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OUT OF CHINA.
AUTO-ORGANIZATION OF CHINESE COMMUNITIES ABROAD
AND TRANSNATIONALISM

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Out of China. Auto-organization of Chinese Communities Abroad and Transnationalism

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Resumen

La sociedad china a lo largo de la historia ha desarrollado diversos tipos de organizaciones fuera del control del Estado con el objetivo de defender y promover intereses de segmentos sociales específicos. Los movimientos migratorios internos e internacionales de China han dado lugar también a la creación de numerosas asociaciones que se diferencian por sus objetivos, funciones y criterios para reclutar a los miembros. Existe un debate sobre el control o no por parte del Estado de las asociaciones de migrantes, así como sobre la legitimidad de las mismas. En este trabajo se analizarán estos debates y sus conexiones con el transnacionalismo, afectando a conceptos como lealtad, nacionalismo e "integración".

Palabras clave

Migración internacional, asociacionismo, transnacionalismo, integración, China

Abstract

Chinese society throughout history has developed various types of organizations outside the control of the state in order to defend and promote interests of specific social segments. Internal and international migratory movements from China have led also to the creation of many associations which differ by its objectives, functions and criteria for recruiting members. There is a debate about the control, or not, by the Chinese State on migrants' associations abroad, as well as on their legitimacy. In this paper will be analyzed these debates and their connections with transnationalism, affecting concepts such as loyalty, nationalism, and "integration".

Keywords

International migration, associations, transnationalism, integration, China

OUT OF CHINA. AUTO-ORGANIZATION OF CHINESE COMMUNITIES ABROAD AND TRANSNATIONALISM[1]

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Civil society is a difficult concept to apply in China, as numerous studies have shown, since its origins are directly related with the evolution of the modern nation-states that emerged following the French and Industrial revolutions, as well as with the processes of urban growth. Nevertheless, in the Chinese context, it is possible to approach and trace the phenomenon of auto-organization, of the creation of groups, associations, institutions and organizations that do not directly emanate from state power but that also go beyond individual action. The development of different forms of organization outside state control and beyond the reach of institutionalised power as monopolised by political parties, unions and the religious creeds with a leadership structure – with or without representation in the exercise of power – has a long history in China.

The founding of associations to defend and/or promote the specific interests of a group or segment and that can come to take on the role of interlocutor with the state and the different institutionalised political forces, negotiating, resisting or cooperating with them, is a proven phenomenon in the Chinese socio-political tradition. This we might call civil society with Chinese characteristics, with the addition of more recent developments in the People's Republic. The new Party-State that was established as of 1949 has its own particularities in this domain of social action: besides the NGOs promoted by the government, which have recently been classified as GONGOs ("Government Organized NGOs"), there are others that have emerged from an increasingly plural, diversified, stratified, segmented, fragmented and open society. It is precisely around these new emerging forces where the analytical effort on the phenomenon of civil society in China has been concentrated (Ma, 2002; Yang, 2002; Yang, 2004).

Throughout history the Chinese socio-political order has shown a high degree of decentralisation and local autonomy. The imperial state had a minimal bureaucracy for administering and governing an enormous population in an extensive territory and managed this by delegating central power to the local level. This domain was under the control of communities and lineages, the traditional forms of organization outside the state which took responsibility for the minimal well-being of their members. This collusion between the local elites and notables with the state, sharing the same ideology marked by Confucian principles and enabling autonomy in the management of local affairs, was one of the keys to the survival of the imperial system for so many centuries without the appearance or development of any really relevant dissenting forces, although one should not underestimate the periodical challenges posed by movements of oppressed peasants, heterodox religious millenarianism and very localised ethnic minorities that rose up

against the government in times of manifest injustice. These movements were systematically crushed although they sometimes managed to retain an unsanctioned limited territorial sovereignty beyond the control of the central government and/or that of the forces that colluded with it, and they were occasionally determinant in bringing about changes of dynasty.

In China's case, the city has barely been studied as a prototypical space for the emergence of a civil society in keeping with the precepts of Eurocentric modernity. The phenomena of urbanisation and the new forces that appear and develop in cities have been analysed by Skinner and Elvin (1974) and Skinner (1977), giving rise to more focused studies of the guilds (*hanghui* 行会, *gongsuo* 公所) and associations founded according to place of origin (*huiguan* 会馆) that have been established in cities, for example the contributions of Rowe (1984), Goodman (1995) and, most recently, Belsky (2006). These guilds and associations changed and moved on to form part of, or compete with the chambers of commerce promoted by the imperial state of China after 1904 and subsequently also encouraged by the republican state (Chen, 2001). Besides the guilds, there were other traditional forms of civil organization such as temple associations which, despite being informal, helped in many ways to govern the city without interference from above as long as imperial authority was not challenged. Over time, the traditional forms of association –taking the *huiguan* as the paradigm, along with secret societies– gave rise to new, more modern forms of association, generically known as *shetuan* 社团. These were no longer necessarily associated with place of origin or ritual forms of solidarity (Kuah-Pearce and Hu-Dehart, 2006).

