Abstract

This article reflects on the representations of overseas Chinese in Chinese political and popular discourses from the late Qing to World War II. It argues that contrary to prevalent views, which credit the success of the Chinese nationalist discourse in mobilizing the overseas Chinese to their re-incorporation into the Chinese nation, extraterritorial Chinese nationalism depended not so much on the rhetoric of inclusion, but rather on the separation of the overseas Chinese as a sub-ethnic group, particularly after they were “rebranded” as huaqiao, or Chinese sojourners. This analysis begins by looking at the key reasons for Chinese political activists’ newfound interest in the diasporas — in soliciting huaqiao contributions to China’s state-building projects — and argues that they imbued huaqiao with certain positive qualities only insofar as these made them relevant to China. The truth is, prejudices against the emigrants have persisted and Chinese within China continue to view huaqiao as uncouth, uncultured, and even “unChinese.”