

Historical Image of Overseas Chinese of the Xijiang River Basin in Guangdong Province

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ABSTRACT

This work attempts to analyze the migration trajectory of the overseas communities in Xijiang River Basin in Guangdong Province based on the county historical materials. Results show that villagers in this area moved abroad as far back as in the Ming dynasty, but mass migration occurred after the mid-19th century, which was subject to the natural, social, political and economic conditions of both societies of origin and target. Early immigrants could be divided into free choice migration and “indentured labors”, they all lived by the sweat of their brow. Sihui, Gaoyao and Sanshui were the three key Qiaoxiang in this region, however, there were significant differences in the migration directions. The people of Sihui and Sanshui took the Malay Peninsula as their resettlement destination, Gaoyao villagers tended to immigrate to Australia, this was related to the migration network constructing by the transnational flow of local people. The network was a part of the important social capital, maintaining the continuation of emigration flow. To some extent, the weakening of transnational practice has led to the “decline” of Qiaoxiang in the Xijiang River Basin.

Keywords: transnational immigration; migration network; Qiaoxiang in the Xijiang River Basin

1. INTRODUCTION

The Xijiang River has been the “golden waterway” connecting the Southwest and South China since ancient times. The Guangdong section of the Xijiang River flows through the hilly areas of Yunfu and Zhaoqing, then merges with Beijiang River in Foshan. As the birthplace of Cantonese culture, the number of overseas Chinese in the Xijiang River Basin of Guangdong province is not significant, meanwhile, they play an important role in promoting the development of their hometowns. Sihui(Zhaoqing), Gaoyao (Zhaoqing) and Sanshui (Foshan) are the traditional Qiaoxiang in the region, there were 145081 Overseas Chinese of the Sihui city, distributed in more than 40 countries on the five continents of the world. The majority were settling in Malaysia (91016), accounting for 63% of the city’s total overseas Chinese, followed by Singapore (21872), Thailand (5590), Vietnam (5505) and Indonesia (4495). [1] The Gaoyao city had more than 130000 overseas Chinese, concentrating in Australia (63900), Malaysia (13500) and Singapore (9100). Among them, there were 35000 overseas Chinese in Australia from Huilong Town, this figure ranked first among the Chinese Australian at the township level in China.[2] In the Sanshui county, there were 89400 overseas Chinese, Singapore was their favorite destination, accounting for 71% of the total number of immigrants. [3] Sihui, Gaoyao and Sanshui are all located in the middle and lower Xijiang River, but their migration destinations were significantly different. What factors played a role in their migration process? This article focuses on the international migration phenomenon of the Xijiang River Basin in Guangdong, analyzing its migration

patterns, motivations, and interactions with their hometowns, expecting to show the history of overseas communities in this region clearly and enrich the study of Qiaoxiang in Guangdong.

Table 1. Overseas Chinese distribution table of the three counties

Gaoyao		Sihui		Shanshui	
Australia	63900	Malaysia	91016	Singapore	63500
Malaysia	13500	Singapore	21872	Malaysia	5400
Singapore	9100	Thailand	5590	Vietnam	3800
Vietnam	2900	Vietnam	5505	Cambodia	3550
Indonesia	2700	Indonesia	4495	Thailand	2500
United States	1300	Canada	4030	Canada	1200
Thailand	1100	India	3301	Australia	1100
Cuba	500	United States	2480	United States	800
Canada	500	Philippines	2152	Indonesia	800
Cambodia	500	Cambodia	1630	Germany	750
Total	130000	Total	145081	Total	89400

2. IMMIGRATION PATTERNS

2.1. Resettlement Time

Sanshui villagers moved overseas for a long time. In the Ming Dynasty, more than 30 people surnamed Zou in Datang town fled to an alien land for eluding the

authorities. From the end of the Qing Dynasty to the time before the Japanese aggression against China, more than 60000 Sanshui predecessors had drifted across the ocean, including 20000 settled in Singapore and 10000 in Vietnam. [4] The migration history of the Sihui people could be traced back to the beginning of the 19th century. Some young and middle-aged peasants accompanied their friends or recruited by the Colonists sailed south to find a way for living. The large scale emigration to Southeast Asia occurred after the Opium War in 1840 and formed a massive wave by the end of the 19th century. Gaoyaoese moved overseas in the mid-19th century, according to the statistics from an association of Overseas Chinese in Sydney called "Yaoming Hongfu Hall", from 1850 to 1856, more than 300 households and 3000 people in Huilong went to Australia. From the late Qing Dynasty to the period of the Republic of China, more than 30000 people went abroad one after another in Jiaotang, Huilong, Baitu, Dawan, Xinqiao and Jindu of Gaoyao. [5]

