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## Overseas Chinese as assets of public diplomacy in Southeast Asia

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**Abstract.** The Chinese living abroad have great influence in the fields of economy, culture and politics. As a means of communication between the country of residence and the country of origin, they play a prominent role in coordinating China's relations with other countries. This article is dedicated to Chinese people living abroad, it reveals their basic position and status in society. The overseas Chinese, as an important asset, has become an important part of China's soft power, and has also become a unique advantage that China enjoys for public diplomacy. Starting with the definition of Overseas Chinese, this article explains the concepts of different types of Overseas Chinese in countries of Southeast Asia. Then, from the number and distribution of overseas Chinese to the economic and political status of overseas Chinese is gradually discussed in detail, and the actual situation of overseas Chinese is also introduced to readers.

**Keywords:** China, overseas Chinese, public diplomacy, Chinese soft power, Huáqiáo, Southeast Asia

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Научная статья

## Зарубежные китайцы как актив публичной дипломатии в Юго-Восточной Азии

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**Аннотация.** Китайцы, живущие за границей, имеют большое влияние в области экономики, культуры и политики. Являясь средством связи между страной проживания и страной происхождения, они играют важную роль в развитии отношений Китая с другими странами. Данная статья посвящена китайцам, проживающим за границей, раскрывает их положение и статус в обществе. Хотя зарубежные китайцы имеют многолетнюю историю иммиграции и проживания в Юго-Восточной Азии, сегодня они стали существенной частью «мягкой силы» Китая, а также уникальным преимуществом, которым Китай пользуется для публичной дипломатии. В данной статье дается определение зарубежных китайцев, объясняются концепции различных типов зарубежных китайцев в странах Юго-Восточной Азии. Для описания китайских общин выбраны репрезентативные страны: Таиланд, Филиппины, Малайзия, Камбоджа, Индонезия.

Для более детального анализа заокеанские китайцы делятся на три категории, исходя из их фактического политического участия и влияния на местную политическую жизнь в странах проживания в Юго-Восточной Азии в зависимости от их политического статуса (Сингапур, Таиланд и Филиппины, Малайзия и др.). Обнаруживается, что проблема зарубежных китайцев в настоящее время является острой темой, достигающей кульминации общественного мнения в период выборов. Подробно обсуждаются количество и распределение зарубежных китайцев, их экономический и политический статус, а также раскрывается их реальное положение. Делается вывод, что использование силы и влияния зарубежных китайцев для содействия глобальному сотрудничеству и росту стало отличительным преимуществом дипломатических усилий Китая. Упоминается и о существующих проблемах. Так, китайцы, живущие за границей, обладают экономической силой, но демонстрируют слабую политическую силу. Разрыв между ними является характерной чертой зарубежного китайского сообщества в Юго-Восточной Азии.

**Ключевые слова:** Китай, зарубежные китайцы, публичная дипломатия, мягкая сила Китая, Хуацяо, Юго-Восточная Азия

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## Introduction

The term public diplomacy is increasingly used in international relations. It encompasses dimensions of international relations beyond traditional diplomacy; the cultivation by governments of public opinion in other countries; the interaction of private groups and interests in one country with another; the reporting of foreign affairs and its impact on policy; communication between those whose job is communication, and the process of intercultural communications. [1]

Overseas Chinese are widely distributed all over the world, and have an important influence in their residence countries. The cross-cultural communication of the overseas Chinese community helps China (The "China" in this article mostly refers to the People's Republic of China) to spread its cultural influence abroad and plays a unique role in China's public diplomacy. However, overseas Chinese are not equal to China's national will, and the power of overseas Chinese is not equal to China's national power. Only when we have a deep and comprehensive understanding of the overall situation of overseas Chinese, we are able to distinguish between overseas Chinese and China. We can see the strength played by the interaction between Overseas Chinese and China. This strength originates from the blood relationship, emotion and cultural ties between overseas Chinese and China. It is a deep-seated spiritual power, which is China's real diplomatic assets.

### I. The basic situation of overseas Chinese

China, after India and Mexico, accounts for the largest number of people who have left their home countries to migrate elsewhere. The history of Chinese immigration, marked by successive waves, dates back to the opening of the ancient maritime Silk Road. [2]

The Chinese began to produce migration activities more than 2,000 years ago. At first, people living in border areas migrated actively and sporadically due to trade. With the rise of the Silk Road and seafaring activities, large-scale immigration gradually began. Especially in the Ming Dynasty, with Zheng He's many voyages, the ties between mainland China and maritime countries deepened. At that time there were two routes to Southeast Asia, one route goes from the South China Sea to the Malay Peninsula and the island of Java via Vietnam. another route through

Japan, Ryukyu, and the Philippines reach eastern Indonesia. A large number of Chinese began to settle down in Southeast Asia, some Chinese communities were initially formed. [3. P. 55]

In the middle and Qing Dynasty, some citizens in coastal areas were forced to go overseas to make a living due to the difficult living conditions. In addition, due to the expansion of modern capitalism in the world, some Chinese workers went to work in North America, Europe and other regions, forming a large number of immigrant groups. During the tumultuous years of the Chinese civil war in the last century, a large number of people also left China for Southeast Asia. [4. P. 55] After the founding of the People's Republic of China, under the influence of the reform and opening up carried out in the late 1970s, some

citizens went to European and American countries to learn technology. After improving their technical level in Europe and the United States and finding high-paying jobs, many Chinese gradually settled there and became new immigrants.

