

Shelly Chan. *Diaspora's Homeland: Modern China in the Age of Global Migration*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2018.

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In *Diaspora's Homeland*, Shelly Chan weaves a captivating narrative of overseas Chinese people and offers a convincing argument for engaging diaspora theory by introducing the concepts of “diaspora time” and “diaspora moments.” Challenging nation-centered and nation time-centered historical narratives, she suggests that diaspora “served to unify a fragmented time and space,” creating the nucleus where the “homeland-nation” could take root. (9-10) In other words, diaspora and nation were operating in tandem even though they functioned in different, sometimes conflicting, temporalities and geographies. It was Chinese emigrants and returnees and their long negotiation with the Chinese state that “turned China into a diaspora’s homeland” (185).

The book’s greatest strength is its temporal and spatial vision. Shelly Chan casts aside traditional watersheds, offering instead unexpected juxtapositions and a unique chronology informed by diasporic time, which she defines as “the diverse, ongoing ways in which migration affects the lifeworlds of individuals, families, and communities” (12). Her cases range from intellectual debates on coolie migration and the lifting of the emigration ban in the late nineteenth century, to the role of Confucianism at Xiamen University in the early twentieth, to wives of sojourners and homecomings in the early People’s Republic in Guangdong. To help digest these disparate, but connected cases, Chan draws from the work of Asian-American studies, diaspora studies, gender analysis, cultural studies, maritime history, and temporal studies. She brings new evidence and ideas for each case she examines, but it is the combination of these diasporic moments that makes the monograph so special.

In a field that is dominated by spatial frameworks, Chan makes the case for time. Central to her vision is the idea of “diaspora moments,” or periods of “rupture, transformation, and recombination” that upended not just diasporic time, but also national time, socialist time, and other temporal frameworks (185). Chan highlights, for instance, how returned overseas Chinese, or *guiqiao*, represented a unique threat to socialist time because, having come from “capitalist” colonies or recently independent nation-states, they were on a different temporal plane than their socialist comrades (148). In some ways, Chan suggests that their ability to adapt to these ruptures defined the Chinese diaspora(s).

In the first chapter, Shelly Chan adopts a new vantage point to explore the politics of the Chinese coolie experience and the Qing elimination of its emigration ban in 1893. By linking state efforts to aid indentured servants and encourage their return to China with the larger Qing modernizing mission, Chan argues that Chinese sovereignty was

created “during China’s encounter with the indentured labor trade” (31). In the next two chapters, Chan proceeds to the early twentieth century, exploring the academic output of Jinan University scholars and the Confucian revivalism of Lim Boon Keng respectively. Chan shows how intellectuals from Jinan University in Shanghai “recombined Chinese, Japanese, and European thought to refashion the Chinese nation and identity” (70). Chan’s chapter on Confucian revivalism and the intellectual debates at Xiamen University, expand on her earlier treatment of the subject in previous research. In both chapters, Chan examines how education linked the homeland and diaspora.

In the final two chapters, Shelly Chan moves to the People’s Republic, exploring how party cadres, wives of overseas Chinese, and *guiqiao* negotiated divergent values, experiences, and expectations. Overseas Chinese and mainland socialist revolutionaries operated on completely different temporal and cultural planes, yet party cadres made some unexpected concessions for overseas Chinese and their families. Many wives of overseas Chinese, for example, maneuvered to remain married to their husbands overseas despite the unlikelihood of their return because the women did not like the alternative of remarrying locally and losing remittances and status (130-31). Later, for their part, party officials recalibrated their strategy by aligning with those very women who wanted to remain married and demanding conjugal loyalty from those who did not. The driving motivation for the cadres, as with the wives, was undoubtedly encouraging remittances and investment from overseas compatriots (141). Chan highlights a similar instance of socialist-diaspora negotiation well in the final chapter where she traces how state officials gradually shifted strategies from encouraging overseas Chinese to return by building luxurious utopian villages for them to forcing returnees of all stature to do hard labor.

It is unfair to demand more from a book as ambitious as *Diaspora’s Homeland*, so instead of critiquing what some might consider missing connections, I will instead point out a few areas where Chan or other scholars can pick up the metaphorical baton moving forward. By starting in the 1850s and paying only lip service to earlier migrations, Chan unintentionally reinforces the notion that Chinese diaspora(s) depended on European, American, and Japanese imperial interventions. Perhaps scholars could expand the timeline and explore what might qualify as earlier “diaspora moments,” such as Zheng He’s intervention in Melaka in the fifteenth century or coastal depopulation of the southeast during the Ming-Qing transition. Additionally, while engaging with Asian-American studies is already demanding enough, we could learn much by comparing Chinese coolies with their counterparts from South Asia, Southeast Asia, and beyond. In light of recent scholarship on anti-Chinese and anti-communist movements in Southeast Asia, it might also be instructive to see more on the ground from the adopted homelands of overseas Chinese who traveled “back” to China in the 1950s (170). Although homecomings

often entailed misunderstandings, frustrations, and sometimes violence, remaining in Southeast Asia sometimes turned out much worse.

It is doubtless that many critics of diaspora, especially those who research overseas Chinese, will remain unsatisfied with Chan's use of this concept and "greater China" due to the tendency of the terms to portray the overseas Chinese experience as a monolith (191). Though it is nitpicking, Chan also largely overlooks a central theme to the mission of Jinan scholars in her second chapter. While her research on the scholars is crucial to our recognition of the role of Chinese researchers in theorizing overseas Chinese and colonialism, Chan's emphasis on Chinese engagement with Japanese, European, and the American discourses in some ways overlooks the agency of the colonized. In other words, Southeast Asians are missing from Chan's chapter on Chinese research on Southeast Asia and overseas Chinese.

The contributions of this book far outweigh any of the obligatory nitpicking mentioned above. Shelly Chan masterfully rewrites the history of China and the overseas Chinese experience, contributing what will no doubt be the theoretically inspiring and highly cited concepts of diaspora time and diaspora moments. Her monograph is just the starting point. As Chan observes in her conclusion, diaspora time is only one of many temporalities that researchers can explore. She points out, for instance, that the much maligned "floating population," which has moved to urban china in large numbers in the past decades, mostly operates on a different time than either diaspora or homeland, and new research is needed to fit their experience into a more comprehensive migration theory (189-90). Furthermore, calling the present another potential "diaspora moment," Chan hints at the continued relevance of her theory. And finally, with her eye toward the present and the future, Chan notes how using the lens of diaspora helps us see the nation as "multispatial, polyrhythmic, and always incomplete" (195). Chan thereby questions not only the logic and permanence of the nation in the twentieth century, but also in the present.