2.2. Immigration Types

There were two primary types of immigrants from the Xijiang River Basin in Guangdong. One was free migration which referred to those who were guided by their relatives and friends or "parallel traders". More often than not, some young and middle-aged people went first and then returned to their hometowns to take their families. Some of them that traveled back and forth between China and other countries frequently, carried property for overseas Chinese back to their homes and led the locals out were called "parallel traders". For example, there were many women among the Sanshui diasporas living in Singapore, most of them were brought to Chinatown (the settlement of Chinese in Singapore) by the "parallel traders", they were advanced the discharge fee which later deducted from their monthly income. The majority of them worked in the construction industry in Singapore as plasterers, such as rubbing plaster, carrying bricks, and moving timber, that were high labor intensive with working 10 hours a day. When they went to work on the building site, they were accustomed to use a piece of red cloth folded into a square hat to wear on their heads, therefore, they were known as "Red Headband". "Red Headband" had a tragic experience, there was a bemoan song in the northern part of Sanshui singing about their drifting-life situations, which sang like this "Ten crossed the oceans, nine suffered hardships. If it were not for bitter, but for poverty. Six months in Southeast Asia, half a year long without enough to eat". The second was forced migration in the form of "indentured labor" or "selling piglets". At that time, Britain, France and other countries set up recruitment offices in the Pearl River Delta to inveigle and kidnap Chinese laborers who would be sent abroad. According to the "County Local Records of Sanshui" contained, "in 1881, Liang Huzhang, a native of Shatou Village located in the Southwest of Sanshui, sold himself into a "Pigsty", being trafficked to a mine in San Francisco. Because he was skilled in writing and calculating, understood some English

and hard-worked down-to-earth, he was appreciated by his boss and promoted to the foreman soon. He lived frugally and saved a lot, opened a snack store in the mining area. Later, he returned to Hong Kong and opened a furniture shop to make rosewood (sandal wood) tables and chairs which were mainly sold to the United States. After a short while, he opened three branches in Guangzhou, Shanghai, and Japan and became a millionaire". Liang was one of the fortunate members of the Chinese indentured labors. Most of the Chinese workers abroad were detained in the bottom of the bilge, after arriving at the overseas destination, they lost their personal freedom and became "coolies". "The Development of Shalian in New Guangdong Port in Nanyang" described the living condition of coolies, "when Sihui, Guangning and other villagers moved to Sarawak Shalian reclamation field in the late Qing Dynasty, there were no roads to walk and no houses to live, they should co-built the bothies to rest, when it rained, the roofs of the bathy were leaking heavily. They relied on their hands to open up wasteland and grew pepper and rubber." The overseas Chinese in India made a living by burning bricks and tiles. Some young and strong people became apprentices working as carpenters, handymen and mechanics on the ships. After three years, they applied for the seaman license, however, they were still subject to fraud by the "head", their wages were too meager to support their lives. Some sailors were still living alone over fifty years of age, some were even buried in the sea.

3. REASONS FOR IMMIGRATION

3.1. Internal Factors

Early immigrants emigrating overseas was the result of internal pushing and external pulling forces. First of all, the frequent natural disasters, the turbulent times, and the deteriorating economic conditions were the internal causes of large-scale population migration. In modern times, the Xijiang River Basin was an area with more serious natural disasters in Guangdong Province, droughts, floods, hails, locusts and other disasters took place year after year. Taking Sanshui as an example, there were 11 records of floods or droughts in the first 50 years of the 20th century. In the year of Yi Mao(1915), two and a half months of heavy rain destroyed more than 20 dykes, which led to the county' fading agrarian and forced the farmers in distress to travel overseas. As "Overseas Chinese in Sanshui County" showed that the number of Sanshui people who came to Singapore after the Yimao Flood increased dramatically to more than 20000. [6] The same was true for Sihui and Gaoyao, the floodwater hit the villages with particular ferocity, demolishing all rice paddy and houses. Fleeing as soon as the flood occurring was the stories we heard most during the fieldwork. The political turmoil also affected the lives of the people in the Xijiang River Basin. On the one hand, after the Opium War, Guangdong assumed nearly 70% of the war reparations, the local