Apart from the economic factor, another important factor in the immigrant activities in ancient China was religion. In the Wei-Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties, and Tang Dynasties, Buddhism prevailed. Many religious believers go to East Asia and South Asia to preach and settle. In the Qing Dynasty, with the rapid spread of Islam, people from northwest China also went to Central Asia and even the Middle East to participate in religious activities.

With the gradual increase in the number and influence of China's overseas immigrants, some special words to describe Chinese overseas immigrants have gradually formed in different language systems. Overseas Chinese is often used in English to refer to people of Chinese descent outside of China. However, the Chinese language has various terms equivalent to the English "overseas Chinese." *Huáqiáo* (华侨 Chinese sojourner) refers to Chinese citizens residing in countries other than China. *Huáyì* (华裔) refers to ethnic Chinese residing outside of China. [5] Another common term is *Hǎiwài Huárén* (海外华人), a more literal translation of overseas Chinese; it is often used by the PRC government to refer to people of Chinese ethnicities who live outside the PRC, regardless of citizenship. [6] These words apply to different conditions, the following analysis one by one.

*Huáqiáo* (华侨) is translated into overseas Chinese in English. *Huáqiáo* first appeared in the official decree in June 1884. It was composed of the words *Hua* and *Qiao*. The first character is the shortened form of China, indicating the national attribute; the second character means living abroad, and the two characters together represent the immigrants and descendants of China. [7]

In 1909, the Qing Dynasty government promulgated the first nationality law - Qing Nationality Regulations in Chinese history. Based on the principle of ancestry, it is stipulated that as long as one parent is Chinese, the child is Chinese; whether or not he was born in China, he or she belongs to Chinese nationality. *Huáqiáo*, that is, Chinese nationals residing in foreign countries. Nationality Law of the Republic of China promulgated in 1929 basically inherited the principle of *jus sanguinis* in the Qing Dynasty, and still stipulated that all those with Chinese national blood should have the nationality of the Republic of China. In 1955, the government of the People's Republic of China and the government of Indonesia signed the "Treaty on Dual Nationality Issues", the PRC government officially announced the abandonment of the dual nationality policy and encouraged *Huáqiáo* to join the local nationality. Therefore, "*Huáqiáo*", which previously referred to all overseas Chinese and their descendants, will only refer to those who retain Chinese nationality overseas in a legal sense. [8. P. 3]

According to law of the People's Republic of China on the protection of the rights and interests of returned overseas Chinese and the family members of overseas Chinese Legal provisions of Article 3 (1990): *Huáqiáo* is designated Chinese citizen settled abroad. [9. P. 1, 150] Therefore,

affected by the policy of abolishing dual nationality, people of Chinese descent and their descendants who live in overseas countries and have been naturalized locally cannot be regarded as overseas Chinese under the official definition. However, the official definition is still confusing in the face of some special circumstances.

First, since China does not recognize dual nationality, foreigners should choose their nationality according to their own conditions when they are naturalized in China. For example, if the foreigner is Korean or Russian, they can continue to choose Chinese Korean or Russian nationality after naturalization in China. (China has 56 ethnic groups, including Chinese Korean and Chinese Russian). If it cannot correspond to the 56 ethnic groups in China (for example, this person is from the Himba ethnic group in Africa), people can continue to fill in the Himba on the national identity card. However, there are still some naturalized Chinese who have no special ethnic affiliation and will default to the Han nationality. In this case, if the person settles abroad, he will not be regarded as an overseas Chinese in the general sense.

Second, the time of settlement is not clear. Some of the overseas staff and students with Chinese nationality have even lived in foreign countries for less than one year. It is difficult to determine whether such a situation belongs to the item. Therefore, in general, these special cases are not counted as Huáqiáo.

"Huáyì" (华裔) generally refers to the overseas descendants of "Huáqiáo". "Huárén" (华人) generally refers to foreign citizens of Chinese descent who have acquired the nationality of the residence country. [10. P. 11]

The official and academic perceptions of "Huárén" in various countries (including China) are not completely consistent, but they are basically divided by political (legal) and cultural ethnic types, and the two are closely related. In general, the judgment of belonging to Huárén is mainly based on the cultural characteristics associated with the lineage. [11. P. 62–69]

Although the definitions of Huáqiáo and Huárén are different, officials of the PRC, Chinese citizens and Chinese immigrants have habitually used Huáqiáo and Huárén together. Therefore, this article will use overseas Chinese to refer to all Chinese who have lived overseas for a long time, immigrants and descendants of Chinese descent.

