

International Conference on
Population and Development in Asia: Critical Issues for a Sustainable Future
20 – 22 March 2006, Phuket, Thailand

Abstract

Chinese Migration and Relations among the Overseas Chinese in the Asia Pacific Region

Christine INGLIS
Multicultural and Migration Research Centre, RIAP,
University of Sydney, Australia

Fifty years after the Chinese revolution, there is once again Chinese migration to the Asia Pacific Region. Political and economic changes in China, as well as in the now independent countries in the region, have significantly changed the patterns of Chinese migration. The rapid economic development of China has meant that China and its population now view overseas countries as major markets for Chinese products and, at the same time, major destinations for Chinese businessmen, students, tourists and, potentially, permanent migrants. No longer are the Chinese arriving in the Asia Pacific Region the often poor and unskilled migrants of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Now they have extensive human and financial capital. They also often come as representatives of business seeking trade and investment. While the People's Republic of China is a major source of these Chinese flows, there are also flows of Chinese from Taiwan into the region.

Given the competition between the two Chinas in the political as well as the economic sphere, the potential exists for these two flows of new Chinese arrivals to be competing with each other for influence and access to resources, including in areas such as forestry and fishing, as well as general trade and investment. At the same time, the new flows of Chinese (from both Taiwan and mainland China) come to countries with significant populations of ethnic Chinese who, after more than 50 years of settlement outside China, finds themselves re-establishing contact with ethnic Chinese from China. Their shared Chinese background is widely viewed by many overseas Chinese as giving them particular advantages in establishing economic relations with China. Yet, the path to economic success in China is not necessarily either easy or successful as China itself has developed significantly in the last half century. Relations between the new migratory flows from China and the longer established Chinese populations in the Asia Pacific region also have problematic dimensions as both the new comers and the existing Chinese communities find that assumptions about shared ethnicity facilitating productive and harmonious relationships are often realised more in the abstract than in reality.

Over half a century of significant change in China and the Asia Pacific region have had a major impact on both the overseas Chinese and those from China. These changes also

coexist with the competition between China and Taiwan for the support of overseas Chinese, as well as foreign governments. The combined effect of these developments is that now is an appropriate point to re-examine the dynamics of Chinese population flows to the Asia Pacific Region from the perspective of their social, economic and political impact on the overseas Chinese. This presentation will first of all outline some of the major dimensions of the changes in Chinese population flows in the APR before examining in more detail their impact on the existing Chinese populations from the perspective of social and political as well as economic sustainability.