In describing long-distance nationalism, Benedict Anderson argued that values and information flowed from the outside to the inside.\(^1\) As such, the OC play a key role in shaping the political and cultural future of China by transmitting Western values and ideologies back to their place of origin.\(^2\) They are able to use international relations, technology, and legislation to maximize, exploit, and manage their relationship with China for their own welfare, protection, and economic advancement. The OC can act as bridges between East and West, as resources for China to draw upon in order to strengthen itself, or as defenders of Western or Chinese ideals.\(^3\) Ultimately, the OC are either challengers or supporters of homeland policies.\(^4\) They are therefore a potentially influential force to promote liberal values, together with freedom of thought and speech within China.\(^5\) Could the OC usher democratic reform within China as some commentators have predicted?

In 1989, American scholar Francis Fukuyama contended that Western-educated PRC students would return to change China.\(^6\) However, his assertion never materialized. Returned OC are mostly technocrats who lack commitment towards democratic transition. At most, they serve only to espouse Western political values in an indirect manner in their roles as advisors or administrators outside the key political and propaganda system.\(^7\) Fukuyama

\* Parts of this chapter were revised for “Beijing’s Policies for Managing Han and Ethnic-Minority Chinese Communities Abroad,” in *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 41 no. 4 (2012): 183–221.


later maintained that nationalism would decline as liberalism and free markets rendered national differences irrelevant. By extension, economic liberalization and the influence of the OC would lead to democratic freedom in China. As described in Chapter Two, the events of 2008 proved yet again, that Fukuyama was wrong in his prognosis.

The CCP is not immune to conflict with interstate, trans-governmental, and transnational groups. As Ragazzi argues, the state-diaspora relationship is driven by power politics—it is in the state’s interest to retain supremacy over its diaspora for national security. In this context, the state may view cohorts of its overseas population as a potential menace, and who therefore must be placed under surveillance or dealt with by force through its security agencies.

7.1 The OC as Threats to the CCP

While their ethnicity may provide them with convenient access into and throughout China, the OC do not necessarily receive protection if they come into conflict with state interests. Those engaging in any activity outside those parameters as defined by the CCP may find themselves the subjects of scrutiny. Their origin, irrespective of nationality, means that their behaviour could be perceived as treacherous or traitorous, and therefore subject to even harsher treatment than their non-Chinese colleagues. These OC are not necessarily the beneficiaries of a warm embrace as widely promoted by the Chinese state. Instead, they are identified as suspicious threats or cast as convenient scapegoats.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, there are numerous examples of OC journalists who have found themselves in this situation. Similarly, OC academics, writers, and businessmen involved with matters considered as ‘sensitive’ while visiting China may undergo “returnee interviews” and warned about how they should behave, or threatened with consequences to their family in China should they not oblige. Others might be accused of spying and dealt

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