According to the report on the overall development of Chinese entrepreneurs in the world, there are currently more than 60 million overseas Chinese. [12. P. 43] This data is similar to the description from the International Organization for Migration (IOM): There are more than 10.7 million Chinese overseas today – about 60 million, if their descendants are included. [2]

The Chinese are distributed in nearly 200 countries and regions in the world, of which Southeast Asia is the region with the largest number of overseas Chinese. Before the 1980s, the number of overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia accounted for 85% to 90% of the total number of overseas Chinese in the world. After 2007, this proportion dropped to 73.5%. [13. P. 52] According to incomplete statistics, there are currently more than 30 million Chinese in Southeast Asia, accounting for 6% of the total population of Southeast Asia, 74.1% of the population of Singapore,

23.4% of the population of Malaysia, about 4% of the population of Indonesia, and the total population of Thailand. 11% of the population. [14. P. 199–210]

Although China has a long history of immigration, it is still difficult to count specific overseas Chinese data. One of the important reasons is the issue of statistical caliber. As described in the previous chapter, there are multiple explanations for the concept of overseas Chinese. In addition, few countries currently have direct census data on overseas Chinese. So the number of overseas Chinese in many countries is an indirect estimate, even an estimate many years ago. [15. P. 8–15, 22] From the website-Statist illustrates, the five biggest countries in overseas Chinese numbers are: Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, The US, and Singapore. [16]

Among the five countries with the largest distribution of overseas Chinese, except the United States, the rest are located in Southeast Asia. Southeast Asia is one of the earliest areas where the Chinese immigrant settled. Most of the overseas Chinese here come from China's southern coastal provinces - Fujian, Guangdong and Hainan. They have a strong provincialism. Different from the Chinese communities in North America and other European countries, the Chinese communities in Southeast Asia are often more deeply influenced by Chinese traditional culture. The overseas Chinese live together according to behavioral norms and values, forming a cultural identity with their ancestral home and birthplace. The specific population of overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia is still estimated, and the results obtained by different calculation methods vary greatly. In particular, whether the number of mixed-race Chinese (Baba) should belong to the indigenous population or should belong to the number of overseas Chinese, or the question of what proportion of Chinese descent is considered overseas Chinese is difficult to determine. After the World War II, the identities of overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia showed diversity. The overseas Chinese living in Indonesia, Cambodia and other countries have experienced racial persecution by the local government, and many are forced to assimilate into the local society, which makes them afraid to reveal their blood and true identity at will. Especially in Indonesia, for more than thirty consecutive years, Chinese people were prohibited from displaying their culture. [17. P. 215]

In Thailand, there is a high degree of ethnic integration between overseas Chinese and local people. Many people have Chinese ancestry, and they maintain both local and Chinese living customs. When this kind of people choose their cultural identity to be Thailand, it is difficult to distinguish their identities. There are a large number of cross-border residents living in Myanmar, Laos and other border. These people lack entry and exit documents and related records. These reasons have affected the data of the number of overseas Chinese. [11. P. 62–69]

However, there is no doubt that the overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia account for the largest proportion of the overseas Chinese population in the world. They are concentrated in various countries in Southeast Asia. They play a particularly important role among the Chinese in the world and are also an important diplomatic asset of the People's Republic of China.

## II. The economic status of overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia

For centuries, Chinese people have been renowned for their prudent approach to personal finance. This attribute also applies to Southeast Asian Chinese, who embody the hardworking and frugal nature of their ancestors in their diligent accumulation of savings, forming a foundation of capital over time. [18. P. 75]

Before Western colonists came to Southeast Asia, there were already many Chinese and Indian immigrants living here. Although they are different from the original inhabitants and immigrants in terms of thinking, cultural customs and language, they still live in harmony. The Western colonists wanted a better grip on the land, so they adopted the typical divide-and-rule method, using race, religion to reduce the cohesion of the local and ethnic groups. In this case, the white colonists, Chinese and Indian immigrants and local in Southeast Asia were divided into different classes and engaged in different occupations.

White colonists were the main owners of political power, land and wealth. Chinese who are hard-working and good at business activities become professional handler. Some Indian immigrants work in the military police, security and civilian departments, and most of them are ordinary labor coolies. A small part of the local became the servants and plantation workers of the colonizers, and most of them were engaged in traditional agricultural production in the vast rural areas and lived a life of poverty. [14]

The overseas Chinese capital in Southeast Asia has long been regarded as a "remnant of the colonial economy". The economic achievements of the overseas Chinese people here are regarded by the local as nonnational economies, resulting in many violent protests and even massacres against the local overseas Chinese. However, this is an excuse used by the indigenous rulers to transfer social contradictions. Chinese business activity in colonial Southeast Asia was often pioneering, relegated to sectors, niches, and peripheral areas not occupied by Europeans or reserved for natives. [19. P. 35] The original capital accumulation of the overseas Chinese economy in Southeast Asia has always been completed locally and has not been transferred to other countries. The overseas Chinese have a long history of settling down in Southeast Asia. They will make reasonable investment in the profits they will gain from years of economic activities, thus gradually promoting the economic development of the overseas Chinese group. This process objectively promoted the modernization of Southeast Asia. In addition, the commercial territory established by the overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia is not a western monopoly oligopoly economy, but a local commodity economy based on local resources. This overseas Chinese economic model has solved a large number of local labor employment problems and promoted the modernization of the country.