The bonds of place of origin (*tongxiang* 同乡) or of working in the same economic sector (*gongsuo*) were mobilised very early on in China, leading to the establishment of organizations

without this necessarily implying any unwillingness to identify with the city of residence. The importance of particularist social ties in Chinese culture and society does not mean that domains like the city or nation were not important for people at certain times.

This traditional form of auto-organization has been reproduced and adapted to new means and circumstances, including those of the Chinese communities established abroad, along with a recent development within China associated with migratory processes and/or the promotion of local economies in different parts of the country. Fewsmith's analysis (2005) of the Wenzhou Chamber of Commerce presents a good example of the updating of this organizational form of civil society, as do other studies of migratory enclaves in the big cities (Ma and Xiang, 1998; Xiang 1999; Tomba, 1999; Girard 2006; Zhang, 2001, 2002).

Brook's study "Auto-organization in Chinese Society" (1997) starts out from the assumption that autonomous and voluntary social organizations are a key element of civil society and identifies four principles or criteria, beyond kinship, that the Chinese people have used to organise themselves: 1) place of origin; 2) occupation; 3) common activities –religious or literary, for example–; and 4) shared causes –political party– which have varied over time, depending on the historical circumstances. Along similar lines, Yu Keping (2006) defines "civil society organizations" (CSO) as non-profit-making groups or organizations of a social nature composed of people who come together voluntarily and by common accord to achieve shared interests and goals. This kind of relatively independent autonomous society makes it possible to develop spheres of economic activity, expression of opinions, auto-organization and individual self-management. Civil society is a mass-based public sphere, relatively independent from the

states and consisting of different civil groups that seek to defend their interests without this involving coming to power.

In brief, the autonomy and auto-organization of different kinds of interest groups outside the scope of state institutionalisation is a constant in Chinese history with different manifestations adapted to each context. Internal and international migration has triggered off processes of auto-organization both within and beyond China. People from the same area, displaced for different reasons and coming together somewhere else, tend to associate, creating and reinforcing networks of solidarity and mutual aid and also promoting and defending their interests in an unfamiliar setting. The history of their organizational activities is well documented, one recent case being that of the Zhejiang people in the capital, Beijing, where more than 100.000 emigrants from Wenzhou have come together to work in the production and selling of textile goods, footwear and other items. The difficulties they faced in getting their projects underway and living in the city during the 1990s led them to organise a kind of state within the state since internal migratory policy in China did not recognise them as urban residents. The same phenomenon has occurred with other groups and in other cities. Discrimination and segregation, on the one hand, and difficulty of access to public services such as education, health and transport, on the other, have been dealt with autonomously without state intervention. In other words, they have developed independent organizational mechanisms to satisfy their own particular interests.

Some authors consider that the most appropriate way to approach this phenomenon is to see it as the creation of ethnic communities rather than as developments belonging to the public sphere and civil society. Without entering fully into the debate, the only thing we might assert is that, to the extent that organizations are voluntarily established in keeping with the

needs of specific interest groups and without state intervention, this can be regarded as a specific form of civil society.

Out of China

The capacity for auto-organization of Chinese communities abroad has been the object of study for some time now. Associative movements have been taking shape from the first moment of Chinese settlement in any part of the world with the aims of meeting needs, promoting and defending interests, and structuring hierarchies of power and authority in these communities of Chinese residents abroad. Such organizational activities have occurred outside state control, although on some occasions the state, either in the new places of residence or in China itself, has promoted them or attempted to co-opt them. Emigrants' associations are usually instruments for channelling social and economic prestige since the people who occupy leadership or board-member status in them are also part of the elite within the community. Thus one might come to the conclusion that the associations, far from being concerned about and defending the interests of the majority of the population, work to perpetuate inequalities and favour only elite interests. Nevertheless, this view does not do justice to the whole spectrum of activities carried out by these associations, many of which have repercussions in the everyday life of the community as a whole rather than being oriented exclusively in favour of elite concerns.

Among the first attempts at producing a typological account of associative activities in communities of Chinese emigrants abroad were those of Crissman (1967) and, before him, Freeman (1960), who noted the existence of:

> "A segmentary structure of associations which organize their members into a hierarchy of inclusion: associations of people

from the same village or lineage are subsumed under higher-level associations based on common region of origin, common surname, common dialect, and finally, an association representing the Chinese community as a whole (…) The segmentary hierarchy of associations serves as the community's political structure" (Pieke, 1998: p. 12).

