Between Equality and Prejudice: Chinese Planning on the Postwar Status of the Chinese Diaspora, 1940–9

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Abstract
China’s ruling Nationalist government saw the Second World War as an opportunity to shape the postwar world in China’s favour. However, existing studies have often focused on China’s plans on territorial arrangements in East Asia. This article examines how Nationalist China imagined and attempted to improve the postwar status of the Chinese diaspora in host countries. During the war, Nationalist China envisaged the removal of discriminatory treatment against the Chinese diaspora and planned to advocate racial equality. However, this equality was often intended to be parity with white people and Japanese rather than other Asians. Some Chinese officials even claimed that the Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asia should receive preferential treatment, which resonated with their perceptions that Chinese were superior to other Asians. As atrocities against Chinese migrants in Southeast Asia after the war mounted, China was forced to concentrate on saving their lives and assets. At the Asian Relations Conference, held in India in March–April 1947, Chinese delegates defended the Chinese diaspora against sceptical delegates of Southeast Asian nations. Although the conference delegates reached an agreement on treating foreign migrants in each country fairly, the Chinese diaspora still found itself in a precarious position.

Keywords
Asian Relations Conference, Chinese diaspora, discrimination, Nationalist China, postwar order, Second World War

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The Second World War gave birth to a new global order. It has been assumed that Euro-American powers – chief of which were the US, the Soviet Union and Britain – were the locomotives of change.1 However, countries that recovered sovereignty after the war, such as China and India, were also leaving their marks. Of the decolonising countries, China was in a strong position, at least internationally. It was one of the worldwide ‘Four Policemen’ named by the US President Franklin D. Roosevelt, cemented by its permanent seat at the UN Security Council. It bears stressing that this was before the Chinese Communist Party established its regime in 1949. The Nationalist government, led by Chiang Kai-shek’s Chinese Nationalist Party (Guomindang), used the war to catapult China to an international prominence and leadership that had been unseen for China for at least a century. Previous studies have highlighted China’s interest in recovering ‘lost’ territories like Manchuria and weakening its great rival Japan.2 Yet its ambitions went far beyond territorial arrangements. Eric Helleiner has shown that Chinese officials at the Bretton Woods Conference in 1944, which laid the foundation of the postwar international economic order, emphasised that the new order must support the developmental goals of poor countries like China.3 Another under-researched area is the postwar status of the Chinese diaspora, an issue at the heart of China’s concerns.4 For the Nationalists,

1 See, for example, O. Rosenboim, The Emergence of Globalism: Visions of World Order in Britain and the United States, 1939–1950 (Princeton, NJ 2017); C. Baxter, The Great Power Struggle in East Asia, 1944–50: Britain, America and Post-War Rivalry (Basingstoke 2009); A. Husain, Mapping the End of Empire: American and British Strategic Visions in the Postwar World (Cambridge, MA 2014); P.J. Heer, Mr. X and the Pacific: George F. Kennan and American Policy in East Asia (Ithaca, NY 2018); D. Barnes, ‘Think Tanks and a New Order in East Asia: The Council of Foreign Relations and the Institute of Pacific Relations During World War II’, The Journal of American-East Asian Relations, 22, 2 (2015), 89–119; T. Hasegawa, Racing the Enemy: Stalin, Truman, and the Surrender of Japan (Cambridge, MA 2005).

