

Across the border: The Study on the Transnational Political Practice of Fuzhou Immigrants in New York

LI Xiangyi

(School of Anthropology and Sociology, Sun Yat-Sen University)

I. Research Background

In the global context, under the background of globalization, more and more international immigrants have established their new homes and new community in their receiving countries, and in the meantime, have maintained frequent and orderly activities in financing, industries, trade, culture and politics with their sending country. Such a living pattern between the sending country and the receiving country is called by scholars as “transnational practices” (Basch et al., 1994: 6; Portes, 1994; 波特斯, 周敏, 2011) .

The transnational practice of immigrants involves the economic, political, social, cultural and religious domain. Many researchers focus on the political transnational practices of immigrants and conduct some empirical studies (Ostergaard-Nielsen, 2003; Guarnizo et al., 2003; Blom-Hansen, 1991; Kurien, 2001; Layton-Henry, 2002; Mahler, 2000; Skrbis, 1999; Pei-te Lien, 2007; Ong, 1999: 214-239; Bloemraad, 2004; 丁月牙, 2012; 连培德, 2009) .

The previous researches mainly aim at the Latin immigrants or the immigrants from the high socioeconomic status. As a consequence, we do not

have reliable knowledge of the Asian immigrants from the low socioeconomic status especially the illegal immigrants.

My study focus on the case of Fuzhou immigrants in the U.S. Many scholars study the migration, social adaptation, and some illegal industry of this immigrant group, but few pay attention to the transnational political practice of these Fuzhouese (see also Kwong, 1997; Chin, 1999; Pieke, 2004; Liang et al., 2008; Chu, 2010; 彼得·郎, 2001; 庄国土, 2006; 李明欢, 2005). So this paper attempts to discuss the types, features and patterns of transnational political practice of illegal immigrants from the interactive macro-micro perspectives. This study aims to offer a conceptual framework for a systematic analysis of the impacts of sending and receiving country policy, the social status mobility of immigrants on the political transnational practice of immigrants. The article will discuss the following questions in detail: How do the Fuzhou immigrants participate on the transnational political practice? What are their motives? And how the practice influences their social adaptation? What role do the Chinese government and Fujian local government play in this process?

This research uses the case study. The major sites chosen for the field work are settlements of Fuzhou immigrants on the East Broadway of Chinatown and the Eighth Avenue of Brooklyn District in New York, and the sending areas of Fuzhou immigrants on the Lian Jiang, one county of Fuzhou. Data were collected both in the United States and China, including the survey

with organizational leaders, in-depth interviews, field observations. The names of the people and associations in this paper are anonymous exclude the central government leaders.

II. Findings

A. Support from across the Pacific: Transnational Political Support

Transnational political support is the basic form of the transnational political practice of Fuzhou immigrants. Fuzhou Associations in American play the role of organizer and coordinator in the transnational political support of the immigrants. When the government leaders from the home country visit America, all association from the county, town and village level will make a “full” preparation for fighting against the Overseas anti-china forces by adopting the “pursuit and interception” strategy to keep the anti-China forces like Falun Gong away from the view of the government leaders and medias.

After several successful attempts of pursuits and interceptions against the anti-China forces, the Fuzhou community is taking a more and more important role among the Chinese community. And this has undoubtedly changed the original negative image of Fuzhou immigrants.

These spontaneous patriotic behaviors also arouse the attention from the Chinese embassy in American consulate. After that, the consulates often invite

the Fujian Association to take part in the welcome ceremony when the government leaders pay a state visit. And top leaders of the government will also pay visit to these associations and meet with the immigrants especially the leaders of the associations.

Many Fuzhou immigrants especially the association leaders will take this chance to promote their political status. Mr. Lin the leader of one association stole into America with his family in 1980s. He got the green card in 1986 because of the amnesty. Recently, the top leaders of Chinese government meet with him frequently because he is the leader of association. He even put he and Premier Wen Jiabao's photo in his business card, which is also hung in the remarkable place of his home. For Lin Bing who has changed his identity into an overseas Chinese by illegal immigration, transnational political support has given him noticeable compensation in political status. What's more, Mr. Lin argues that these transnational political supports maintain the "face" of the home country, which compensates the negative impact on the national image due to the smuggling.

The transnational political support also includes the act of maintaining the Chinese national image initiatively. Because the national image of home country have direct influence to their self-image and the political status in the host society. That is why they spare no effort to participate in the transnational political support and promote their status at the same time.

B. Long-distance Nationalism: Transnational Political Participation

If the transnational political support is the basic form of transnational political practice, transnational political participation is more positive act of Fuzhou immigrants, which we can call “the long-distance nationalism”. The long-distance nationalism was proposed by the Benedict Anderson. Anderson states that this sort of nationalism acts as a "phantom bedrock" for people who want to experience a national connection, but who are no longer resident in their national or ethnic homeland and do not actually want to leave their diaspora community.