In Pieke's view (1998) one needs, in each case and locality, to contextualise the presence of a true "community" that is organised in keeping with criteria of segmentation. However, when one analyses the Chinese presence in different countries of Europe, this tends not to be the case as, far from being organised in keeping with one single structure, these Chinese communities are made up of many separate groups, each one of them looking out for its own interests. Indeed, we even find that there are large numbers of Chinese-born people who are totally outside associative dynamics, as exemplified by the case of the Czech Republic, which was analysed by Moore (2006). Nevertheless, people of Chinese origin in the migratory context have generally looked to a series of criteria when creating associations of different functions. Among them are the following:

> 1) **Family-name associations.** These are sometimes referred to as lineage or clan associations. This basic criterion in the Chinese world alludes directly to the family. The rural world was dominated by lineages that enjoyed great autonomy and were by and large self-sufficient. Lineage ideology invoked solidarity among the members who, at some level, were all deemed to be equals and brothers and sisters.

> 2) **Associations by place of origin (*huiguan*).** These are based on the same birthplace, whether this is a single village, town, region, district, prefecture or province.

3) Dialect. Spoken language could also be a basis for creating associations and as a yardstick of differentiation. It is closely bound with place of origin.

4) Occupation. Guilds and occupations have always constituted important reasons for people coming together and this type of association is among those that are most revitalised at present. Businessmen's associations are a special case.

5) Brotherhoods. Secret societies. These were frequently societies created around such interests as martial arts or music. Some are linked with secret societies *Tiandihui* 天地会 (Heaven and Earth Society), which are generally known as triads. Sometimes they have taken on a true political dimension by adopting the form of clandestine political parties.

6) Religious. These are formed around temple building or devotion to some god or a particular belief. On some occasions, family-name and birthplace associations financed temples as centres of worship and/or meeting. Under this heading, Christian associations were important, as well as the Buddhist variety.

7) Cultural, recreational, educational. These were organised around theatre, opera, music, dance, et cetera. Sports clubs subsequently became important and, in particular, schools.

8) Umbrella or community associations. Under this heading are 1) already-existing federations of organizations; or 2) community-based associations which incorporate all Chinese people present in any one place without making any kind of distinction. They tend

to act as mediators and negotiators working for economic well-being and offering all kinds of social services, including schools. They constitute the Chinese political elite at the community level and may include Charity or Benevolent Associations (*Zhonghua huiguan* 中 华 会 馆), Chinese Chambers of Commerce (*Zhonghua Shanghui* 中 华 商 会), General Chinese Associations, Hospitals and so on.

From a different standpoint, some historians have studied the activities of secret societies outside China as a particularity of the associative movement before they were criminalised by the colonial powers which, for a long time, used them as interlocutors or mouthpieces for everything related with the Chinese minorities in territories under their control –Singapore, for example–. Also noteworthy is the attention that has been given to the development of the *gongsi* 公司 or work-oriented associations which structured many Chinese communities. Secret societies and *gongsi* have been forms of auto-organization devoted to satisfying the needs of migrants and especially the elite, constituting states within the state. In some places such as Hong Kong, the interlocutor used by the colonial power for governing the Chinese population was a Hospital and its management personnel.

Out of China, the forms and functions adopted by migration-related voluntary associations have been evolving, in their adaptation to the milieu and space, from traditional forms of auto-organization to more modern ones. Up to a certain point, there is some correspondence between what is happening in China and out of China since both cases have entailed displaced populations who, in unfamiliar settings, have had to deal with the need to protect their interests and satisfy certain specific requirements given the distance now separating them from the local powers under which they once lived. Both inside and

outside of China, when strangers appeared as a result of migratory dynamics, the local powers generally kept the new arrivals at a distance for a time and even refused to accept their presence or ignored them. In these circumstances, auto-organization became an effective instrument of structure and order that saw to the needs of the neglected local community, whether by re-creating and/or reproducing earlier ties or creating, on new bases, other bonds inspired in traditional practices or, finally, starting out from zero in response to the new kinds of problems they had to face.

When people coming together in a migratory context had previously forged family, friendship, neighbourly and linguistic, et cetera, ties, the voluntary association appeared naturally, institutionalising already-present links under a hierarchy of power and prestige that was founded, in turn, on reinforcing networks of solidarity and mutual aid. As time passed, new organizational criteria emerged, these no longer starting out from the earlier personal bonds, although they were concerned, for example, with economic and/or professional activities that people shared, such as business interests or being a student, and so on. Religious beliefs could also give rise to associations around a certain form of worship. In the latter cases, previous ties are not so important and, in fact, what happens is that new, different ties are forged.