Due to the limited access to overseas Chinese economic data, the actual statistics of the wealth distribution and economic strength of the overseas Chinese are difficult. At present, there is no systematic and mature overseas Chinese business statistic database. However, over the years, there have been estimates from different perspectives on the development of the overseas Chinese economy in Southeast Asia.

Overseas Chinese capital reached an asset scale of 300 billion Yuan at the end of the 1990s, a sharply increase of more than 100 times over the 1950s. Among the five main Southeast Asian countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand), overseas Chinese control 70% of the wealth of private enterprises in the region with 6% of the population. [10, P. 39]

By the mid-1990s, Malaysia had about 30 overseas Chinese enterprise groups with a capital scale of more than 300 million dollars; There are about 20 overseas Chinese enterprise groups with a capital scale of more than 200 million US dollars in Singapore. [20. P. 1-7]

In 1994, the top 10 enterprise groups in Indonesia were all overseas Chinese enterprises. Ethnic Chinese control a significant portion of private capital in Indonesia. In fact, before the 1997/1998 economic crisis, 26 out of the top 30 business groups were owned by Sino-Indonesians. [21. P. 140]

From the statistics of *The Economist* in 2001, the overseas Chinese, who only account for 3-4% of the Indonesian population, control 73% of the Indonesian stock market share; overseas Chinese account for 30% population of the Malaysia, account for 69% of the Malaysian stock market share. In the Philippines, overseas Chinese account for 2% of the population, control 50% - 60% of the Philippine stock market share. In Thailand, the overseas Chinese accounts for 14% of the population, account for 81% of the share of Thailand's stock market. [22]

From the Global Top 1,000 Chinese Businessmen list (2016), there are 53 overseas Chinese businessmen on the list, including 52 from Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines in Southeast Asia, excluding the Chinese mainland, Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan. [12. P. 15] Between 2007 and 2017, the number of overseas Chinese businessmen on the Forbes list increased 1.6 times, from 22 to 58, mostly in Southeast Asia and North America. [12. P. 20]

As the largest ethnic group in Southeast Asia after indigenous people (except Singapore), the Chinese have economic power far in excess of their population. It can be clearly seen from the above data that the Chinese in Southeast Asia have significant economic advantages in terms of capital scale, number of high-value companies, stock market share and number of billionaires, and the economic strength of the Chinese in Southeast Asia occupies an advantage among the Chinese groups worldwide.

In terms of distribution, overseas Chinese capital is mainly concentrated in industry and commerce, financial industry, service industry, etc., with less achievements in high-tech fields. Influenced by economic nationalist policies, overseas Chinese-run enterprises are mostly small and medium-sized enterprises concentrated in low-end technology, lacks strong manufacturing sector and technology as support. [10. P. 44] In the public facilities, energy, food industry, overseas Chinese companies do not have a large share. These industries are related to national security of South East countries.

Chinese living in Southeast Asia have gained a high reputation after their own efforts and extraordinary economic achievements. However, there are also very exaggerated doubts. Since the implementation of the reform and opening-up policy in the 1980s, China's economy has taken off

rapidly. Many overseas Chinese from Southeast Asia have actively invested in China and established business networks. Similarly, Chinese capital, products and technologies have also been actively invested in the markets of various countries. The local of Southeast Asia are mixing the overseas Chinese with the People's Republic of China, creating an increasingly rampant Chinese threat rhetoric.

Southeast Asian officials, locals, and the media, to some extent, began to misinterpret the relationship between the overseas Chinese economy the Southeast Asian economy, creating contradictory voices. Such as the economic lifeline of Southeast Asia is in the hands of the overseas Chinese, the rich overseas Chinese dominate Southeast Asia, and the Chinese control the Southeast Asian economy.

However, is this really the case? The overseas Chinese do have strong advantages in some fields, but from the perspective of the entire national economic situation, the overseas Chinese economy is still subordinate in Southeast Asia. Relevant worlds remarks exaggerate the economic strength of the overseas Chinese, and over-exaggerate the economic power that the overseas Chinese have always been in a weak position.

The overseas Chinese economy has obvious advantages in the areas of free competition in the Southeast Asian market. However, the overseas Chinese economy is relatively weak in such areas as energy and resources development, which are the lifeblood of the national economy, as state-owned capital or local companies dominate. Overseas Chinese have considerable wealth and good economic conditions, but lack the right to control and distribute wealth. Over the past two decades in particular, wealthy Chinese business families have been credited with driving economic growth in China and Southeast Asia. [23. P. 10] While gaining a great reputation, with the significant development of information technology in the past two decades, local young indigenous people realize that after years of efforts, it is still difficult to accumulate as much wealth as the overseas Chinese community, and all kinds of grievances and hatred can easily spread through the Internet. Therefore, the wealth controlled by the overseas Chinese has always been covetously, such wealth is always unstable, it is difficult for the Chinese to protect their own wealth, at any time facing the risk of being seized by political forces. This is the most important problem in the economy of overseas Chinese, and also the embodiment of their rich but not strong status.