2 In English, a pioneering account is X. Liu, A Partnership for Disorder: China, the United States, and Their Policies for the Postwar Disposition of the Japanese Empire, 1941–1945 (Cambridge 1996). Recent Chinese scholarship has paid more attention to China’s postwar geopolitical aims. See, for example, C. Li, ‘Chongsu shijie: kanzhan hauqi Zhongguo dui zhanhou shijie de faxiang yu shijian’ [Reshaping the World: China’s Imaginings and Practice on the Postwar World during the War of Resistance], unpublished paper, Chiang Kai-shek and China during the War of Resistance Academic Conference, delivered 25 June 2013; R. Duan, ‘Taipingyang zhanzheng qianqi Jiang Jieshi de zhanhou gouxiang (1941–1943)’ [Chiang Kai-shek’s Postwar Vision Formed during the Early Period of the Pacific War (1941–1943)], Guoshiguan guankan, 32 (2012), 121–52; J. Wang, ‘Daguo yishi yu daguo zuowei—Kangzhan hauqi de Zhongguo guoji juese yu waijiao nuli’ [The Sense and Actions of a Great Country—China’s International Roles and Diplomatic Endeavours in the Later Stage of the War of Resistance], Lishi Yanjiu, 6 (2008), 124–37. See also the bilingual volume of S. Wu, F. Lu and Y. Lin (eds) Kailiu Xuanyan de yi yi yu yinxiang [The Significance and Impact of the Cairo Declaration] (Taipei 2014). For a collection of recent research on China’s international position during the Second World War, H. van de Ven, D. Lary and S.R. MacKinnon (eds) Negotiating China’s Destiny in World War II (Stanford, CA 2014).

3 E. Helleiner, Forgotten Foundations of Breton Woods: International Development and the Making of the Postwar Order (Ithaca, NY 2014). For the growing scholarship on postwar reconstruction in China, see T. Ma, ‘A Chinese Beveridge Plan: The Discourse of Social Security and the Post-War Reconstruction of China’, European Journal of East Asian Studies, 11, 2 (2012), 329–49; R. Mitter, ‘Imperialism, Transnationalism, and the Reconstruction of Post-war China: UNRRA in China, 1944–7’, Past and Present, Supplement 8 (2013), 51–69; R. Mitter, ‘State-Building after Disaster: Jiang Tingfu and the Reconstruction of Post-World War II China, 1943–1949’, Comparative Studies in Society and History, 61, 1 (2019), 176–206.

4 The scholarship on the Chinese diaspora is vast. See, for example, S.B. Miles, Chinese Diasporas: A Social History of Global Migration (Cambridge 2020); P.A. Kuhn, Chinese among Others: Emigration in Modern Times (Lanham, MD 2008); A. McKeown, Chinese Migrant Networks and Cultural Change: Peru, Chicago,
the rehabilitation of China, one of their postwar priorities, included assisting their overseas compatriots.

This article considers how, during and immediately after the war, Nationalist China’s leaders imagined what the postwar status of Chinese migrants should be in their host countries. Chinese leaders had to contend with delicate realities, not least the fraught relationship among the Chinese migrants, the ruling governments and the local populations. The postwar world China was imagining consisted of prejudicial views on other Asians as well as lofty ideals.\(^5\) Recognition of this kind of pragmatism is lacking in discussions of Asianism that are more focused on friendly exchanges in anticipation of a reviving Asia.\(^6\) This article focuses on the 1940s: its first half saw Nationalist officials contemplating the shape of the postwar world, the second half witnessed attempts to realise their visions – derailed by their loss in the Chinese Civil War.

This article argues that, during the war, Nationalist China aimed to remove discriminatory treatment against the Chinese diaspora and promote racial equality, but this equality was more about parity with white people (and Japanese) rather than other Asians, as examples in South Africa suggest. Defending the interests of Chinese migrants could mean merely raising the position of Chinese in the existing colonial–racial hierarchy by distinguishing Chinese from other Asians who were seen as of lower standing. Some Chinese officials even believed that the Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asia – a region roughly equivalent to what the Chinese called ‘Nanyang’ – should enjoy special privileges. This echoed their perceptions of Chinese superiority over other Asians. It undermined the myth of unity among Asians and did not help the attainment of real equality.

In the wake of postwar atrocities against the Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asia, China had to concentrate on protecting the diaspora from immediate danger, slowing down but

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5 An early work on racial perceptions in China is F. Dikötter, The Discourse of Race in Modern China (London 1992). More recent works include J. Leibold, ‘Competing Narratives of Racial Unity in Republican China: From the Yellow Emperor to Peking Man’, Modern China, 32, 2 (2006), 181–220; J. Leibold, Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism: How the Qing Frontier and Its Indigenes Became Chinese (New York, NY 2007); X. Liu, Frontier Passages: Ethnopolitics and the Rise of Chinese Communism, 1921–1945 (Stanford, CA 2003); F. Dikötter (ed.) The Construction of Racial Identities in China and Japan: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives (London 1997); H. Lin, Tibet and Nationalist China’s Frontier: Intrigues and Ethnopolitics, 1928–49 (Vancouver 2006); T. Mullaney, Coming to Terms with the Nation: Ethnic Classification in Modern China (Berkeley, CA 2010).