Outside China, and for a long time, most of the types of auto-organization of Chinese collectives went unnoticed by the general society in which they settled. Recognition has come hand-in-hand with interest in who controls them, this being associated at first with the search for interlocutors to convey the demands of local governments to immigrant minorities or, conversely, when minority groups have nominated representatives to express their wishes to the local government concerned. The process of designation usually consists in the

institutionalisation of prestige within the collective in keeping with the cultural guidelines associated with it. The leaders of Chinese associations are people who have more economic, and/or cultural, and/or social, and/or symbolic capital. Their activity of representation and defence of group interests has repercussions in increasing their own influence and prestige and, to the extent that their activities are to the advantage of the collective, their social recognition is also enhanced.

The proliferation of associations of Chinese-born people who reside abroad not only corresponds with the increased volume of their presence and diversity of their origins and occupations but is also related with the struggle for power and, in particular, prestige. The power of social influence is related with the importance given to the notion of face (*mianzi* 面子) in the Chinese context. Respect and social recognition for the group of reference of each person can come to include very wide circles in a very active political game. Auto-organization and plurality of associations are a reflection of this.

Transnationalism and Civil Society

The Chinese diaspora has a long history of transnational activities which, to some extent, have been forerunners of their present concerns. As early as the sixteenth century there were towns in Southeast China that were dependent on remittances sent back by emigrants overseas (Wang, 1991). The republican revolution would not have been possible without the support and financial help of overseas Chinese who Sun Yat-sen dubbed the "Mother of the Revolution". Contacts, comings and goings and circularity are nothing new in Chinese international migration. Activities going beyond the borders of the nation-state have always been the usual thing. An absence of total

assimilation[2] has also been the norm. Again, there has been mixing, miscegenation and a range of forms of hybridism. All of this coexists simultaneously.

However, attention to activities and the transnational fields and spheres –political, social, cultural, religious, etcetera– inasmuch as it is of very recent awakening, is limited to current times, as if they had not existed earlier (McKeown, 2001). Chinese migration confirms that these are not new phenomena since migratory networks and associations have gone beyond the borders of the nation-state from the very start, just as population movements of other people of different ethno-national origins have done.

Transnationalism from below and the institutionalisation it generates tends to be a source of surprise since the usual procedure is to analyse transnationalism from above, this corresponding to the big economic, religious and political corporations –the UN and its derivative organisms– with their branches scattered around the world, added to which is transnationalism constituted by NGOs with international ramifications, this time emerging from a sphere that is closer to what tends to be understood as civil society.

Many Chinese migrant associations reveal a marked transnational character, including within them networks that take in people located, not just in the place of origin but in different parts of the world. The transnationalism of the associations is manifested in different ways:

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[2] Lack of assimilation has not prevented integration up to a certain point, at times that permitted by the place of settlement and other times that which the newcomers have managed to achieve themselves.

1) **Origin-oriented associations**. These are created in order to keep alive and present different kinds of contact with the place of origin: economic, cultural, religious and political.

2) **Destiny-oriented associations**. Their main function is that of helping immigrants to settle into the host societies. They often promote and work on a range of activities geared to social integration. Despite appearances, they frequently engage in initiatives related with place of origin as well.

3) **Federations of nationally-based associations**. The federation is a common form among the associations, each one representing members located in a specific place.

4) **Associations promoted by the Chinese state** to conserve active links with international migrants.

5) **Networks of professionals** scattered around the world.

Since the 1980s, the state of the People's Republic of China and, before that, the Taiwanese state have been very active in fostering the creation of emigrants' associations and federations, seeking their loyalty and investments in exchange for recognition and certain privileges (Li, 1999; Hong, 1998, 2005; Thunø, 2001):

"In Europe, the pro-China and pro-Taiwan divide between Chinese communities has materialized in two European-wide associations: the above mentioned European Federation of Chinese Organizations (EFCO), a pro-Beijing, European-wide association established in May 1992 in Amsterdam; and

the pro-Taibei Union of Chinese Associations in Europe (OCAC), founded in 1976 in Brussels" (Moore, 2006:p. 281).

At the same time, and beyond the reach of state intervention, emigrants have traditionally organised themselves without any need of recognition or explicit political support from outside. The informality of migrant auto-organization, in the sense that at times –as in the case of Spain– very few of the associations are properly registered in keeping with formal legal procedure, does not prevent them from being active at both local and transnational levels. The Chinese state attempts to co-opt already-existing associations or to push for the creation of others under its sway, but these two cases represent only a small proportion of the presently-existing associations. It usually happens, too, that associations recognised by the Chinese state are not registered in the countries overseas in which they are established and active, and vice-versa. Again, there are others that are not registered under any state administration.

