, overseas students and overseas Chinese have many characteristics in common. If our government seeks to liaise with overseas students, it's best for diaspora institutions to do this job. However, we should keep a low profile (*buhao dazhangqigu*). After all, it's very sensitive.

The 2015 Central United Front Work Conference also called for establishing WRSA branches at local levels [99]. Consequently, as of 2018, over 42 WRSA branches had sprouted in provincial capitals and universities, boasting 220,000 individual members (WRSA 2018). At further lower administrative levels of prefectures and counties, local FROC branches establish various versions of the Overseas Students and Families Association (OSFA, or "*Liuxue renyuan ji jiashu lianyihui*") to play essentially the same role as the WRSA. Like the WRSA, the FROC also has close ties with the UFWD and takes charge of China's external liaison with the Chinese diaspora. These institutions have collectively formed an expansive network of official and quasi-official entities across the administrative hierarchy for China to reach out to overseas students for *geopolitical* ambitions.

By analyzing historical policy documents, I have demonstrated that since the PRC's founding in 1949, the economic, governmental, and geopolitical objectives behind the Chinese politics of OSM have fluctuated in their relative significance, depending on China's contingent

socioeconomic and political conditions. Before the 2010s, *economic* and *governmental* interests dominated state policies, and overseas students were seen as either catalysts for the country's economic boom or potential threats to regime stability that needed close surveillance. Since the 2010s, however, *geopolitical* ambitions have gradually taken precedence in China's policies toward overseas students. As China more assertively pursues global leadership, student migrants are envisioned as public diplomats to strengthen Chinese influence abroad. Given the Chinese central and local governments' inconsistent administrative interests [100], however, this fundamental realignment in national grand plans may not be fully enforced by frontline migration officials, who have their own bureaucratic priorities and political agendas [101], as the next section will discuss.

6. Deviations in local implementation

Concomitant with China's repositioning of student migrants from "sea turtles" to "grassroots ambassadors," Chinese students increasingly faced espionage allegations and strict political scrutiny around the world, including Europe [102], the United States [103], Canada [104], Japan [105], and Taiwan [106]. Chinese students were accused of stealing technological innovations and acting as the long arm of China's intelligence machine into foreign campuses [107]. Despite largely speculative allegations [108], these widespread suspicions thrust the supposedly close political ties between Chinese overseas students and the Chinese state into the international limelight.

My grounded empirical research reveals, however, that the reality of state-student relations may be more complicated than the rhetorical flourish in the West suggests. China's geopolitics-oriented top-level strategies have not been fully translated into grassroots migration officials' implementation on the ground. In interviews, bureaucrats in Qingtian County, for example, still attached most importance to overseas students' *economic* and *governmental* benefits in boosting

the local economy and maintaining political stability, while downplaying the national grand plan's *geopolitical* reorientation. For instance, a senior OSFA member in Fengsheng Prefecture told me about its three institutional goals:

> First, to serve overseas students. We are part of the united front. In the eyes of the UFWD, overseas students are a group of potential threats that need to be reined in (*guanshu*). Therefore, the OSFA gathers overseas students to let them feel the care and love from the government. Second, we create a platform where we can meet more friends with similar backgrounds and experiences of studying abroad. We also serve as a launching pad where we can share information about business and entrepreneurial opportunities. Third, the government needs to hear the voice of overseas students and better understand their ideological status quo.

Thus, while first and third goals of the OSFA in Fengsheng point to the *governmental* dimension of student migration politics, the second goal is *economic* in nature. To illustrate the *economic* yields from student returnees, both actual and desired, bureaucrat interviewees analogized their work as "brokering the coupling between 'brains' (*naodai*) and 'deep pockets' (*qiandai*)." To stay economically competitive, Qingtian County and Fengsheng Prefecture joined other Chinese cities in a fierce "scramble for talent" (*qiangren dazhan*) by trying to entice student returnees with privileges in social welfare and citizenship benefits [109].

