ABSTRACT

Since the late 19th century, the emigration of Chinese has left large numbers of their family members (Qiaojuan) behind in China. These “left-behind relatives” were seen as a channel through which the government could influence the attitudes and behaviors of the Chinese overseas especially in relation to overseas remittances to families remaining in China; the Qiaojuan thus became a group that successive Chinese governments treated with special consideration in their policy-making. Before 1949, some Qiaojuan received favorable treatment and a degree of protection from extortion and theft, and these were extended to the whole group of Qiaojuan regarding their property and legitimate rights in the post-1949 era, with the exception of the period when the “ultra-Left” policy was implemented. Many Qiaojuan actively used their privileged status to pursue their interests through the transnational protection networks. This article examines the changing perceptions of and policies toward the Qiaojuan on the part of various Chinese governments between the 1880s and the 1990s. It demonstrates that the changing socio-political status of the Qiaojuan is contingent upon the government’s perceived importance of the Chinese overseas and the Qiaojuan in an era of rapid national development.