Transnationalism is focused in fields and activities that go beyond the borders of the nation-state. Nevertheless, one cannot overlook the indisputable and necessary localisation, or the local settling-in processes of each one of the nodes that, in their contact and interaction, shape the transnational spheres. Hence the transnational domain is never wholly autonomous since it is also subject to many of the limitations imposed by the nation-states.

Informality in the face of the institutionalization –administrative registration, regulations and control– of associations is an important characteristic of the world of Chinese associations outside China, at least in certain temporal and local contexts. At the same time, one also observes other phenomena related with the registered associations, for

example those which, under a certain name and with specifically-stated objectives engage in activities and perform functions that differ from their denomination and declared intentions. Then again, there are associations that exist in name only and are registered without engaging in any significant kind of activity.

In brief, the relationship between transnationalism and civil society in the case of migratory movements fits into the framework of the nature, objectives and activities of the forms of migrant auto-organization that, on occasion, bring together into a single structure orientations geared to both place of origin and host country without this entailing any kind of contradiction.

Associations and Loyalties

Auto-organization is a response to contextual collective needs, on the one hand, and to personal needs of political activism on the other. If we take the case of Chinese auto-organization in Spain as an example, we can indicate that recent influxes of immigrants have created associations from the outset, while the earlier waves took more time to set them up. People coming from the province of Fujian have been very quick to found associations in view of the privileges their management staff enjoy both in Spain when delegations of their people come to this country, and in China when they visit their home territory in order to invest or to participate in events related with emigrants for which their presence and representation is needed (Hong, 1998, 1999, 2005; Thunø, 2001). Keeping up free-flowing contact with the local government can bring advantages such as access to information that will be beneficial for their economic operations, *inter alia*. Again, the internal dynamics of the predominant group in Spain –people from the Southern part of the province of Zhejiang–, by far the most

numerous and longest-established group with dense, extensive and firmly intermeshed kinship networks that have helped them and that are still useful in resolving most problems of adaptation and settling into the society where they have come to live, have meant that they have not needed to resort so urgently to associative structures.

The earliest arrivals set up, for example, associations of very exclusive Chinese restaurants, open to only a select group of members and thereby excluding the majority of restaurateurs. In this regard, the association was responding to personal needs for recognition of economic and social prestige attained in the host society but with fundamental reference to its own group.

Chinese schools were usually founded originally under the auspices of associations whose leaders and managers were the most influential and powerful members who had worked for their establishment. Among their functions was that of representation in society in general in the quest for a venue in which to offer the classes. For some time, the out-of-hours venue for the project was a normal local school with which an agreement had been reached over using its facilities at the weekend (Sáiz López, 2014). At present, in the city of Barcelona, for example, there is no longer just one Chinese school since many have now been opened, and neither do they come exclusively under the auspices of the associations but rather have taken on the character of private business. In other words, what was previously achieved and managed by an association is now taken over by a company, thus privatising a service that was once offered in another structural form.

Auto-organization is frequently a response to the state, which seeks representatives of different collectives to convey its

demands through them, while also delegating some functions to their organizations by way of financing them[3].

In Spain, auto-organization began by dealing with the internal functions of the group with minimal or non-existent contact with the state. However, as the immigrant population grew and the state started to be aware of its presence, it set out to find interlocutors while also offering assistance so that they could establish their own associations as a prior requisite for interacting with them. One of the common complaints of local government at the different levels of the public administration in Spain –municipal, provincial or that of autonomous communities– has been the lack of spokespersons for the Chinese collective, or the absence of associations, which impeded their representation.

In fact, Chinese associations did exist but, originally, their main functions were not concerned with direct discussion with the public administration. One of the earliest moments of contact and emergence into visibility coincided with their demand for solutions to problems that were beyond their power to deal with, for example greater security in the face of the robberies to which they were subjected on a daily basis (Beltrán and Sáiz, 2002). Another demand in Barcelona, voiced for more than a decade, is the quest for institutional support for the creation of a Chinese centre in which all kinds of activities would take place (Beltrán and Sáiz, 2004).