### III. The political position of overseas Chinese

Although the overseas Chinese have many years of immigration and residence history in Southeast Asia, during the colonial period of Western, the overseas Chinese was not allowed to hold own land in the countryside. This policy has led to a severe divide between overseas Chinese and local who are engaged in agriculture in rural areas. [14]

Although Chinese living in cities have no means of production such as land, the information and opportunities provided by cities allow overseas Chinese to contact modern economic development models earlier than local in rural areas. Overseas Chinese follow the trend, take advantage of opportunities, carry out trade activities, and explore

a specific business path. However, as the Chinese economic development became more successful and their living conditions became better, other ethnic groups and colonizers became dissatisfied. Coupled with the influence of the "divide and rule" policy adopted by the white people at that time in order to effectively control the power and guard against the union of the various local races. All ethnic groups are full of vigilance and estrangement towards the overseas Chinese. This also sowed unfavorable seeds for the relationship between the overseas Chinese and the local ethnic group in the future, brought obstacles to the overseas Chinese to participate in political activities in the future, and even once triggered a large-scale genocide.

In some Southeast Asian countries where locals account for a relatively high proportion of the total population, racism is rampant, and overseas Chinese cannot enjoy equal civil rights with aborigines. Even overseas Chinese living in some countries (Indonesia, Myanmar, etc.) even have not available the most basic citizenship. While possessing racial privileges, the indigenous people still have a strong political struggle awareness. They always regard the overseas Chinese as foreigners, and set up many obstacles to overseas Chinese participation in politics and elections. Therefore, for overseas Chinese living in Southeast Asia, the road to political advancement is full of difficulties.

According to the actual political participation and the influence in the local political life, the overseas Chinese living in Southeast Asia can be divided into three categories according to their political status.

**Category 1:** Singapore. As the main national group in Singapore, the overseas Chinese are the leaders of Singapore's national political power and have an absolute dominant position.

**Category 2:** Thailand and the Philippines. Here, the overseas Chinese have a high extent of integration with the local ethnic groups. Although they will also be influenced by xenophobic thoughts to a certain extent, in general, the overseas Chinese can participate in all political life in these two countries, and many national leaders of Chinese descent have been born.

**Category 3:** Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, East Timor and other countries in Indo-China Peninsula except Thailand. Overseas Chinese in Malaysia have a strong enthusiasm for political participation and have a certain influence in the local political arena, but they are subject to many restrictions. Indonesia is the country with the largest number of overseas Chinese in the world, but at the same time Indonesia is also one of the countries with the lowest political status of overseas Chinese, and there are hardly many political channels for overseas Chinese to rise. The number of overseas Chinese living in Brunei, East Timor and the Indo-China Peninsula is relatively small, and they are not enthusiastic about participating in political life. They still focus on developing the overseas Chinese economy, and their political status in these countries is relatively low. The marginal location has limited space for political development. The issue of overseas Chinese is currently a sensitive topic in these countries and often triggers a climax of public opinion during the election period.

The following is an example of the political status of overseas Chinese living in different countries (Singapore

will not be analyzed due to the dominant position of overseas Chinese).

**1. Thailand.** Thailand is the only country in Southeast Asia that was not fully colonized. The royal families of various dynasties in Thailand have Chinese ancestry. In Thailand, overseas Chinese not only have a long history of political participation, but also have a large number of people join political life. It is currently one of the countries that gives overseas Chinese political power and civil rights the most extensive. Since the World War II, the Thai government has gradually loosened restrictions on overseas Chinese naturalization. Indigenous people in Thailand also have a high acceptance of Chinese citizenship. These factors have helped users of Thai Chinese in their pursuit of political power. Especially, the 1983 general election stipulated that all legal Thai citizens have the right to vote and stand for election, thus stipulating that the Thailand overseas Chinese enjoy the same civil rights as Thais. [24]

The main ethnic group in Thailand is a different branch of the same ethnic group as the Dai ethnic group in Yunnan Province, China. Because of their similar language and culture, minorities from China's border provinces who migrate to Thailand become well adapted to local life. Thailand as a whole believes in Buddhism, religious characteristics for things a higher degree of tolerance. The overseas Chinese also have a high degree of recognition of Buddhism. Therefore, the local people have a relatively natural acceptance of Chinese immigrants and a high degree of tolerance. After the overseas Chinese acquired Thai nationality, the local people, as citizens of the host country, had the obligation to exercise the powers prescribed by law. Meanwhile, the overseas Chinese community also had the need to express political demands and pursue ethnic interests. The relatively loose ethnic policies in Thailand have boosted the overseas Chinese's yearning for political power.

With the continuous deepening of the contact between the overseas Chinese and the local aboriginals from all walks of life, the overseas Chinese are further inclined to participate in the national affairs as citizens of Thailand and jointly promote the development of the country with the aboriginals. The overseas Chinese and the indigenous people can compete fairly in all fields. The indigenous people basically have no preferential policies, and the overseas Chinese even occupy a favorable proportion in many sectors due to their high quality. Overseas Chinese also account for 60 percent of government offices, universities, hospitals and research institutes in Thailand. [25. P. 27-33, 39.]