What was more concerning for migration officials at the time of my fieldwork was overseas students' potential *security* threats. In Summer 2019, university students led Hong Kong citizens to protest against the introduction of a controversial extradition bill that would allegedly jeopardize the territory's judicial independence from Mainland China [110]. A bureaucrat interviewee told me that young students' active participation in pro-democracy campaigns in Hong Kong had sparked state concerns over these youth movements' potential spill-over effects onto the mainland,

> History tells us that young students are passionate, hot-blooded, and agitative. If they fight against us, they could become very destructive. We should learn lessons from what's happening in Hong Kong. We need to influence their minds. Let them see the real China that is different from how it is presented in the West.

Seeing overseas students as a possible threat to local political stability, the diaspora apparatus spared no effort to prioritize the *governmental* objectives in the implementation of overseas student policy. As a member of Qingtian County's OFSA shared,

> We all know why the UFWD needs an organization like the OSFA – to keep overseas students under control. When we plan activities, we are told to gauge the appropriateness of the events from the perspective of the Party. We had to consider the CPC's taste.

Another OSFA member complained to me that some officers from the Bureau of State Security, which is China's intelligence and secret police agency, were secretly monitoring their events: "It's only a casual gathering of overseas students. Why did they send spies to watch us? Are we going to topple the government, or what?"

Compared to these *economic* and *governmental* interests, the rising *geopolitical* goal in national policies was rather poorly received among street-level officials in Qingtian County. When asked if they also perceived overseas students as "grassroots ambassadors," a bureaucrat interviewee pointed out the local state's lack of interest in broader geopolitical issues: "People who make national policies are big-picture thinkers (*da geju*). In this small county, we are more concerned about matters that have direct local impacts." Other bureaucrat interviewees also expressed their stronger enthusiasm for OSM policies' *economic* and *governmental* effects, while showing little motivation in pursuing such policies' *geopolitical* goals. In comparison to economic prosperity and political stability that topped the local political agenda, the geopolitical leverage of the Chinese nation as a whole seemed tangential to grassroots bureaucratic interests.

In China's fragmented administrative structure, despite the national government's enormous power in policy design and coordination, national policies rely on the implementation by local governments [111]. While adhering to the top-down policymaking in principle, grassroots bureaucrats enjoyed a high degree of autonomy in adjusting national policies based on specific conditions and local interests on the ground. This decentralized bureaucratic setup leads to what FitzGerald (2008) calls the "pluralist" diaspora politics featured by street-level migration officials' flexible improvisation in their day-to-day operation. In Qingtian County, local bureaucrats kept prioritizing OSM policies' *economic* and *governmental* impacts, regardless of the growing emphasis on *geopolitics* in national strategies. In addition, student migrants' own responses to this geopolitical orientation also varied significantly, as evidenced by my ethnography in three state-organized summer retreats for overseas students.

7. Encounters and collisions in summer trips

A trademark activity of China's expanding diaspora affairs apparatus is summer trips for overseas youths of all age groups. In 2019 alone, over 23,000 overseas teenagers of Chinese descent from 75 countries took part in the so-called "root-seeking tours" (*xungen zhilü*) (FROC 2019). These trips bear a striking resemblance to the diaspora tourism organized in Israel [112], Morocco [113], and Scotland [114]. As Louie (2004) points out in an ethnography of Chinese diasporic youth festivals, these political rituals aim to inculcate ethnonational and cultural bonds between diasporic descendants and home states.

Lesser known in the diaspora tourism literature are summer trips for the more mature population of tertiary students abroad. Compared to diasporic teenagers, tertiary students' upbringing in China and education in Western liberal democracies later in life mean that they tend

to be more concerned and even critical about Chinese politics [115]. In contrast to the ethno-cultural orientation of youth festivals examined by Louie (2004), the summer trips I observed were more political and ideological in nature, aimed at forging student migrants' political attitudes along the Party line. These retreats provided the mundane encounters in which migration bureaucrats tried to build political rapport with student migrants and achieve the multiple goals behind OSM policies.