The concentration since the beginning of the twenty-first century of Chinese warehouses engaging in wholesale textile selling in one zone of the Barcelona Eixample neighbourhood

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[3] In migratory contexts, whether within China (Froissart, 2006) or abroad, many associations have close ties with the State.

which was traditionally engaged with this trade led to the opposition of a small group of residents who managed to obtain an official City Council moratorium against the opening of any more premises working in this sector. The response of the Chinese community was to bring all the associations of Chinese businessmen, supposedly represented by the Unión de Asociaciones en Cataluña (Union of Chinese Associations in Catalonia), into PIMEC Comerç, the employers' association of Small and Medium-Sized Companies of Catalonia, in April 2007. Along with this political move in defence of their interests in the face of media "harassment" accusing them of not making an effort to integrate, they acted once again, this time making a donation of 13.000 pieces of clothing worth 43.000 euros to an old people's home run by the Sisters of Charity in the neighbourhood where the conflict had begun. The Federación de Asociaciones Chinas de Cataluña (Federation of Chinese Associations of Catalonia) made the donation in the name of 200 Chinese businesspeople. The executive president declared to the press:

> "The Chinese citizens residing here are aware of the need to become integrated, so this act has great symbolic value, as did the initiative of a few days ago when 4,000 Chinese businesses joined PIMEC" (*La Vanguardia*, 21th April, 2007).

The present discourse of the Spanish public administration is that immigrants join already-existing business associations while also having and developing their own. Sáiz López (2014) discusses how Chinese women rather than men are preferred as spokespersons and representatives:

> "A new step in coexistence and living together in harmony. For the first time, a Chinese woman represents all the businesspeople in the colourful neighbourhood of Fondo de Santa Coloma de Gramenet. She is a board member of the

well-established association of businesspeople Fondo Comerç, which forms part of the city's main entity, ACI. Her name is Zhangjiong Ye Ye (…). Xiaofeng Yu was one of the first Chinese people to join Fondo Comerç two years ago when the long-time local businesspeople embarked on a campaign to bring in foreigners. (…) One third of the shopkeepers belonging to Fondo Comerç are foreigners" (*La Vanguardia*, 15th June, 2008).

Such measures aim at social control. Integration of Chinese people into the society's already-existing associations means that they become a minority therein, and they rarely work on measures to defend their own specific concerns that go beyond the general interests common to the other members. One basic issue is language. A significant proportion of Chinese businesspeople do not speak the language of the host society with any degree of fluency, which puts them at a disadvantage when it comes to manifesting and expressing their views and demands. In a Chinese association the language problem does not exist, although there are others such as hierarchy based on ageism or capital, which determines who will hold management positions and act as representatives. The younger members, in spite of having a better command of the language and wider knowledge of the values and rhetoric of the dominant society due to their education in this society, tend to occupy subordinate positions since the older generation sequesters real power for itself.

The problem of loyalty is what lies at the bottom of the debate on the role played by the Chinese associations in a migratory context. Society in general tolerates them and even encourages them, fostering their establishment to the extent that they offer certain services delegated by the state. Nevertheless, their claims and activities must adjust to what is expected of them and drop any awkward aspects since the consequence might be that they are rejected as mouthpieces and criticised for an

alleged lack of representation and commitment to integration. To sum up, the political agenda of what is negotiable is imposed by the administration and the society in general and their forms of auto-organization will be recognised only to the extent that the newcomers circumscribe themselves to fit in as required. Again, the Chinese state also elicits the loyalty of its immigrants abroad, without this necessarily working against their integration wherever they have settled, and engages in a whole range of campaigns to co-opt already-existing associations and create others that are in line with state interests.

Under this cross-fire of state-centric loyalties, the migrants make progress, using the associations strategically in keeping with their transnational interests, and also with integration and personal and collective concerns.

Integration as Discourse Legitimising Representation

In the migratory context, both inside and outside China, the beginnings of auto-organization are based on and take off from the social networks that have facilitated migration and that reinforce previous ties, expanding them through institutionalising them, and soon adding new ones. The deficiencies of the state and local administration, which do not see to the needs and demands of the new arrivals, are offset by the creation of associations, a manifestation of auto-organization which is informal in the early days since they are not registered and neither are they subject to any form of control.

Time and a change in perspective of local governments which, both in China and abroad, are now beginning to recognise the presence of migrants, have brought about a transformation of

the pre-existing informal institutions into formal ones, which are registered, regulated and subject to some degree of control. Thus different kinds of migrant auto-organization can come under the heading of "civil society" and start forming part of it.

Researchers have been engaged in intense debate as to whether or not a real "civil society" has developed in China and the main obstacle noted is that state control forestalls the appearance of truly independent organizations since they are submitted to its objectives and dependent on its financing. It is generally supposed that civil society organizations must be independent in every sense. As against this assumption one observes that most NGOs, or at least the most important and influential among them in Spain, are not only registered but they go about their everyday work and survive thanks to state financing, which does not necessarily undermine their independent character. Registering because of state regulations and public funding, in both China and Spain, should not be confused with an absence of independence in the different kinds of auto-organization –associations, NGOs, foundations, and so on–. However, people do tend to consider that, in China's case, the State always interferes by paring down independence.

