

## **Application to the Global Studies Program, University of Freiburg – Research Proposal: Chinese Transnational Diasporas, Identity and Pro-PRC Nationalism**

### Introduction

China as a major emerging country and its shifting idea on global development as well as changing positioning in the South-North dichotomy makes it a crucial country to study (Park 2022). Grand national aspirations are often linked with nationalistic sentiments. While discussions about rising populist nationalism in the global North are abundant, it is relevant to examine similar sentiments of “other” major countries. With the use of transnationalism in nation-building, the Chinese overseas population in the global North is an especially interesting population to study (ABC News 2018). A lived experience along the friction line of major geopolitical agendas, systems of capitalism and globalization, and dissonant discourse from and about either side implies challenges to conventional theories on identity and “otherness”.

### Theoretical Background

In a globalized world, novel patterns among diasporas necessitate new concepts. Guo (2022) characterizes the new Chinese diaspora as having unprecedented hypermobility, hyperdiversity and hyperconnectivity, manifesting in substantial sub-group differences. Based on Grossman’s (2019) conclusion of 6 core aspects that define a diaspora, Guo concludes that it is fitting to refer to overseas Chinese as a “transnational diaspora”. The consideration of these aspects necessitates a transnational perspective over traditional views on migration, diasporas and assimilation. With diasporic Chinese networks being referred to as an “authentically Asian form of globalization” it is important to take involvement in these networks into consideration (Callahan, 2002, p. 481). Engagement in transnational social spaces, multiple and circular mobilities, and economic-cultural dynamics are examples of crucial aspects that fall outside of conventional views on immigration.

Callahan (2002) describes diasporic identity forming that is highly diverse in its “Chineseness” and how considerations of these nuances play into understandings of diaspora, nationalism and cosmopolitanism. Resulting from critiques of (straight-line) assimilation theories, concepts such as segmented assimilation may provide more useful tools (Portes & Zhou 1993). Furthermore, while an understanding of identity in line with anthropological constructivism is fitting for a diasporic population, a thoughtful approach needs to be applied due to the nonetheless existing state influence in transnational networks.

From this basis, I want to differentiate different diasporic experiences and the tendencies to agree with nationalistic attitudes prevalent in China.

### Research Question and Expectations

As such, my research question is, “how do different sub-groups within the Chinese transnational diaspora relate to pro-PRC nationalism?” This subgroup differentiation is drawn according to different manifestations of hyperdiversity, hypermobility and hyperconnectivity. For this use, pro-PRC can be understood synonymously to “pro-CCP”, its visions of Chinese development (Chinese Dream etc.) and societal order, as well as its position on related

geopolitical “hot topics” (Taiwan, Hongkong, etc).

As a sub question (or focus) I want to examine whether strong involvement in a particular form of Chinese network capitalism (*guanxi*-relationships) as well as the media they consume, especially exposure to China based media, show any correlation to such beliefs.

While I expect those with high mobility and high connectivity to have a higher incidence of nationalistic tendencies than those with lower connectivity and lower mobility, I also expect there to be a high variance within this group. Jiang (2021) describes a nationalistic tendency among Chinese overseas students, partly fueled by an interplay of diasporic institutions (Chinese student association) and government organs (consulate). Involvement in transnational social spaces could thus contribute to nationalistic tendencies. Another finding was that economic history can play into this as many Chinese families have only recently gained a degree of wealth and freedom from poverty. With many attributing a strong central government with strong policies of economic growth as the main reason for this, stronger involvement in an economic culture of *guanxi*-relationships (between entrepreneurs and PRC officials), could produce nationalism (while simultaneously producing cosmopolitanism (Callahan 2002)).

Common beliefs on transnationalism have been challenged by Jiang (2021) showing an example of how the mobilities and fluidities of transnationalism which were thought to reduce the significance of nation-states in identity forming can feed into a strengthened sense of national identity and political intolerance. Implications of assimilation have been challenged by Tian (2019) in a study of the Chinese diaspora in France which found that the more integrated an individual was in French society, the more they believed France to be hostile to people of Asian heritage, and vice versa. These dynamics will be interesting to examine.

#### Methods and Limitations

I propose to carry out a survey among overseas Chinese in the US and Germany, employing snowball sampling. The choice of these sites is simply due to having access to a wide array of overseas Chinese individuals and networks in these places that can reach people with various immigration histories, socio-economic status, connectivity to China and transnational Chinese networks, mobility, etc. These factors will be measured to position the subjects among the characteristics of hyperdiversity, hypermobility and hyperconnectivity (Guo 2022). Nonetheless, snowball sampling will inherently lead to biased recruitment. The significance of any findings will thus be limited to those subgroups that were sufficiently reached in sampling, limiting generalizability. Furthermore, I intend to carry out in-depth interviews with some participants to gain insights that might have been insufficiently captured from the survey, as well as giving them the opportunity to expand on more subjective aspects such as identity.

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#### Statement of Authorship

I hereby confirm that this hypothetical research proposal has been composed by me and is my own work, unless stated otherwise.

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