6 This point echoes the argument made by T. Sen and B. Tsui (eds) Beyond Pan-Asianism: Connecting China and India, 1840s-1960s (New Delhi 2021). The works of India-based scholars Tan Yunshan and Tan Chung, who are father and son, are exemplars of scholarly studies on the ‘friendly exchanges’. For an analysis of their research, see Z. Zhang, Wenming kuayue Ximalaya zhanging: Tantao Yindu Huayi xuezhe Tan Yunshan yu Tan Zhong de sìxiàng mailuo [Civilisation Crosses the Himalayan Barrier: Investigating the Threads of Thought of Indian Chinese scholars Tan Yunshan and Tan Chung] (Taipei 2010).
not discarding its plans on migrant status. Chinese representatives defended the status of Chinese migrants against the suspicion of Southeast Asian delegates at the Asian Relations Conference, held in New Delhi in March–April 1947. Despite the tension, the delegates agreed to treat foreign migrants in each country fairly. Yet this did not resolve all mistreatments, nor did the Nationalists entirely abandon their tactic of equality with white people at the expense of other Asians. The less than progressive views of some Chinese leaders (and, for that matter, nationalists in Southeast Asia who targeted the Chinese diaspora) complicated the belief that postwar anti-colonial struggles gave rise to more equal racial relations. The case of China contrasts with that of India, which has sometimes been considered a champion of what became the Global South in fighting racialism.7

An introduction to patterns of Chinese migration in the early twentieth century is useful. Most Chinese migrants moved within Asia, constituting one of the two major groups of intra-Asian migrants (the other being Indians). Up to 1949, almost 90 per cent of some 21 million Chinese who emigrated and stayed in foreign lands went to Southeast Asia: British Malaya, the Dutch East Indies and Thailand were the most popular destinations.8 Most of them took up menial labour, working in cotton or sugar plantations, digging tunnels, mining, manufacturing weapons or food. Some others started or expanded businesses in these areas and became wealthy.9 The number of the rich among Chinese migrants, however, was not as great as the indigenous people suspected.10 What intimidated indigenous and colonial leaders in host societies was not only the number of Chinese and their wealth but also their nationality. Since the late nineteenth century, some migrants from China began to view themselves as members of a single ‘Chinese diaspora’, as did colonial and indigenous leaders. Such references ignored significant divisions within the diasporic population along fault lines like dialect and kinship. Still, Chinese governments recognised migrants from China and their descendants legally as Chinese citizens, partly to mobilise their resources to support the governments. In 1909, legislation of the Qing dynasty stipulated that one whose father was

7 This does not mean that independent India had no difficulties with its own minorities, for which see N.G. Jayal, Citizenship and Its Discontents: An Indian History (Cambridge, MA 2013). The Indian National Congress leaders, including their preeminent leader Mohandas Gandhi, petitioned for the welfare of the Indian diaspora in South Africa but less for Africans. On the other hand, for India’s pursuit of racial equality and human rights, see M. Bhagavan, India and the Quest for One World: The Peacemakers (Basingstoke 2013); R. Khan, ‘Between Ambitions and Caution: India, Human Rights, and Self-Determination at the United Nations’, in A.D. Moses, M. Duranti and R. Burke (eds) Decolonization, Self-Determination, and the Rise of Global Human Rights Politics (Cambridge 2020), 207–35.