Internal disputes among the Chinese associations in Spain and power struggles for representation and access to funding have led to mutual smear campaigns. One of the arguments wielded is the accusation of being puppets of the Chinese government and not caring about the "integration" of Chinese immigrants into society at large (Nieto, 2003, 2007).

Newly-founded Chinese associations, like CEIICHES (Committee for the Education and Integration of Chinese Immigrants in Spain), adapt to the prevailing discourse, going so far as to incorporate the word "integration" into their very

names (Nieto, 2003). So, what does integration consist of? According to CEIICHES, one of the basic features of integration is learning the Spanish language and the organization therefore encourages its teaching along with other activities. In fact, this function has been carried out by many Chinese associations before the word "integration" came to be part of everyday language. For example, the Asociación de Chinos en España (Association of Chinese in Spain) was founded in 1983 and, from the outset, one of its activities as "offering Spanish courses to Chinese people and helping them to learn the language" (Xu, 1999: pp. 64-65).

One of the most-discussed issues is the supposed lack of representativeness of Chinese associations in the sense that they stand for the interests of the elite over and above those of the majority of the immigrants.

In the Chinese cultural context, "representation" is meritocratic rather than democratic and what is manifested is the struggle for the prestige of leaders who seek social and political recognition through their acts of representation such as donations, defending interests that not only affect themselves as a privileged group, aid activities, working for the common good, et cetera. The growth of the community and the passing of the years have meant that there are more people eligible for taking "power" and, in this new context, the quest for legitimation also brings in the host society.

Another phenomenon, which I have mentioned above, is the new endeavour of the Chinese state in restoring links with emigrants abroad by promoting a whole range of associations. In the subsequent line of argument, the Chinese associations are instruments of the Chinese state for promoting its interests and controlling the population, even abroad. In consequence, the associations are no longer trusted by society in general or the

local governments because they are seen as extensions of the Chinese government and not representative of the migrants' interests.

Nationalism versus Integration

Insofar as integration has become the discourse of legitimating representation, it follows that when a migrants' organization does not engage in activities that can be clearly identified as promoting their "integration", it is not deemed to represent them, or it is alleged that it only represents elite interests and not those of "disadvantaged sectors". Beyond the content of the concept of integration, which is a continuous object of controversy, what can be confirmed is that the resort to the rhetoric of integration constitutes an instrument in the power struggles between old and new organizations.

By way of contrast with the supposed lack of interest in integration in the Chinese case, mention is made of the close relationship between nationalism and associative endeavours among migrants abroad. The support of the migrants for the republican revolution from the end of the nineteenth century and, subsequently, during the republic period and extending to the Republic of China in Taiwan right through to the present day, is well documented. The republicans tried to imbue the emigrants with a nationalist spirit so that they would remain loyal to the country. The republican state sent teachers to give classes in Chinese schools to the children who were starting to be born overseas. The textbooks and teaching had a high level of nationalist content. Moreover, the journalists who were now arriving and the newspapers being established took on the task of spreading nationalist ideas. During the Cold War years, Taiwan remained very active with its nationalist activities, while the People's Republic kept a low profile in this period. The change of political agenda and developmental direction

initiated in 1979 under the new leadership of Deng Xiaoping progressively began to recover the trust of emigrants overseas while, at the same time, a new exodus from the country was also underway, the "new migration" (*xin yimin* 新移民). The state attempted to regain the complicity of the emigrants in its modernising project for the country, which is to say, to get them to invest, transfer technology and knowledge, and come back to visit and for holidays, et cetera. This change of direction has led to the creation of new associations and the co-opting of some of the already-existing ones, aid to the Chinese schools and a supply of text books and, to a lesser extent, teachers. Some emigrants have made the most of the new opportunities opened up by the state and have collaborated actively with it in its projects.

Many associations existed before the Chinese state recognised or bothered about them. The associations take care of their own interests and to the extent that cooperation with the state promotes them it is welcome. As far as the associations are concerned engaging in certain activities that foster a certain identity, a more or less nationalist character does not exclude integration into society in general and neither is this seen as contradictory. Being in contact with the Chinese embassy or consulates, achieving legitimacy and recognition does not necessarily imply being an instrument of the Government of China or being directed or controlled by it. Auto-organization is a political activity and it is carried out with particular goals in mind. The elite revalidates and confirms its social prestige within the Chinese community inasmuch as it redistributes some of its wealth, meets the needs and takes an interest in the well-being of the client group that supports and recognises it. Associations split and multiply as a result of internal power struggles while the recently-formed ones offer satisfaction to new segments that did not feel represented in those that existed previously. New needs also give rise to new associations.