On the summer trips I observed, each day, the guides whisked participants off to a whirlwind of activities and banquets. The paramount theme of all three summer trips, however, was red tourism (*hongse lüyou*), that is, state-promoted tours to revolutionary sites commemorating the CPC's heroic figures and victorious events. During these trips, we visited eight red destination sites. To set the tone, each trip began with a visit to a red museum. We visited the August 1st Nanchang Uprising Memorial on the exact date of August 1, 2019, to commemorate the 92nd anniversary of the birth of the CPC armed force. All participants were required to wear red T-shirts with the CPC's hammer-and-sickle emblem and the English caption of "stay calm and believe in communism." In other museums, we were asked to perform a myriad of patriotic rituals, such as giving full 90-degree bows to a tomb where a famous CPC general was buried, singing red songs, and sending flowers to a monument of martyred CPC soldiers in the Anti-Japanese War.

Some participants, however, clad in T-shirts of luxurious foreign brands and coated with thick layers of sunscreen, seemed out of place in these sites designated to memorialize the hardship and endurance of CPC war heroes. When discussing the purpose of conducting red tourism in what they originally thought to be more relaxing summer trips, participant interviewees were fully aware that they were perhaps seen as *security* threats. A student interviewee said resignedly,

> In their eyes, we are Western educated (*he yangmoshui*, or literally "drink foreign ink"). We have been influenced by the West, so we are "dangerous" and become the target for the united front.

Participant interviewees were also cognizant of their value in public diplomacy, as one said, "They see us as not only economic resources but also a business card [through which China can be introduced to the West]." In addition to party ideologies, summer trips sought to present a positive image of China vis-à-vis its allegedly negative media representation in the West. We, for instance, visited numerous pristine mountains and heritage villages, learned the traditional seven-string musical instrument of *guqin*, practiced the ancient physical exercise of Five-Animal Play (*wuqin xi*), and ate fresh, local cuisines in fine restaurants. A student interviewee astutely pointed out the rationale behind these arrangements:

> In Western media, China has all kinds of problems: economic slowdown, environmental degradation, food insecurity, lost traditions, money worship, you name it. But here, they show us how awesome the environment is. There's not so much pollution. All we see are beautiful rivers, green mountains, and well-organized villages. They also present historical heroes to show the greatness of the Chinese people. They teach us traditional musical instruments and physical exercises to show that traditions are well protected. We also eat clean, organic food. They guided us to factories and companies where business is booming. All in all, the past, the present, and the future of China, everything is great. This is also the narrative they want us to use when describing China to our friends abroad.

In fact, many student participants signed up for these trips because everything was free and because they could meet new friends during the summer break. Beneath the benevolent appearance of "free tours," however, was the political agenda of implanting favorable perceptions about China. A further *geopolitical* goal was to feed student migrants with publicity materials and to motivate them to "tell good stories of China" (*jianghao zhongguo gushi*) abroad.

This *geopolitical* vision seemed to be better received among student participants who intended to return to China after graduation, especially those who aspired to join the state bureaucracy. When asked whether they resonated with trip activities, some student interviewees told me that they were quite familiar with this style of political indoctrination throughout their upbringing when they were members of the Young Pioneers of China and the Communist Youth League of China, two youth organizations affiliated with the CPC. "It's just how things work in China," an interviewee said indifferently.

In comparison, the freedom of information abroad had shaped other participants' more independent understanding of China, which, in their own words, could hardly be affected by "a five-day propaganda trip." They performed political rituals during the trips only to "get over it" (*yingfu*). As one participant commented,

> I went studying abroad since high school and read George Orwell's novels *1984* and *Animal Farm*. I sometimes intentionally fight back against the history that the Party had taught me. So it's meaningless that they try again to instill this version of history during the trip. But everything's free. What else can I complain about?