8 O.A. Westad, Restless Empire: China and the World since 1750 (London 2012), 213.

9 Miles, Chinese Diasporas, 99.

10 Westad, Restless Empire, 214.
Chinese (or whose mother was when the father’s nationality was indeterminate), wherever one was born, would be Chinese. Succeeding governments followed suit. Attempting to speak for the whole Chinese diaspora, the Nationalist party-state went further in mobilization by, among other things, setting up Chinese schools, founding voluntary associations and collecting intelligence. To host governments and societies, this ‘law of bloodline’ meant that Chinese nationals could become a fifth column in their societies.\(^{11}\)

In this context, anti-Chinese sentiment arose in much of Southeast Asia at the turn of the twentieth century, and became part of Indonesian, Malay and Filipino nationalisms.\(^ {12}\) Chinese migrants in the Dutch East Indies and Malaya also faced state-sponsored repression.\(^ {13}\) Thailand was something of an exception. On the one hand, it restricted immigration, arrested Nationalist activists and drove Chinese out of key economic sectors. On the other, the Thai monarchy and aristocracy co-opted Chinese elites loyal to the monarchy, making ‘bad’ Chinese an enemy and ‘good’ Chinese a pillar of the Thai royal nationalism.\(^ {14}\)

Japan’s conquest of Southeast Asia worsened the plight of the Chinese diaspora, many members of which were imprisoned or killed. The most notorious example was the *Sook Ching* (purge): some 30,000 Chinese in Singapore and thousands more in Malayan cities were executed. Some fled to places like Southwest China or India. Others were spared from the worst by working with the Japanese, but many of the rich had huge amounts of wealth confiscated.\(^ {15}\)

In the context of such unfavourable circumstances to the Chinese diaspora, the basic aim of the Nationalists was to secure migrant rights. Between late 1940 and early 1941, Wu Tiecheng, head of the Nationalist Party’s Overseas Department – the party organ in charge of Chinese diasporic affairs – visited much of Southeast Asia to offer support to the Chinese diaspora. Praised as the ‘teacher of overseas Chinese’, Wu was a key figure in diasporic affairs, founding in 1942 the Nanyang Overseas Chinese Association (now known as the Overseas Chinese Association) to strengthen the connections between Southeast Asian Chinese and China.\(^ {16}\) In his post-trip report, Wu was especially concerned about the ‘interventionist’ colonial policy of the Dutch East Indies. For Wu, its legal system ‘demonstrated racialist discrimination’. Under its criminal law, Wu explained, Chinese and the ‘natives’ (*turen*) were judged by the same legal code, and Chinese could not appeal to the supreme court; however, ‘Japanese are treated equally

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11\ Even for some members of the Chinese diaspora like the Singapore-based magnate Tan Kah-kee, Nationalist attempts to control diasporic affairs were seen as intrusion. Kuhn, *Chinese among Others*, 267–9.
12\ Ibid., 270–1, 286–96; Amrith, *Migration and Diaspora*, 124.
13\ Abraham, ‘State Formation’, 53.
14\ Kuhn, *Chinese among Others*, 271. For more on Thailand, see W. Wongsurawat, *The Crown and the Capitalists: The Ethnic Chinese and the Founding of the Thai Nation* (Seattle, WA 2019).
15\ Kuhn, *Chinese among Others*, 285–6.
16\ C.S. Tan, (no date) ‘Wu Tiecheng de nanyang zhi xing (1940–1941): Yi zai Malaiya de huodong wei taolun zhongxin’ [Wu Tiecheng’s Trip to Nanyang (1940–1941): Centring the Discussion on the Activities in Malaya]. Available at: https://ocah.org.tw/getHistory?id=205 (accessed 20 November 2021).
as Europeans’. ‘When the Sino-Dutch treaty is revised in the future’, Wu wrote, Chinese diplomats ‘must strive for improvement’ regarding these issues.17