Thailand is a binary constitutional monarchy, and the democratization process is developing rapidly. Although there are sometimes dictatorships in the military, in most cases Thailand can carry out elections representing the public opinion. Since the establishment of constitutional monarchy in 1932, Thailand has had 17 overseas Chinese prime ministers. Among them, a number of leaders of the Pheu Thai Party have been elected prime minister, especially Thaksin Shinawatra and Yingluck Shinawatra (brother and sister), have been elected as the prime minister of Thailand. That would be unthinkable in a conservative Malay nation-state.

**2. The Philippines.** The Philippines is a country that has been thoroughly influenced by Western culture, and the official language used is English. Although the indigenous people of the Philippines are Malays, the main religion of the entire country is Catholicism. Due to the colonization of many countries and the strong influence of the United States, the Philippines is relatively modern in terms of national political system construction, and the president is elected by voters. There also has been some presidents who has Chinese ancestry in the Philippines, where the overseas Chinese have the same right to run for office as the natives.

Overseas Chinese in the Philippines even often identify their Chinese ancestry during election campaigns, thereby obtaining political funding and support from relevant overseas Chinese associations. However, the overseas Chinese in the Philippines had no real influence in promoting and protecting overseas Chinese interests. Many overseas Chinese candidates cannot be seen as overseas Chinese politician because they cannot represent overseas Chinese community, they are more Filipino in every way and fully acceptable to Filipinos. Like other candidates, they ran as Filipino citizens, not as representatives of the overseas Chinese community. [26]

Both traditional overseas Chinese and younger overseas Chinese, they all tend to think of themselves as citizens of this country to treat in the Philippines, Overseas Chinese identity just origin background of symbols, to some extent the Philippines overseas Chinese based on their tendency obvious, based on individual or based on the country, for national identity and cultural identity gradually weakened. At the same time, there is a long-standing tendency for discord within the overseas Chinese community. Even if overseas Chinese candidates are elected, they only represent part of the overseas Chinese community behind them. Different overseas Chinese communities have different economic power and social influence, so the competition among overseas Chinese candidates is actually a competition within the overseas Chinese community. In the Philippines, anti-Chinese incidents are sporadic, and the social vicious incidents of kidnapping overseas Chinese threatening their family numbers are also on the rise. Faced with the critical situation of indigenous people threatening the safety of overseas Chinese, the overseas Chinese community is unable to unite and unite externally. Although these incidents did not rise to the level of genocide, and the political status of overseas Chinese in the Philippines was still much higher than that in some Southeast Asian countries, it was enough to reflect the short-sightedness and insufficiency of overseas Chinese political participation, which reduced the efforts made by the entire overseas Chinese community to obtain political and civil rights.

**3. Malaysia.** In the post-colonial period, the three-level ethnic hierarchy structure of white colonists, Chinese and Indian immigrants, and local aboriginals was replaced by the dual ethnic structure of indigenous political elites, Chinese and Indian immigrants. [14] As an intermediate group between the high colonialists and the low aboriginals, the overseas Chinese became the biggest enemy in the eyes of the aboriginals after the colonists withdrew from Southeast Asia.

During the colonial period, the overseas Chinese focused too much on the development of business and did not think deeply about the political situation after the withdrawal of the colonists. They still insisted on living a small and comfortable life. This encouraged indigenous ethnic policies. The indigenous Malays in Malaysia used their political power to strengthen their racial privileges for many times, which resulted in the failure of the status of the overseas Chinese to develop synchronously with the whole country, resulting in huge hidden contradictions. In terms of national identity, Malaysian overseas Chinese actively choose to become naturalized and want to participate in national life, but the laws of Malaysia give unequal treatment to different races. After the independence of Malaysia, the Constitution clearly stipulates that the indigenous Malays have preferential privileges. The United Malays National Organization (UMNO) representing the Malays has become the main ruling party of Malaysia. Malaysia expelled overseas Chinese-majority Singapore from the country in 1965. [14. P. 199–210]

The Malaysian government has helped to enhance the voice of Malays in the economic field by sacrificing and infringing on the interests of the overseas Chinese, and has continued to implement the policy of racial differentiation to distinguish the overseas Chinese community from the Malay community. Therefore, the overseas Chinese in Malaysia still retain the most perfect Chinese identity and cultural beliefs in the whole overseas Chinese community. The cohesiveness of overseas Chinese ethnic identity is based on the background of increasing political exclusion, while the overseas Chinese are more united, and the policy of "Malays first" is further developed, which has created a vicious circle. 13 May Incident in 1969 caused, the political power of Malaysia was completely tilted to Malays.

After 1969, the ruling party of Malaysia amended the Constitution for many times to increase the number of constituencies. Despite an increase in the number of constituencies, the rural areas with majority Malays and no overseas Chinese candidates indirectly boost the voting power of Malays in the general election. [10. P. 29]

Therefore, although the consciousness of overseas Chinese participation in politics has been awakened in Malaysia for a long time, the progress of Malaysian overseas Chinese in obtaining full equality with local ethnic groups has been difficult to develop due to the racial policy. Although Malaysia treats the overseas Chinese more cautiously than Indonesia, the biggest development space for the overseas Chinese in the political field is that the overseas Chinese political parties participate in political life with a small number of parliamentarians and a small percent of political participants. The overseas Chinese cannot own the federal subject (state) in power of the overseas Chinese.