Some student participants developed a deeper aversion to the trips' embedded political agenda because they now had insider knowledge of the CPC's "inner workings." In particular, the formalistic (*xingshi zhuyi*) nature of these trips annoyed many participants. After visiting each site, participants were asked to take group pictures holding red banners with the titles of each trip or patriotic slogans. Many group photos were taken outdoors in the scorching summer heat. Trip organizers repeatedly apologized by saying, "Hold on for a bit longer! This is the last photo today." To give the false impression that we visited more sites of red tourism than we actually did, organizers shrewdly took several group photos at the same location by changing the banners,

reorganizing participants' standing positions, and using different shooting angles. "Just like we submit assignments to teachers, they also have to report to their bosses," participant interviewees explained to me.

Occasionally, student participants openly expressed their disaffection. For instance, we visited a museum in Fengsheng Prefecture that celebrated the "international friendship" showcased by local villagers who saved the life of a Japan-bound American pilot near the end of WWII. When we were walking uphill to the museum, the guide mentioned that there would be air conditioning. Exhausted in the sweltering heat, participants yelled with great excitement. The guide asked disappointedly, "Is A/C really the most important thing about the museum?" Participants laughed loudly without saying aloud that they were rather unconcerned with the museum's content.

When we arrived at the museum, few were interested in the exhibition, and most participants lined up to play an entertainment flight simulator. Preoccupied with maneuvering a crash landing in WWII, they appeared aloof to the villagers' proclaimed courage and international solidarity on display, not to mention their desired *geopolitical* role as "grassroots ambassadors." Personal leisure and entertaining desires outweighed the political agenda throughout these mundane encounters between student migrants and state projects.

8. Conclusion

Following the rise of global student migration, studies on international student migration/mobility have grown substantially across education and migration literature [116]. Existing scholarship mostly focuses on four actors involved in ISM: students and their families, Western universities, receiving countries, and the education-migration industry. In contrast, sending

countries and how their policies shape, regulate, and strategize about overseas students have been relatively overlooked [117].

This chapter foregrounds sending countries' perspectives by examining China's outbound student migration policy through the conceptual framework of diaspora politics. Drawing on Adamson and Tsourapas (2020), I propose a typology to account for three policy objectives in student migration politics: economic, governmental, and geopolitical. The *economic* model emphasizes student migration's developmental effects in boosting the home economy through financial remittances, knowledge transfer, and return migration. The *governmental* model highlights the security concerns of sending states, many of which are ruled by non-democratic regimes, aimed at co-opting overseas students into political compliance. The *geopolitical* model treats overseas students as para-diplomats in expanding home countries' global clout and soft power in host countries.

Based on a comparative analysis of policy and ethnographic evidence, I further argue that the relative significance of these interests tends to both change over time and differ across administrative levels. As I show, since the PRC's founding, *economic* and *governmental* interests alternated to dominate in China's OSM policies, depending on the country's specific socioeconomic and political contexts. The past decade, however, has witnessed the steady rise of *geopolitical* considerations under the incumbent leadership of Xi Jinping, as OSM policies have been incorporated into China's broader diaspora politics and global soft power strategies.

Nevertheless, the changing national policy interest may not resonate with all local migration bureaucrats or student migrants. Drawing on evidence from interviews and ethnography, I present the complex politics of OSM as a dynamic field where local improvisation adapts national grand plans for grassroots interests and individual desires take advantage of state projects. I find

that while the national emphasis has increasingly moved toward the *geopolitical* objective, street-level bureaucrats still pay more attention to OSM's *economic* and *governmental* impacts, due to the latter's closer connections to local issues. Furthermore, student interviewees diverged in terms of their attitudes toward their designated role as "grassroots ambassadors" for China's growing soft power project in host countries. Among student participants in three state-organized summer retreats that I observed, while those who intended to return to China after graduation and join the state government were more receptive to their delegated political roles, most student interviewees were rather indifferent or even averse to the ritualistic inculcation of their alleged responsibility of conducting public diplomacy for a rising China.