In January 1944, Chiang Kai-shek ordered several government or party bodies whose work touched upon the Chinese diaspora to devise ‘concrete measures’ to ‘develop’ the legal status of Chinese migrants. This was just weeks after the Cairo Conference in November 1943, where Chiang Kai-shek discussed with Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill wartime strategy and postwar arrangements in Asia. Chiang thought that in Cairo his achievements in ‘politics’, the postwar settlements of East Asia, were the greatest.18 In this context, the time seemed ripe for China to consider its future policies regarding the Chinese diaspora. Responding to Chiang’s order, Liang Long, head of the Department of European Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, drafted a proposal in the same month. It called for ‘fair treatment’ of Chinese migrants, who should enjoy ‘all the rights… of Euro-Americans and Japanese’. The Chinese government should negotiate on the migrants’ behalf the end of ‘draconian rules on entry and residence’.19 The fact that an official responsible for dealing with European countries prepared the document implies that at least some Chinese officials expected that after the war they would liaise with returning European empires.20 This assumption not only belittled Asian nationalist movements. It appeared to accept that Chinese migrants – whom the Nationalists regarded as Chinese – would continue to live under colonial rule when China negotiated the end of extra-territoriality and most colonial concessions in China itself in 1943.

In June 1944, the Overseas Department offered recommendations similar with those outlined by Liang Long. This department suggested signing ‘equal and mutually beneficial treaties’ with the various Nanyang governments. The purpose was that Chinese migrants would enjoy the same treatment as ‘migrants of various countries’ – including those in the West – and not be restricted by ‘special laws’. Chongqing should immediately resume consular service in Southeast Asia to protect their legal rights, especially when new treaties were yet to be ratified.21

Six months later, Wang Chonghui, a trusted aide of Chiang Kai-shek especially in diplomacy, and Secretary General of the Supreme Council of National Defence (the top policymaking body of the Nationalist government during China’s war against Japan) offered yet again similar policy suggestions. For example, host governments should safeguard the ‘legitimate rights’ of Chinese migrants in ‘residence, business, property purchase, investment, forming associations’. Those governments should protect the ‘lawful assets and other rights’ obtained by Chinese migrants before or after the war.22

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17 Wu Tiecheng, (1941) ‘Xuanwei Nanyang baogao shu’ [Report on the Trip to Nanyang]. Available at: https://ocah.org.tw/getHistory?id=207 (accessed 20 November 2021).
18 F. Lu, ‘Jiang Zhongzheng, Kailuo Huiyi yu zhanhou Dongya xinzhixu de xingcheng’ [Chiang Kai-shek, the Cairo Conference and the Formation of the New Order in Postwar Asia], in Wu, Lu and Lin (eds) Kailuo Xuanyan, 143–71.
19 Liang Long to T. V. Soong, 28 January 1944, Academia Historica (AH), 020-070900-0076.
20 Overseas Department to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 24 November 1945, AH, 020-010807-0045.
21 Overseas Department to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 7 June 1944, AH, 020-070900-0076.
22 Wang Chonghui to Chiang Kai-shek, 29 December 1944, AH, 001-067130-00003-007.
It is important to note that the Chinese government maintained that all Chinese migrants and their descendants were Chinese, and that it had the authority to protect them. The nationality of Chinese migrants remained at the heart of discord between China and host countries. Without a satisfactory solution, the Nationalists preferred delaying the issue. In January 1945, the Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission, the Nationalist government department responsible for diasporic affairs, insisted that the nationality of overseas Chinese should be based on bloodline rather than the place of birth. When children of Chinese migrants reached adult age, they would be given a ‘free choice’ to convert to foreign nationality if they wished. Yet, the commission noted, China would secretly retain their Chinese nationality.23 Asked by Chiang for comments, the Discussion Group on International Affairs advised not to press for a rapid solution. It was founded in January 1942 under the Supreme Council of National Defence as the top body for formulating foreign policies; Wang Chonghui was its convenor.24 One possible solution, it observed, was to revise China’s nationality law in a way that would eliminate any conflict on nationalities. Yet it was all but impossible: China could neither coerce other countries to accommodate China’s law nor force itself to follow other countries’ law. Another solution would be the one suggested by the Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission. Yet as Chinese migrants required the protection of the host countries, they would be unwilling to give up their foreign nationality, thus ceasing to be Chinese. This would completely contradict the Nationalist policy. The group recommended observing how far other governments improved the treatments of Chinese migrants after the war before considering the next moves.25

