Abstract

Between 1950 and 1966, about 60,000 overseas Chinese youth, officially known as qiaosheng, entered the People’s Republic of China (PRC) as students and refugees from Southeast Asia. In the state archival record, qiaosheng appeared collectively “disobedient” to socialism, first cast as “capitalist” during the Great Leap Forward (1958-60) and later as a “two-faced” threat during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Not to be taken at face value, their supposed “disobedience” illustrated the broad and complex challenges that the diaspora posed to Mao’s China. Even as the Party-state valued the mobilization of overseas Chinese resources, a combination of massive inflows of refugees from abroad and radical transformation at home produced many conflicts over qiaosheng across the 1950s and 1960s. Thus, the narrative of “disobedience” revealed not only an unstable relationship between China and the diaspora, but also how the diaspora functioned as a key site whereby differences between socialism and capitalism were worked out.