Through a close examination of the real-world encounters between migration officials and student migrants, this chapter advances the burgeoning scholarship on diaspora institutions [118] in the localized contexts of China. At the confluence of FitzGerald's (2008) theorization of "pluralist" diaspora politics and Lieberthal's (1992) classic thesis on China's fragmented political structure, I provide first-hand evidence on the decentralization of Chinese OSM politics. The multilevel governance of OSM brings about the dynamic interplay and negotiation between the central state and street-level officials in defining their variegated bureaucratic interests. As China's diaspora affairs apparatus has undergone considerable transformations in recent years [119], this chapter serves as a point of departure for finer-grained insights into the complex operation of diaspora governance on the ground.

Following Adamson and Tsourapas's (2020) footsteps to break away from the immigration bias and Western-centrism in migration studies, this chapter also advances the theorization of ISM, with China, the largest sending country of student migrants, as the primary frame of reference. Although the central state policy on OSM may not accomplish as much as it has hoped, the robust

evolution of economic, governmental, and geopolitical goals in different macrohistorical environments testifies to OSM's significant role as an integral part of China's broader socioeconomic and geopolitical strategies.

Additionally, this chapter enriches our knowledge of diaspora tourism and birthright trips [120] by investigating how China adopts a similar approach to a migrant population who has not yet become "diasporic" per se. To establish a conceptual bridge between diaspora and ISM studies, I push forward the constructivist turn in diaspora studies [121] and give more weight to the dynamic processes whereby overseas students are imagined and positioned in changing diaspora politics. In doing so, and steering away from the prevailing focus on neoliberalism in ISM studies [122], I redirect scholarly attention to the role of nation-states, especially sending countries, in repositioning and re-strategizing about international students. While neoliberal education and labor immigration policies in destination countries constitute the necessary pull factors for ISM's continuous rise [123], sending states may also seize the opportunity to tap into overseas students' economic, governmental, and geopolitical effects both within and beyond state boundaries. This chapter, thus, recenters sending countries in ISM literature and highlights the "migrant" dimension in the hyphenated figure of "student-migrants" [124].

More broadly, these findings deepen our understanding of state-student relations at a time when Chinese overseas students have been accused of espionage activities by destination countries [125]. Admittedly, the ongoing geopolitical reorientation in China's OSM policies at the national level signals the central state's desire for closer political ties with student migrants. However, my grounded empirical research indicates that this geopolitics-oriented policy realignment received divergent recognitions among local bureaucrats tasked with enforcing national policies on a day-to-day basis and student participants in state-organized trips.

A more nuanced picture of the relationship between the Chinese state and overseas students requires moving beyond both prevalent sinophobic sentiments among Western politicians and rhetorical flourish in political grand plans. Migration scholars should take overseas students as the central frame to uncover their own agency and voices vis-à-vis the homeland state's top-down designation [126]. This chapter also calls for more ethnographic insights into the actual processes through which diaspora policies are carried out in their quotidian operation. While home countries have increasingly reached out to emigrants and pursued more assertive "diaspora governance" [127], we need more grounded research to examine migrants' agential responses and street-level migration bureaucrats' local improvisation.

Chapter 4, in full, is a reprint of Liu, Jiaqi M. 2022. "When Diaspora Politics Meet Global Ambitions: Diaspora Institutions Amid China's Geopolitical Transformations." *International Migration Review* 56(4): 1255-79.

[1] King and Raghuram, "International Student Migration"; Brooks and Waters, *Student Mobilities, Migration and the Internationalization of Higher Education*; Kell and Vogl, *International Students in the Asia Pacific*.
[2] UNESCO, "Education: Outbound Internationally Mobile Students by Host Region."
[3] Institute of International Education, "Economic Impact of International Students."
[4] I use the terms "overseas students" and "student migrants" interchangeably. The Chinese official phraseology, however, only uses "overseas students" (*liuxuesheng*).
[5] Ma, *Ambitious and Anxious*.
[6] Xiang and Shen, "International Student Migration and Social Stratification in China."
[7] Fong, *Paradise Redefined*.
[8] Kell and Vogl, *International Students in the Asia Pacific*.
[9] Lan, "State-Mediated Brokerage System in China's Self-Funded Study Abroad Market."