Another direction of the Chinese attempts to improve the status of the Chinese diaspora was to promote racial equality as the basis of the postwar order. The connections between racial equality and the diaspora issue were spelled out in a proposal of a postwar ‘international coalition organisation’. This proposal was the product of the Discussion Group on International Affairs, submitted by Wang Chonghui to Chiang Kai-shek on 4 July 1942. The proposed organisation would replace the League of Nations, which was seen as having failed to prevent the Second World War. The proposal began by listing five ‘principles of peace’ of the organisation; the first stated that ‘all countries should recognise racial equality’. The group argued that ‘racial prejudice was the source of conflicts in the past’, that the ‘various forms of unreasonable migration restrictions… caused countless international disputes’. Recognising that ‘all races of the world’ were equal would ‘eliminate racial prejudice’ and ‘secure world peace’.26

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23 Chen Shuren et al. to Chiang Kai-shek, 8 January 1945, Kuomintang Party Archives (KPA), Fang 005/0039.
24 Li, ‘Chongsu shijie’, 15. The founding of the group, just one month after Pearl Harbor, shows that Chiang Kai-shek believed that China reached a turning point in the war and it was timely to plan for the postwar world.
25 Wang Chonghui to Chiang Kai-shek, 3 March 1945, KPA, Fang 005/0039.
26 Wang Chonghui to Chiang Kai-shek, 4 July 1942, AH, 002-080106-00017-003. In relation to this, the fifth principle of the organisation stated that ‘all countries should strengthen social welfare’ by, among others, ‘improving the means of migration’.
Wang ensured that racial equality was part of other major Nationalist documents on the postwar political order. On 7 July 1942, Wang suggested to Chiang that the Atlantic Charter, first announced by the United States and Britain in August 1941, should be strengthened. As Wang noted, racial equality was not stated in the charter as a goal. To remedy this, Wang drafted the ‘Atlantic Charter Supplementary Joint Declaration’, the third article of which advocated that ‘equality among nations and races was an integral element to world peace and evolution’. In the same month, Wang submitted to Chiang the suggestions of the Discussion Group on International Affairs on how to achieve postwar political cooperation among the Allies. The group recommended that the Big Four should agree on certain terms of armistice and peace, the first of which was ‘racial equality’. It also presented a draft bill of the Treaty of Co-operation and Mutual Assistance in the Pacific for postwar political cooperation. The draft bill started with several ‘Principles of Co-operation and Peace’, which would ‘ban all propaganda that provokes international discord’ and ‘acknowledge racial equality’.

Chiang took a more concrete step in raising the race issue with the prominent US Republican politician Wendell Willkie, who visited China in October 1942 during his goodwill trip to Allied countries (as an informal representative of Roosevelt after Willkie lost to him in the 1940 presidential election). The Nationalist leadership hoped that Willkie could sway Roosevelt’s thoughts, although the American embassy in China believed otherwise. When Willkie asked for his opinions on the postwar arrangements, Chiang replied that the core issue was ‘the Pacific problem’ – meaning the liberation of ‘weak and oppressed nations’ – followed by ‘the race problem’. This suggests that racial equality was a key concern of Chiang. China and the US were the most suitable powers to solve these issues, Chiang declared, for only they were able to understand the truth of the matters. China thought Britain and the Soviet Union hypocritical about liberating weak nations. Chiang was so keen to defer to his new ally that he glossed over American colonisation of the Philippines. Although racial equality did not find its way into the treaties that concluded the war in Asia – the San Francisco Peace Treaty (1951) and the Treaty of Peace between China and Japan (1952) – its promotion became one of the ‘Purposes of the United Nations’ stated in the UN Charter.

