chapter 8

External Work: Diplomatic Assistance

This next section investigates qiaowu as a continually developing and expanding process for dealing with new demographic patterns in the mass movement of OC. Beijing's relationship and policies have evolved in accordance with OC migration over recent decades. According to the Migration Policy Institute, there were 12.7 million OC in the 1960s, 22 million in 1985, and by early 2000 there were 33 million.\(^1\) ROC OCAC statistics revealed that this number had grown to over 38 million in 2005.\(^2\) A 2008 report by the China News Agency showed that the population of ethnic Chinese and PRC nationals living outside of China totaled 48 million.\(^3\) According to analysts, another 30 million Chinese citizens travel or work abroad each year—and this figure is expected to increase to 100 million by 2020.\(^4\)

This chapter examines the developments and breakthroughs for China's consular affairs in the context of these increasing numbers, and demonstrates how and why the CCP has enlarged its embrace and protection of the OC. Despite including them in its nationalist rhetoric, Beijing accords consular assistance to the OC only on a selective basis. The CCP finds itself in a predicament whereby it must carefully balance regional concerns and the promotion of its desired international image against further deepening its relationship with the OC.

8.1 The PRC and Protection of the OC

As noted throughout this research, qiaowu plays a leading role in China's foreign relations. Its nature and direction is constantly subject to China's national interests, its diplomatic rivalry with Taipei, and addressing suspicions

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\(^*\) Parts of this chapter were revised for “Sino-Pacifica: Extra-Territorial Influence and the OC,” in Looking North, Looking South: China, Taiwan & the South Pacific, ed. Anne-Marie Brady (Singapore: World Scientific, 2010): 49–82.


\(^2\) The OCAC maintains comprehensive statistics based on decades of regularly updated research, empirical surveys, quantitative data from official census results, and reports from diplomatic staff. Government Information Office, Taiwan Year Book 2004; de Vienne, “For a Tentative Modelization of the Economic Weight of OC at the Beginning of the 3rd Millenium.”

\(^3\) “2008 huayi baogao,” Zhongxinwang, 2 February 2009.

\(^4\) “Protect Our Compatriots,” China Daily, 26 April 2007, 10.
of political interference. Throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, Beijing appeared to put the interests of the OC behind its desire for international recognition. This was a strategic move to relieve itself of the “OC problem”. OC affairs were publicly downgraded as part of its détente efforts with Southeast Asia, and the OC were urged to assimilate and cooperate in their localities—indicating to the world that they had shed their political links with the mainland.\(^5\) Continuing ethnic and political tensions during this period ensured that there were many opportunities to demonstrate Beijing’s position towards the OC—but only when it suited its interest.\(^6\)

Geo-political circumstances have always played a major role in influencing Beijing’s treatment of the OC. For example, anti-Chinese/anti-communist feeling spurred the Indonesian government to pass anti-alien legislation in 1959, so that ethnic Chinese and their property were open to seizure. Nearly 100,000 OC fled to China to escape the violence. Beijing did not directly criticize Jakarta, as it was a leftist ally at the time. Instead, it attempted to resolve the situation through quiet diplomacy, urging thousands to return to China where they could participate in “socialist reconstruction”. The PRC OCAC supported the decision to receive all returned OC, no matter how many there were.\(^7\) Beijing sent naval vessels to repatriate them.

When the new anti-Beijing Suharto regime moved to destroy the ethnic Chinese-dominated Indonesian Communist Party (ICP) in 1965, Beijing again decided to use the OC issue to send political signals.\(^8\) It wasted no time in demanding that Jakarta protect the OC and again dispatched ships to collect them.\(^9\) This action caused Southeast Asian nations to believe that China was still championing the cause of the OC—despite the 1955 Bandung agreement. Only 10,000 ethnic Chinese chose to leave on this occasion, as most preferred to stay on as Indonesian-Chinese. Relations between Beijing and Jakarta continued to deteriorate. In 1966, Beijing closed down its three main consulates in Indonesia, recalled its ambassador, and cancelled economic aid; moreover, it

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5 Measures included recommending local investment and cooperation with local business instead of emphasizing remittance and foreign investment; and refraining from holding elections amongst OC as representatives in the National People’s Congress. See Skinner, “OC in Southeast Asia,” 136–147, 298.


