

English-language Editor's Introduction

The year's issue of *Chinese Southern Diaspora Studies* focuses on historical research on the Chinese in Vietnam. The bulk of its contributions are revised versions of papers from a major international workshop—"Vietnam, China, and Chinese in Vietnam: New Research on Chinese in Vietnam, from the Earliest Times until the Present"—that was held at the Australian National University on 29–29 July, 2010. The workshop was funded by a generous grant from the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange in Taiwan, for which all participants are very grateful. A report on the workshop appears in the CSCSD newsletter.

Vietnam has long had a unique, but rather paradoxical, relationship with China and diasporic Chinese people: nowhere else in Southeast Asia are connections between Chinese and local people and governments as old, as complex, or as intimate as in Vietnam, yet many details of this relationship remain poorly understood. The powerful influence of twentieth-century nationalist political agendas and of research priorities arising from them have too often restricted our knowledge of Chinese people in Vietnam to generalities or stereotypes. Perhaps the most potent such stereotype, because routinely evoked as the foundation stone of an age-old Vietnamese identity, is the notion of an essential and enduring "Vietnameseness" in resistance to one thousand years of "Chinese" occupation". While not in itself an issue of diaspora, this powerful myth of origins deserves to be reconsidered in a journal devoted to Chinese diaspora because of its intellectual contribution to the pain and hardship suffered by many diasporic Chinese in later twentieth-century Vietnam. We are therefore proud to begin this issue with a special symposium on origins in which two emerging scholars—John D. Phan and Michael Churchman—present cutting-edge contributions that, taken together, seriously test whether hard historical evidence can be found to support the belief that a core "Vietnamese" identity, self-consciously different from its Chinese "Other", existed through ten centuries of "Chinese occupation". The distinguished historian, John K. Whitmore, then concludes the symposium with a short piece that, among other things, shows how, even centuries after an independent Vietnamese state emerged in the tenth century CE, the upper Tongking Gulf littoral region continued to inhabit a shared Sino–Vietnamese cultural zone.

The rest of the journal moves to the colonial and immediate post-colonial eras. In a revised version of an earlier piece, Claudine Salmon and Tạ Trọng Hiệp enlighten us about the Singapore Babas in 1880s Saigon while presenting a visiting Hokkien literatus' views of Saigon in 1890. Nola Cooke and Thomas Engelbert both utilise unpublished materials from the colonial archives to shed light on other dark corners. Cooke examines the Heaven and Earth Society in early 1880s Cochinchina, and uncovers some hidden connections between the Tiandihui and the most significant Chinese businessmen of the time. Engelbert challenges the bland colonial stereotype of the apolitical Chinese by examining what the French security records tell us about them in the 1920s and early 1930s, and especially about the Guomintang in Cochinchina. Two research documents continue this broad theme: the translation of a Heaven and Earth Society letter written in early 1882 in Cambodia; and the translated tomb inscription of Tjia Mah Yen, an important Peranakan businessman in early twentieth-century Cochinchina.

Moving forward to the 1940s, Shui Wentang and David G. Marr come from different perspectives to provide detailed insights into Chinese experiences at particular times. Drawing on official Taiwanese archival sources, Shui discusses the material and physical losses of resident Chinese during the Japanese occupation (1940–45) and the conflicted years at the start of the First Indochinese War. Using archival and contemporaneous newspaper sources, Marr provides a rare grass-roots view of the immediate post-War period, when a Chinese occupying army controlled Vietnam north of the 16th parallel.

Finally, we continue our interest in electronic sources for Chinese southern diaspora by publishing an introduction to a new website, the "Chinese Australian History Collection Online", contributed by Mei-fen Kuo and Tsebin Tchen.