Although Chinese officials at the senior level might have desired the equality of Chinese migrants with others, this was not the only proposed tactic. Some outside the top of the

27 Wang Chonghui to Chiang Kai-shek, 7 July 1942, AH, 002-020300-00047-004. The other two articles suggested that national self-determination would apply to the whole world and that Japan’s empire would be destroyed. Japan would be disarmed and lose all territories gained after 1894, when it started the First Sino-Japanese War of 1894–5.
28 Wang Chonghui to Chiang Kai-shek, 24 July 1942, AH, 002-080106-00017-002.
29 Liu, Partnership for Disorder, 108.
30 ‘Jiang Weiyuanzhang jiejian Weierji tanhua jilu’ [Discussion Record of Generalissimo Chiang Meeting Willkie], 4 October 1942, AH, 002-020300-00036-016.
31 United Nations, (1945) United Nations Charter (full text). Available at: https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text (accessed 10 January 2021). For the Treaty of Peace between China and Japan, see H. van de Ven, ‘The 1952 Treaty of Peace between China and Japan’, in van de Ven, Lary and MacKinnon (eds) Negotiating China’s Destiny, 220–38.
ladder had a more ambitious aim: to protect the ‘privileges and special rights’ already enjoyed by Chinese migrants, or even to ask the host governments to expand on such privileges. In 1944, following Chiang’s order, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs studied the policy plans on the Chinese diaspora made by the Overseas Department, the Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission and the Trade Committee of the Ministry of Finance. Then, Xie Jiashu, an official of the Foreign Ministry, drafted in August 1944 a plan that integrated the ideas of the various departments. Xie’s plan not only recommended having all discriminatory laws abolished and attaining the most-favoured-nation treatment for the Chinese diaspora. It called for ‘protecting the preferential treatment and special rights’ and ‘expanding the rights’ that ‘our overseas compatriots have already enjoyed’.

The ambitious aims outlined by Xie originated almost verbatim from a report of the Nanyang Research Institute. Founded by the Nationalist government in 1942, the institute aimed to offer policy recommendations to the government regarding Nanyang and the Chinese diaspora. One of its reports claimed that Chinese migrants were early developers of Nanyang as governments attracted them for business by offering ‘special rights’. Yet these rights were gradually removed as governments feared that Chinese migrants became too powerful. By restoring and acquiring more rights, the report argued the migrants could contribute the most to Nanyang.

Even some Chinese officials in charge of diasporic affairs expected Chinese in Southeast Asia to enjoy more privileges. Guo Weibai, head of the secretariat of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission, hoped in 1942 that Chinese migrants in ‘British and American colonies in Nanyang’ could be treated better than the level of ‘mutually beneficial’. Guo explained that in the past China offered the most-favoured-nation treatment to foreign migrants while Chinese migrants were discriminated abroad. China’s new treaties with the United States and Britain, under negotiations and aiming to remove colonial concessions, should therefore be ‘mutually beneficial’ to Chinese migrants in the two countries and their migrants in China. However, the Chinese diaspora in Nanyang should be treated as a privileged group in order to meet its wishes. For example, the freedom of association of Chinese migrants and overseas Chinese education should not be restricted. The Chinese diaspora, Guo claimed, had an ‘extremely’ large population in Southeast Asia, ‘controlled’ its commerce and economy, and enjoyed ‘extremely large power’ in local societies. Guo overestimated the status of the Chinese diaspora and overlooked the difficulties in having Southeast Asian nationalists accept his proposal. However, the Nationalists regarded the postwar period as an opportune moment to reclaim ‘justice’ for their compatriots. They hoped that China’s elevated status would make it easier to achieve the aim.

This approach contradicted the one proposed by Wang Chonghui that emphasised equal treatment. It also stood in sharp contrast with that of Indian leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru, who would soon become the first Prime Minister of independent

32 Xie Jiashu to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2 August 1944, AH, 020-070900-0076.
33 Nanyang Research Institute to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 17 April 1944, AH, 020-019908-0014.
34 Guo Weibai to Fu Bingchang, 20 October 1942, AH, 020-019902-0034.
India, and Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, sister and trusted diplomat of Nehru: defending the basic rights of Indian migrants as naturalised citizens of host countries.\textsuperscript{35} To understand why it had currency, it is necessary to recall that not a few Nationalists maintained a latent sense of superiority over other Asians. In an age when colonised peoples demanded nothing less than the end of discrimination and domination, an approach that prioritised group privilege might have undermined these demands.

