Editors' Note

This issue of JCO contains five articles, covering the complex histories, cultures, politics, and lives of the Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asia, Australia, and North America. One way or another, they are all concerned with a central issue associated with the multi-dimensional relationships between the diaspora and the ancestral homeland.

The issue opens with Lam Lap's "Poetic Record of Local Customs: Bamboo Branch Verses of Singapore (1888–1941)," which is about a unique genre of Chinese literary culture in colonial Singapore and Malaya. This poetic genre was called *zhuzhici* or "Bamboo Branch Verse." It depicted local customs, cultures, and the diasporic experiences of the people. It had a folksong origin that was traditionally used by literati writers to describe local folkways and secular love in exotic places. After reviewing the tradition of *zhuzhici* writing and establishing its generic distinctiveness, the author examines how poets used *zhuzhici* for social criticisms and to reflect upon the colorful and complex *Nanyang* [Southeast Asian] cultures. The author argues that in applying *zhuzhici* to record the exotic elements of *Nanyang*, immigrant writers effectively demonstrated the genre's adaptability and flexibility in handling new contents and neologisms. The year 2019 marks the bicentennial of the founding of modern Singapore, this article is a timely reminder of the importance of understanding colonial Singapore beyond the conventional lens of colonists, coolie and businessmen and of incorporating the literati into our analysis. It also points to a fruitful direction of placing cultural developments of the Chinese diaspora in a comparative framework of transregional studies.

Connections between diasporic Chinese and China go far beyond the cultural and literary arena, and ethnic ties have been intertwined with politics and economy. Peter Post's article, "Bringing China to Java: The Oei Tiong Ham Concern and Chen Kung Po during the Nanjing Decade," deals with such complex diaspora-homeland linkages by studying the Oei Tiong Ham Concern, one of the largest ethnic Chinese enterprises in colonial Southeast Asia, and Chen Kung Po, the Finance Minister of the Republic of China during the Nanjing era (1928–1936). The article also examines the close collaboration between the Dutch-educated Peranakan and China-born Totok Chinese business elites of Java to improve economic relations between China and Java. Disputing the conventional wisdom in explaining the logics and dynamics of overseas Chinese

networks, Post argues that the discourse on political citizenship, education, language use and Chinese nationalism “has little value in explaining the workings of ethnic Chinese business networks.” Instead, the quest for transnational economic citizenship served as a key driver for the Oei Tiong Ham Concern’s leadership in establishing autonomy by allying with the nation-state builders in China.

The role of China in shaping diasporic Chinese in the contemporary era could be understood from another angle. Louise Edwards’ “Victims, Apologies, and the Chinese in Australia” examines recent public debates in Australia about Chinese overseas and the actions by members of the Chinese community in seeking official apologies for historic and current injustices. The author argues that these calls demonstrate the operation of race-based, *xuetong* unity among Chinese overseas and the linkage to China as the representative of all Chinese interests. In her opinion, while the claim to unique humiliation or unique victim status by the Chinese under biologized notions of ethnicity may build bonds with government officials, it may alienate other minority communities, which in turn might cause harm to the Chinese living in multicultural Australia.

Kian Cheng Lee’s research report, “Negotiating Diplomacy: Forging Thai-Sino Relations through Interactive Business Workshops,” approaches the complex relationships between Thailand and China from the perspective of non-state actors. The author maintains that non-state actors could negotiate cultural diplomacy by facilitating Thai-Sino bilateral interactions while seeking mutual benefits. This report adopts an interventional approach to encourage interactions between PRC Chinese transnational entrepreneurs and Thai entrepreneurs and other interested parties through business-themed workshops that go beyond the conventional China-centricity. The author also discusses how research data could be established through interviews and participatory observations from the workshops and calls for state support to non-state actors who facilitate cultural diplomacy.

Jeannie Chen’s research report, “‘Strangers from a Different Shore’: Examining Archival Representations and Descriptions of the Chinese in America,” discusses archival representations of the Chinese in America in collections dating from before and during the Chinese Exclusion era (1860–1943), both in mainstream institutional archives/special collections repositories and in community-based archives. By using critical race theory as a methodological framework, the author highlights a continued lack for transparency surrounding archival descriptions and archival representations and an uneven distribution of resources pertaining to early Chinese in America. She also identifies the

difficulties of balancing evolving terminologies and changing archival descriptive standards/technology, and calls for collaboration among bibliographers, catalogers, archivists, historians and activists in creating archival descriptions in collections about the Chinese in America.

As always, we thank our authors, referees, reviewers, and readers for their valuable contributions. We also thank Professor Gregor Benton for his meticulous copy-editing and instrumental suggestions on JCO's accepted manuscripts. We encourage scholars from different disciplines to continue their effort in promoting the study of Chinese overseas by submitting their original and innovative works to JCO. We also welcome readers' feedback and constructive critiques. For more information about JCO and the Chinese Heritage Centre at Nanyang Technological University, please visit our website at <http://www.brill.com/jco> or <http://chc.ntu.edu.sg>.

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Co-Editors