**4. Cambodia.** Since Cambodia entered the Kingdom of Cambodia, its political development has been relatively stable and its people's living conditions have gradually improved. The local overseas Chinese have the same political and legal status as the indigenous people. However, for historical reasons, the Khmer Rouge regime of the 1970s, and multiple regimes that rapidly came to power and then collapsed, inflicted tremendous persecution on the Cambodian people and the local overseas Chinese

community. The local ethnic relations and organizations of the overseas Chinese were all disintegrated, especially the overseas Chinese living in cities, who were massacred and persecuted in large numbers. Later, on the one hand, with the slow restoration of social order, Cambodian overseas Chinese mainly focused on economic development and living conditions improvement, without showing any urgent political needs. On the other hand, the overseas Chinese community in Cambodia is now scattered, drawn from rural areas across the country. Although the new overseas Chinese community is developing continuously, it does not have strong organizational ability and cohesion compared with the overseas Chinese community in other Southeast Asian countries. At present, the overseas Chinese in Cambodia focus on Chinese cultural customs, Chinese language education and other contents, and have not shown strong enthusiasm for the pursuit of national political power.

In contrast, the participation of Cambodian overseas Chinese in politics has been carried out in another way. The former Minister of Information of Cambodia-Lu Lay Sreng, the Minister of State-Cham Prasadh, and the Cabinet Minister-Sok An, are all of Chinese descent. The wife of Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen is a descendant from Hainan Province, China. These overseas Chinese people who survived the war in Cambodia have all had the experience of trying to hide their Chinese ancestry, and they are all political people as Cambodians, because the background of Chinese ancestry may not be conducive to the promotion of political status. [27]

In addition, according to the interview record of Professor Zhuang Guotu with a overseas Chinese officer in Cambodia (2002), before 1991, the officer tried to avoid his Chinese ancestry. Later, the social gradually stable, but he still thought it was benefit for not reflecting the overseas Chinese information on formal occasions. The officer, like a politician with hidden ancestry, was still worried about the unknown danger caused by his overseas Chinese information because he could not fully trust the indigenous regime in his country. [27] Especially when China is rising, overseas Chinese sometimes need to avoid letting China's achievements affect their emotions, because the experience of overseas Chinese tells them that when there is an anti-China movement or riot, it is the local Chinese who suffer. [28. P. 4] With the gradual recovery of the overseas Chinese community in Cambodia and the continuous development of the overseas Chinese economy in Cambodia, the overseas Chinese community will continue to strengthen ties, and there will be more and more political demands representing the interests of the overseas Chinese community. They develop with the goal of gaining status in politics, in order to defend their economic and social rights.

**5. Indonesia.** The Dutch colonists implemented the policy of "divide and rule" in Indonesia, set up ethnic boundaries, promulgated the residence system and the pass system, exacerbated the conflict between the overseas Chinese and the indigenous population. [29. P. 3]

At the beginning, the overseas Chinese went to sea to make a living. The economic demand always was the most important pursuit. When Indonesia became independent, the local overseas Chinese had strong cultural identity with China, and did not naturalize in time in their political iden-

tity. [29. P. 40] After the indigenous people gained power, the issue of nationality became a symbol to judge ethnic groups. Overseas Chinese in the eyes of Indonesia have always been connected with their home country and remain loyal to China, not to Indonesia. The Indonesian authorities have always been wary of the overseas Chinese, who they fear pose a threat to Indonesia, so the Indonesian government has been very conservative in the issue of the overseas Chinese actively fighting for national identity and national treatment. [30. P. 83]

Although Indonesia's Constitution states that overseas Chinese naturalized as citizens must be treated equally with other citizens, aboriginal status remains crucial for measuring political power and national treatment. The China issue is the result of the Indonesian government's attitudes and policies rather than China itself, and the belief that suppressing the Chinese can ensure their uniqueness is misleading. [31. P. 30]

It took generations of constant efforts by overseas Chinese communities to fight for equal rights resulting in the terms of the Constitution regarding aborigines and non-aborigines being changed many times and no longer appearing. However, distinctions based on "aborigines" and "non-aborigines" still exist in daily life, leaving overseas Chinese as unequal citizens

In addition to the disadvantageous external reason of the discrimination of indigenous people against overseas Chinese, the disunity among Indonesian overseas Chinese is also important reason for their low political status. Indonesia was the country with the largest number of overseas Chinese in the world, Indonesian overseas Chinese were focused by the Government of the Republic of China diplomatic affairs. With the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the Indonesian overseas Chinese formed two factions to support the Chinese Mainland and Chinese Taiwan respectively. Therefore, it has caused internal discord among overseas Chinese associations. Besides, due to the differences of different clans, economic development levels, many interest groups have formed within the overseas Chinese community, which has reduced the cohesion of the overseas Chinese. So they cannot to express a consistent voice to the outside world. [29. P. 41]

Facing unfavorable conditions both inside and outside, the Bumiputera elites aimed at the time, and in 1965-1967, the anti-China incident started by Haji Mohammad Suharto due to the coup triggered a large-scale genocide of the Bumiputera against the overseas Chinese, causing thousands of overseas Chinese living in Indonesia died. May 1998 riots of Indonesia killed a large number of overseas Chinese. During this period, overseas Chinese shops were looted and burned, and overseas Chinese women were sexually harassed and other vicious incidents emerged one after another. The hostility of the Indonesian indigenous people to the overseas Chinese is deeply reflected in several large-scale genocide incidents, and the overseas Chinese fears and concerns about the Indonesian indigenous people have also become more intense due to anti-China activities.