authorities collected money from civilians in the name of donations. At the end of the Qing Dynasty and the beginning of the Republic of China, the government introduced a lot of new taxes like housing donation, butcher donation, gambling donation, agricultural donation and so on, that had made the poor' lives even worse. Hekou Town of Sanshui and some other places were listed as commercial ports where were invaded by foreign commodities and capitals wildly, resulted in the disintegration of the self-sufficient natural economy. Thousands of farmers and handicrafts went bankrupt and had no alternatives but to leave their homes. The upheaval in Chinese society was another reason for forced migration. In the mid and late 19th century, the South China region was in turmoil, a series of upheavals like the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom Movement (1851-1864), the Guangdong Hongbing Uprising (1854) and the 12-year-long Guangdong native-Hakkas battle (1854-1867) brought deep sufferings to the people. In 1860, the Red Turban leader Zhou Chun paid allegiance to Shidakai who was one of the leaders of the Taiping Army, then they co-led a great army of up to one hundred thousand passing through Huaiji(Zhaoqing), Guangning and Sihui, marching towards Gaoyao at length, making the civilians in southern China go through many vicissitudes. During the period of the Beiyang government (1912-1928), the warfare between warlords and each faction controlling the government in turn caused the social order in disarray. After the rise of the Guangxi warlords, wars continued for years. From 1927 to 1930, the warlords of Guangdong, Guangxi, and Yunnan made war so frequent at the mouth of Xijiang in Sanshui that peoples couldn't live in peace. During the Japanese invasion into China, Xijiang served as a transportation hub between China's north and south. Due to the important location of Sihui, Sanshui and Gaoyao(Sihui and Sanshui located in the convergence of at least three rivers; Gaoyao has been called "the key point in the southwest and the throat of Guangxi and Guangxi"), this region became a battleground for military strategists. 1937-1944, the Japanese army carried out indiscriminate bombings on Zhaoqing and its surrounding areas where was occupied by the enemy in 1944. To avoid wars, some people moved abroad with their families. At the same time, bandit-ridden and private armed fights had become a common phenomenon in the rural China. In the face of natural and man-made disasters, the people of the Xijiang River Basin had to leave their homes and travel across oceans to look for a way out.

3.2. External Pull Factors

Western capitalism accelerating the development of colonies was the external cause of their emigration. Great Britain occupied Penang Island as early as 1786 and gained control over the Malay Peninsula and Sarawak and Sabah in northern Borneo in 1914. In order to turn the colonies entirely into raw materials suppliers, dumping grounds for goods and capital export markets, Great Britain had grown rubber, pepper, coffee and other crops on a large scale,

developed tin and gold industries, as well as built ports, houses and roads on a large scale. Whether it was to develop resources or carry out urban construction, Britain needed plentiful labors. However, the situation in Malaysia at that time was that "except for a few residents along the coast, it was still a zone full of virgin forests". For solving the problem of sparse population and labor shortage, the British colonists imported a large amount of labors from China and India. After the Second Opium War, article 4 of the "Beijing Treaty" signed by the Qing government with western powers stipulated, "The Chinese are permitted to make a contract with Britain and other countries to work in their foreign territories". Since then, the Qing government abolished the maritime prohibition policy officially and Chinese laborers going abroad was legalized, Sihui and Sanshui villagers had been recruited to the Malay Peninsula successively. In the 1850s, gold mines were discovered in Victoria and New South Wales of Australia, owing to an urgent need for labors, the Australian government held an open attitude towards immigrants, many people in the Xijiang River Basin who wanted to survive traveled across the sea to Australia.