[10] Brooks and Waters, *Student Mobilities, Migration and the Internationalization of Higher Education*; Robertson, *Transnational Student-Migrants and the State*.
[11] There is a growing body of literature on China's increasingly welcoming policies toward inbound student migrants, especially those from countries along the so-called "Belt and Road" Wen and Hu, "The Emergence of a Regional Education Hub.". To clarify, this article's focus lies in state policies toward Chinese students who study abroad.
[12] Adamson and Tsourapas, "The Migration State in the Global South," September 1, 2020.
[13] Gribble, "Policy Options for Managing International Student Migration."
[14] Fish, "Were They Lost Students or Inept Spies for China?"; Quan, "'Significant and Clear' Threat"; Osaki, "Japan Boosts Screening of Chinese Students amid Fears of Campus Espionage"; Reuters, "Taiwan Detains Chinese Student in Unusual Suspected Spying Case."
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[22] Lan and Wu, "Exceptional Membership and Liminal Space of Identity"; Brooks and Waters, *Student Mobilities, Migration and the Internationalization of Higher Education*; Hawthorne, "How Valuable Is 'Two-Step Migration'?"
[23] Findlay, "An Assessment of Supply and Demand-Side Theorizations of International Student Mobility"; Baas, "The Education-Migration Industry"; Beech, "Adapting to Change in the Higher Education System"; Lan, "State-Mediated Brokerage System in China's Self-Funded Study Abroad Market"; Tuxen and Robertson, "Brokering International Education and (Re)Producing Class in Mumbai."
[24] Waters, "Transnational Family Strategies and Education in the Contemporary Chinese Diaspora."
[25] Robertson, *Transnational Student-Migrants and the State*, 18; Xiang and Shen, "International Student Migration and Social Stratification in China."
[26] Kell and Vogl, *International Students in the Asia Pacific*, 7.
[27] Robertson, *Transnational Student-Migrants and the State*.
[28] Brooks and Waters, *Student Mobilities, Migration and the Internationalization of Higher Education*, 67.
[29] Riaño, Mol, and Raghuram, "New Directions in Studying Policies of International Student Mobility and Migration."
[30] Adamson and Tsourapas, "The Migration State in the Global South," September 1, 2020.
[31] King and Raghuram, "International Student Migration"; Riaño, Mol, and Raghuram, "New Directions in Studying Policies of International Student Mobility and Migration."
[32] Hawthorne, "How Valuable Is 'Two-Step Migration'?"
[33] Riaño, Mol, and Raghuram, "New Directions in Studying Policies of International Student Mobility and Migration."
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[39] Tuxen and Robertson, "Brokering International Education and (Re)Producing Class in Mumbai."
[40] Gribble, "Policy Options for Managing International Student Migration."
[41] Zweig and Wang, "Can China Bring Back the Best?"; Xiang, "A Ritual Economy of 'Talent.'"
[42] Del Sordi, "Sponsoring Student Mobility for Development and Authoritarian Stability."
[43] Gamlen, *Human Geopolitics*.
[44] Zweig and Wang, "Can China Bring Back the Best?"; Xiang, "A Ritual Economy of 'Talent.'"
[45] Liu, "Diasporic Placemaking," December 29, 2020.