After the May riots, the overseas Chinese awakened to political participation and fought hard to defend their lives and power. After many genocide and racial discrimination activities, the overseas Chinese community no longer has

any illusions about the Indonesian government and the indigenous people. They have changed from their previous role that only cared about economic interests, and actively seek to improve their political status to protect their personal safety and economic rights.

The overseas Chinese have huge wealth in Indonesia, but in the face of anti-China activities, not only wealth, but also the most basic human right, life and safety, will be plundered at any time. This bloody experience not only shows that the overseas Chinese in Indonesia have become a tool for those in power to play tricks, but also that they have lost their racial and human status. If they want to prevent this kind of phenomenon from happening again, the overseas Chinese can only actively devote themselves to politics and take up public office, so as to enhance the status of the overseas Chinese from a political point of view, so as to ensure the safety of the group.

In peacetime, the overseas Chinese can fight for political rights and interests according to legal requirements and develop their economy freely. However, when social contradictions increased in Indonesia, due to the gap in economic status, inequality in political status and changes in the relationship between China and Indonesia, all kinds of reasons have caused dramatic changes in the status of overseas Chinese in Indonesian society. Therefore, in politics, Indonesian overseas Chinese do not want to be the scapegoat for domestic conflicts in Indonesia, nor continue to live as low-level citizens. They are working hard to improve their political status within the political space granted by the government, and continue to expand the boundaries of political power granted by the government. In the limited political space stipulated by the Indonesian indigenous people, although the overseas Chinese have made a lot of efforts for this, the status of the overseas Chinese has been improved a lot at the legal level, but in the actual implementation process, the status of the overseas Chinese has not been improved significantly, and they are still discriminated against in daily life. Even if the overseas Chinese economy is very strong, it has little effect on the promotion of Chinese overseas political status.

Marx put forward: The economic base determines the superstructure. However, in most countries in Southeast Asia, the Southeast Asian overseas Chinese, who have a huge economic advantage, have not been able to gain an advantage in political power, and instead show a great disadvantage opposite to their economic advantage.

The overseas Chinese stand hard work, have business talent, are good at operating business networks, and have made great achievements in the economic field. It is precisely because of their economic superiority that the overseas Chinese are separated from the indigenous people. [32]

While focusing too much on economic development, the Chinese have lost their political acumen. The overseas Chinese businessmen's thinking has not helped them transform their economic advantages into the basis of political participation in a timely manner, resulting in a slow awakening of the consciousness of improving the political status of the Chinese themselves. The economic achievements that have lost the protection of political power are faced with the possibility of being deprived at any time. After several riots against overseas Chinese broke out in some

Southeast Asian countries, overseas Chinese paid the price of life and property and learned that there is nothing without political power. Since then, many overseas Chinese have taken part in local political activities. The Southeast Asian overseas Chinese have changed from being immersed in business and indifferent to politics to discussing, participating in and engaging in politics. [33]

However, it is a hard and long road to improve the political status of the entire Chinese group in the residence country or bring benefits to the entire Chinese ethnic group by actively participating in political activities. This does not depend entirely on the conditions and efforts of the overseas Chinese, and the social and cultural situation of the country of residence also has an impact that cannot be ignored. Under different ethnic policy environments, the impact on ethnic identity of overseas Chinese is different. Even in the so-called "melting pot" America, overseas Chinese are still marginalized by the mainstream society, not to mention the popularity of nationalism in some Southeast Asian countries. Perhaps this is the natural problem faced by Chinese immigrant groups.

#### IV. Inadequacies

On the one hand, the overseas Chinese policies discussed in this paper involve a large amount of historical

data. Due to the difficulty in obtaining first-hand data, this paper mostly uses data from literatures related to overseas Chinese studies that have been published publicly, so the details of some of the contents are not completely consistent. For the description of the Chinese communities, representative countries are selected for discussion, so as to draw general conclusions.

On the other hand, this article involves the investigation analysis of some data. This article tries to select authoritative data or public data, but, due to different data statistics standards and research subjects, the actual data may not be completely consistent with the data in this article.

#### Summary

The overseas Chinese here have strong economic strength in here, but they show a weak political strength. The gap between the two is a prominent feature of the overseas Chinese community in Southeast Asia. In addition, while the overseas Chinese in this region participate in the construction of their residence countries' own society, they are also closely related to the development of China. Therefore, leveraging the strength and influence of the overseas Chinese to foster global collaboration and growth has emerged as a distinctive asset for the diplomatic endeavors of the People's Republic of China.

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