4. IMMIGRATION NETWORK

4.1. Network Formation

The early overseas Chinese bore the highest immigration costs as a result of no social network resources to rely on, they struggled all by the spirit of adventure. Once they have a firm footing in the residence country, the chain of immigration networks began to construct. The Chinese have a strong sense of responsibility for family, the original settlers often brought their family members, relatives and acquaintances of the same clan and surnames to the settlements to earn a living in the spirit of "fertilizer does not flow outsiders field". Therefore, when one person went abroad, the whole family emigrated overseas one by one, after a family went out, another family or even the whole clan was taken out in the name of brotherhood or marital relation, thus a unique immigration network weaved. This network reduced the risks and costs of migration and raised immigrants' expectations of retribution, thereby, increased the possibility of international migration.[7] Under the influence of the network, the people of Sihui were led by their fellows or clansmen to flow to Malaysia in batches and gathered in the Kuala Lumpur and nearby areas to form the "Sihui Village". Gaoyao villagers immigrated to Australia in large numbers through "family reunion", "property inheritance" and "labor export" as well. After the reform and opening up, relative-visiting was one of the main ways of Gaoyao people' immigrating. As long as someone had relatives who were settling in Australia and willing to help apply, they would be approved almost as soon as the applications were made. As a returned overseas Chinese in Huilong said:

“nine out of ten applicants would be granted at that time”.[8]

4.2. Network Maintenance

The immigrant network maintained its vitality by the constant interaction between the overseas Chinese and their hometowns. Remittances, charity and ancestor worship journey were the main approaches for overseas Chinese contacting with Qiaoxiang. Those types of communication were capable of conveying important information of residence country, and consequently affected the immigration process.

Remittance was one of the main links between overseas Chinese and their relatives. After accumulating some hard-earned savings, the overseas Chinese were tended to remit money back to their hometowns to supply their families or purchase properties. “County Local Records of Sanshui” showed that the county’s remittances amounted to 5.76 million dollars in 1979, which was double the figure in 1976. The number of remittances by Gaoyao diasporas was huge as well, from 2003 to 2004, 5.14 million yuan was transferred to the Huilong office of Tailai company.

In addition to remittances, overseas Chinese of the Xijiang River Basin were enthusiastic about charity in their hometowns. According to statistics from the Gaoyao Foreign and Overseas Chinese Affairs Bureau, 1979-2012, Gaoyao accepted donations of 169.2 million yuan from Chinese nationals residing abroad. These donations were mostly used for the development of education, health care and public welfare, constructed 199 schools, 21 hospitals, 25 nursing homes, 8 kindergartens, 5 theaters and libraries, 5 bridges and 892 Kilometers of expressway. Besides, overseas Chinese actively invested in their hometowns to promote the economic development, from 1862 to 1949, there were 176 overseas Chinese invested enterprises in Gaoyao, accounting for 1.3% of Guangdong’s investment.[9] In 2008, at the Malaysia Investment Project Matchmaking Conference, Sihui signed 10 contracts and investment intentions with the four ASEAN countries, with an investment of 257 million dollars.

In recent years, diasporas in the areas reestablished links through activities such as rebuilding genealogies and ancestral halls, restoring folk beliefs and rituals. Ancestors became a cultural bond in which the ancestral identity of overseas Chinese was awakened and strengthened. The associations of Overseas Chinese had played a decisive role in the establishment between overseas Chinese and Qiaoxiang, in order to enhance the understanding of the hometown of their origins, Australia Yaoming Hongfu Hall, Malaysia Huining Hall, Singapore Sanshui Hall and so many associations have organized overseas folks to visit their hometowns, helping them, especially young people to trace their roots.

5. CONCLUSION

The migration of human beings has never stopped, some of them left their homeland on their own initiative in search of more abundant resources and a better living environment, some were forced to escape disaster or escape persecution. The immigrants of the Xijiang River Basin who emigrated overseas were motivated by both. From the perspective of immigration practices, the immigration network played a vital role in the cross-border migration of Sihui, Sanshui and Gaoyao diasporas, laying the foundation for the continuation of immigration behavior and leading to the different directions of the three. However, as the old immigrants and their descendants taking root in the local society, new immigrants who are rarely or never return to their hometowns have no feelings for the origins. The dilution of hometown identity of the new generation of overseas Chinese was conducted to the decline of Qiaoxiang to some extent.

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