

Being Chinese: Voices from the Diaspora. By Wei Djao. Tucson, Arizona: The University of Arizona Press, 2003, xvi + 240 pages, US \$22.95. Paper. ISBN 0-8165-2302-9.

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Over the past two decades the subject of the identity of overseas Chinese and diasporas has begun to receive greater attention from social science scholars. Ontologically, most studies tend to employ macro level analyses to examine how Chinese overseas alter and sustain their identity as Chinese in economic, political and cultural environments outside of mainland China. In such macro level analyses the roles and abilities of individuals are often assumed to be homogenous.

As a complement to macro analyses, this volume offers a different approach to the realities of Chinese identity formation. By using a micro perspective, Wei Djao deems the ordinary overseas Chinese as active social actors that have the ability to speak for themselves. Epistemologically, in order to answer questions about how Chinese construct their identities overseas we must not rely on explanations constructed by researchers alone; the actual accounts of Chinese overseas should be taken into consideration. To better understand Chinese identities in diasporas, Djao uses data collected from the narratives of twenty-two Chinese from sixteen countries outside of China including, Australia, Canada, Cuba, Germany, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Peru, the Philippines, Singapore, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Zimbabwe. These diverse narratives indicate that Chinese identity formation is a dynamic and contextual process.

Djao divides the book into three parts. The first part of the book briefly describes the history of Chinese emigration. In the second part, Djao presents the narratives of twenty diasporic Chinese in which they describe how they live, their origins, family background, work experience in their country of residence, and how they define themselves as Chinese. In this section Djao uses

chapter names that signify the unique emphasis of being Chinese in each diasporic narrative.

In the last part of the book Djao offers her analysis of the narratives. By employing an analytic model developed by Wang Gungwu, Djao discusses Chinese identity from ethnic, political, and cultural dimensions. From the narratives Djao identifies several important findings: 1) tracing ancestry to China and an awareness of cultural roots are a common theme in discourses of Chinese identity; 2) Chinese living outside of mainland China have incorporated selective elements and varying amounts of Chinese culture into their daily lives; 3) identity is a dynamic and multidimensional process; 4) agents of socialization are important in shaping identity; 5) individual opinions form an important part of identity; 6) there is great need for a new conceptualization of Chinese identity in diasporas; and 7) although each of the narratives may aid in the theoretical development of a Chinese diasporic identity, there is great need for further research and new conceptualizations of ethnic identity.

This volume provides an important starting point for studies of Chinese identity in a global context. It is clear from this book that it is not enough to understand the nature of identity by focusing on social structures; individuals should not be underestimated in their participation in identity formation. Although in a different environment and social context, Chinese overseas have unique ways of manifesting who they are and sustaining their Chinese identity. This process also includes discontinuing some elements of traditional Chinese culture while maintaining other aspects.

Although helpful, Gungwu's model for analyzing Chinese identity along ethnic, political, and cultural dimensions may not be sufficient and may in fact limit the dynamic discourse that could be had concerning diasporic Chinese identity. If we want to focus on the way Chinese overseas act as agents who speak for themselves, any analytic typology of identity discourse should be derived from the narratives of the people themselves. Imposing existing models of Chinese identity on the narratives of Chinese in diasporas is not sufficient. By using typologies that emerge from actual discourses and narratives, better theoretical models could be generated to

explain the formation of Chinese identity in a global context. This volume serves as an important early attempt to fill the gap in studies of Chinese identity and Djao provides an extremely valuable and readable exploration into understanding the dynamics of Chinese identity.