The attempt by the Chinese state to gain control over the emigrants' associations, which is generically manifested as promotion of nationalist activities, is supposedly countered by associations focused on projects devoted to "integration" into society in general. In fact "integration" is another form of nationalism since it is geared to the adoption of the values and norms of the predominant society. Although there can be no doubt that there are associations that are politically very much oriented to the dictates of the Chinese state, for example those created in opposition to the Falun Gong movement, or those that aim at the unification of the PRC and Taiwan, in most cases they move in an ambiguous space that includes both nationalism and integration, while yet transcending both.

Transnationalism, beyond Nationalism

The oldest associations are those that tend to have among their directors and managers people of greatest economic and social prestige, who have been living longest in Spain and have been most successful, people who devote some of their time to representing interests that not only benefit themselves but also the group in general. Among their concerns are all kinds of contact with their towns of origin or with the government back home which, in turn, contribute to their power and influence.

The fact that they have spent most time outside China does not necessarily mean that their ties with their homeland are broken or that they concentrate exclusively on the host country or, what amounts to the same thing, reduce their transnational activities and commitments. Furthermore, it is taken for granted that the new arrivals are much more active on the international scale, sending back remittances, keeping up frequent telephone contact, travelling back whenever possible, and so on, because of the short time since their departure and the many links they still have with their homeland.

In contrast with these assumptions it has been demonstrated that there is no incompatibility between participation in transnational activities and integration in the host society:

> "We observe that regardless of nationality, transnational immigrant organizations' members are older, better-established, and possess above-average levels of education, suggesting that participation in transnational activities and assimilation are not incompatible" (Portes, Escobar and Ratford, 2007: p. 242).

> "Results reveal a near-absence of perceived conflict between transnational activism and political incorporation. Almost without exception, leaders asserted that there was no contradiction between home-country loyalties and activities and US citizenship and voting" (Portes, Escobar and Arana, 2008: p. 1056).

The research of Portes *et al*. (2007, 2008) on organizations of migrants of different Latin American origins in the United States corroborates the results of studies carried out by Beltrán and Sáiz (2004) and RICAE-CIDOB (2005) on Chinese associative activity in Catalonia:

> "Transnational ties are strong and many immigrant organizations are fiercely dedicated to promoting the welfare of communities in the countries that they left behind. However, leaders of these organizations can see no contradiction between pursuing these goals and a process of successful integration into American society (…) The distinction between transnational and domestically oriented organizations with which the project started is overstated. Most organizations engage in a mix of activities and the original distinction is of no use in predicting leaders' beliefs or organizational involvement in US politics. (…) On the contrary, the type of activities to which an organization is dedicated has a significant effect on incorporation, with civic/cultural associations initiating a much greater number

of US-oriented civic and political activities" (Portes, Escobar and Arana, 2008: pp.1083-1084).

Transnational activities and orientation towards the country of origin do not confront, contradict or exclude activities geared to integration and defence of interests in the host country, as Portes *et al*. make clear (2007, 2008). The obsession of the state, from the dominant state-centric standpoint, with obtaining the exclusive loyalty of its citizens contrasts with their everyday practices, which are much more strategic and instrumental, and the migrants do not experience any contradiction in the fact of living and participating simultaneously in two social and political spheres. In their transnational practices, migrants constantly respond to and challenge the interest in population control that characterises the state. Overseas Chinese are primarily concerned with their prosperity in the host country, which in turn also has repercussions on their prestige and legitimacy back home. In order to prosper and be successful in the host country, it is necessary to be integrated and this is what they foster and promote, although this circumstance does not automatically imply the rupture of their transnational ties. In fact, success in the host country often goes hand in hand with the availability of, and the possibility of mobilising family, social, economic, political, religious, cultural, etc. connections and networks with both the homeland and other nodes of the diaspora.

The presence of globally connected and interlinked citizens helps the state in the internationalisation of its economy, which is one of the key goals in the present age of globalisation. The state must therefore move on from its fears over loyalty and its nationalist and patriotic extolment and recognise and boost these transnational activities to the extent that they have repercussions that benefit the society as a whole.

In the final analysis, transnationalism is not incompatible with participation in local civil society. The organization and defence of specific interests and the satisfaction of needs not met by the state in the local context are compatible with transnational activities. Nationalism is transcended by localism, by the power of private social networks that evolve in transnational domains while at once being very deep-rooted.

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