[46] Sheffer, *Diaspora Politics*, 245.
[47] Liu, "Diasporic Placemaking," December 29, 2020.
[48] Gamlen, *Human Geopolitics*.
[49] FitzGerald, *A Nation of Emigrants*; Gamlen, *Human Geopolitics*; Ho, *Citizens in Motion*.
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[51] Zweig and Wang, "Can China Bring Back the Best?"; Xiang, "A Ritual Economy of 'Talent.'"
[52] Saxenian, "From Brain Drain to Brain Circulation."
[53] Saxenian.
[54] Del Sordi, "Sponsoring Student Mobility for Development and Authoritarian Stability."
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[56] Brooks and Waters, *Student Mobilities, Migration and the Internationalization of Higher Education*.
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[61] Adamson and Tsourapas, "The Migration State in the Global South," September 1, 2020; Gamlen, *Human Geopolitics*.
[62] Lieberthal, "Introduction: The 'fragmented Authoritarianism' Model and Its Limitations."
[63] Ma, *Ambitious and Anxious*.
[64] To protect the confidentiality of my bureaucrat interviewees and student respondents, Qingtian County and Fengsheng Prefecture are pseudonyms.
[65] Liu, "Diasporic Placemaking," December 29, 2020; Liu, "Citizenship on the Move," February 17, 2021.
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[67] Ma, *Ambitious and Anxious*.
[68] Tavory and Timmermans, *Abductive Analysis*.
[69] Cheng and Miao, "Reviews on the Sixty-Year History of Chinese Studying Abroad (1949-2009)[出国留学六十年若干问题的回顾与思考 (1949—2009 年)]."
[70] Zhang and Liu, "The Historical Evolution and Basic Experiences of the Opening-up Policies of Higher Education during the Seventy Years since the Foundation of P.R.China in 1949[新中国成立七十年来高等教育对外开放政策的历史演进与基本经验]."
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[73] Li.
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[94] Xiang, "A Ritual Economy of 'Talent'"; Zweig and Wang, "Can China Bring Back the Best?"
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[97] Ho, *Citizens in Motion*.
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Conclusion

This dissertation argues that China's growing efforts of governing diasporas abroad do not give rise to absolute homeland control but provide new platforms for more dynamic state-diaspora interactions and contestations. I theorize this process as transborder state-building to highlight how institutional, technological, and discursive infrastructures contribute to closer, albeit contentious, state-citizens relations across borders. While traditional neo-Weberian studies focus on the domestic process of state-building within state territories, I extend its scope to the cross-border arena by examining the impacts of Global China on the transborder interplay between state and non-state actors, including the central Chinese state, local bureaucrats, diaspora elites, and ordinary emigrants. Transborder state-building does not mark a complete departure from the fusion of population, territory, and sovereignty that undergirds the international state system. Rather, this expansive project reterritorializes political authority over emigrant citizens from afar and redefines Chinese diasporas' relations with home and host countries in contexts of global geopolitical transformations. As China aspires to move from the semi-periphery to the center of the world order, the impacts of this geopolitical shift reach far beyond the macro-level high-politics and deeply into the everyday lives of grassroots officials in Chinese diaspora hometowns and ordinary emigrants in host societies.

Methodologically, I carry out a relational ethnography to foreground the reciprocal exchange between various sociopolitical actors. By highlighting the agency of grassroots actors in improvising national policies and taking advantage of an ambitious homeland state, I avoid taking China's global outreach and transnational repression for granted and present a more fine-grained picture of Global China as a contested practice shaped by multiple, and often conflicting, interests. This nuanced understanding advances the existing research on Global China by placing diasporas

and migration politics at the center of analysis. I show that the influence of a rising China is not limited to overseas investments and infrastructure projects but also lies in how less visible channels of diaspora institutions, digital technologies, and political discourses reshape the territorial boundaries of state-citizen interactions in a transborder space.

Against the media sensation and political hyperbole surrounding Chinese migrants' homeland connections, this dissertation promotes a humanistic mandate to rethink migrants not as voiceless geopolitical pawns but as agential actors who negotiate with the homeland expansion in their day-to-day liaisons and tap into the benefits of Global China to confront racial and ethnic discrimination in host countries. Although China's politicization of Chinese diasporas led to disastrous results during the Maoist era, the contemporary administration runs the risk of re-politicizing emigrants by incorporating them into the core strategies of geopolitical dominance. However, I also avoid solely blaming China's predatory diaspora policy. By detailing the mechanisms of migrants' status loss and symbolic remittances, I show that the persistent social marginalization in host society often constitutes the primary cause that pushes Chinese migrants to seek homeland support in the first place. Despite being caught in the political crossfire and long-running racism, Chinese migrants carve out a new path of transborder belonging.

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