According to the Chinese law, only the Chinese citizens residing abroad have the right to participate in the government and political affairs, while those naturalized foreign citizen don't. However, out of the consideration of diplomacy and United Front work, the nation would like to develop overseas forces that support itself. In order to achieve this purpose, they open courses to the naturalized Chinese who are dispatched by the overseas embassies to return to their home country to study the national condition and the policy of Chinese government in order to help the immigrants know China better.

Mr. Wang the leader of the United Fuzhouese of America Association is one of them. Mr. Zheng was invited by the Overseas Chinese Friendship Association to participate the workshop for the young Chinese overseas in the May of 2007. He is very proud that he could be “picked” by the home country to

participate these activities, which shows his outstanding social status. The goal of the government is to introduce Chinese diplomatic policy and policy on oversea Chinese affairs to the Fuzhou immigrants in order to get their support from aboard.

Mr. Zheng, another leader of the United Fuzhounese of America Association participated on the 11th Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in 2012. Although the political right given to the immigrants is lacking in substance, the immigrants still take part on the public political affairs of the state, province, city, county every year.

The political participation on the host society of Fuzhou immigrants has some sort of multinational characteristics. Many American politicians including the Chinese, whites and Jewish will come to Chinatown and meet with the leaders of Fuzhou Associations, propagandizing their political programs to canvass and raise the campaign funds. Many leaders try to change their stereotype on the mainland China and Chinese American in the contact with these politicians.

C. Clashes between brothers: Compete with the Political Resources

China is an official-centered society. Strongly affected by the Chinese cultural tradition, the Chinese immigrants value the acquisition of political resources from their home country. Fuzhou immigrants are obviously a typical

example in this aspect.

Since 1980s, the Fuzhou associations in New York have been increasing. The competition with political resources within the associations also becomes fierce, such as the Fuzhou American Association(FAA) and the United Fuzhounese of America Association(UFAA).

How to obtain political recognition and support from their home country and get the limited political resources for personal development has become the focus of competition between these two Fuzhou Chinese societies.

In recent years, the CPC central committee and State Council have consciously strengthened their public diplomacy of overseas Chinese affairs, in order to increase feelings of closeness of the people in the residing countries of overseas Chinese to China, and upgrade China's international image.

Fujian is an important hometown for overseas Chinese. A large part of new Chinese immigrants are from the Fuzhou area, so establishing the Fujian Bookstore Overseas in immigrant ethnic enclave is one of the important move for the National News Publication Bureau.

In the efforts of Mr. Wang, the leader of FAA, FAA found the first Fujian Bookstore Overseas by beating UFAA and other Fuzhou Associations in the world, which means that the Chinese government take FAA for the most typical representative of Fuzhou Associations.

In the December of 2011, the officers of Fujian government attended the

opening ceremony of Fujian Bookstore Overseas in FAA, New York. As a result, none of the members of UFAA were present in the ceremony.

Both two associations know the importance of getting political resources from the home country, on one hand, which could improve the legitimacy and popularity of the associations, on the other hand, which can help the immigrants who have suffered the dislocation to promote their political status and compensate their social status (see also 黎相宜, 周敏, 2012;黎相宜, 陈杰, 2011).

The Chinese government also considers the overseas Chinese are the unique resources for China to show itself to the world to the fullest extent and for the rest of the world to better understand China, which will remove the negative international public opinions and improve its international environment (see also 金正昆, 臧红岩, 2012; 娄亚萍, 2011; 刘宏, 2010).

III. Conclusion and Discussion

Many previous studies on the immigrant transnational political practice have discuss that the transnational activities may challenge territorial jurisdiction and citizenship and impede immigrant integration (Ong, 1999: 214-239) .

But from our observations, paying attention to the home country will not hinder the Fuzhou immigrants from becoming the real American citizens. Most

of the immigrants taking part in transnational political practice actively have already or looking forward to taking the American citizenship.

The most important reason that Fuzhou immigrants are involved to the transnational political practice is that they could promote their political and social status by using the resources of the home country, which contributes to immigrant integration to host societies.

What is inescapable is immigrants afford the firm political support to the home country through these transnational political activities , who are also supposed to be China-friendly and get the permission and praise from the Chinese government.

However, the impact of transnational political practice on the public affairs of both China and America is still limited. Meanwhile, further researches need to be carried out on whether factors of home country, policies of the host country and relations between the two countries, and the social status change of the individual immigrants can explain the transnational political practice of immigrants from other countries and socio-economic backgrounds.

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