Chinese officials often called the indigenous races in host countries ‘natives’ (\textit{turen}), implying that these peoples were primitive compared with the superior Chinese migrants.\textsuperscript{36} In November 1941, Ma Tianying, responsible for connecting the Nationalists with people in Nanyang, especially Muslims, reported that the Chinese migrants were ‘completely unaware’ of the anti-Chinese essays published in indigenous-language newspapers. The friction between ‘the two races of Chinese and natives’ became ever more serious, occasionally descending into fighting. Throughout his report, however, Ma called the Malays ‘natives’. Ma called out the mistakes of the Chinese migrants but was not entirely immune to holding prejudice.\textsuperscript{37} Wu Tiecheng also called the non-Chinese locals in Nanyang ‘natives’ after his Southeast Asia trip in 1940–1. Wu claimed that the ‘natives’ in Indonesia had ‘very backward economic knowledge’; their ‘culture was lowly’, their life ‘poor’, their personality ‘lazy and without the awareness of saving money’. Such a dire perception of Indonesians likely drove Wu to demand the equality of Chinese with Europeans and superiority over the locals. Likewise, in terms of ‘quality’, Chinese in Malaya were said to be ‘exceedingly above the natives’.\textsuperscript{38} Wu claimed that without Chinese migrants, Southeast Asia could not have achieved its existing development, repeating the above-mentioned argument on why Chinese migrants in the region should enjoy preferential treatment.

Later, some Nationalist leaders perhaps became aware of the problem and attempted to mitigate it. In June 1942, Wu Tiecheng gave a speech to Nationalist members sent to India to organise Chinese seamen who had been stranded in the British colony. Wu explained that because ordinary Indians led an ‘extremely poor and tough’ life, they could not afford to pay attention to clothing or hygiene. Wu warned the departing Nationalist members that ‘you must not despise them because of this, and should send them the greatest sympathy and approach them without hesitation’.\textsuperscript{39} It is likely that not a few Nationalist members discriminated against Indians, compelling Wu to make such an exhortation.

\textsuperscript{35} Y.D. Gundevia, \textit{Outside the Archives} (Hyderabad 1984), 46–7.
\textsuperscript{36} One example is enough to show the derogatory nature of the term ‘natives’. When General Xu Yongchang was in the Philippines to negotiate Japan’s surrender terms, he wrote that ‘the Philippine people greatly envy’ the Chinese diaspora, which was ‘extremely entrepreneurial and almost monopolises the market. Meanwhile, the natives [\textit{turen}] are stupid and incompetent’. Xu Yongchang, (1 September 1945) Xu Yongchang Diaries. Available at: https://mhdh.mh.sinica.edu.tw/diary/browse.php?book=eHlj&listNo=1D19F2B6-21CA-4ED3-84EC-C401F90D1926&searchStr=%E5%9C%9F%E4%BA%BA (accessed 11 January 2021).
\textsuperscript{37} Ma Tianying to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 8 November 1941, AH, 020-011107-0040.
\textsuperscript{38} Wu, ‘Xuanwei Nanyang baogao shu’.
\textsuperscript{39} Wu Tiecheng, ‘Dui Fu Yin gongzuo tongzhi xunci’ [Speech for Comrades Setting off to India for Work], 9 June 1942, KPA, Te 13/17.51.
However, Wu’s attempt was ineffectual. In December 1942, Wu had to inform T. V. Soong, Foreign Minister, and He Yingqin, War Minister, that Nationalist staff and soldiers in India occasionally looked down on Indians. If such incidents occurred, they should ‘immediately correct themselves to avoid misunderstanding’. Even Chiang Kai-shek committed the mistakes Wu identified. Speaking to Nationalist members after attending the Cairo Conference, Chiang criticised Indians and other peoples under British colonial rule based on what he saw on his way to Cairo. ‘Peoples in the colonies themselves lacked modern common sense,’ said Chiang. ‘Their food, clothing, residence and transport are all substandard. They are not qualified to be a modern citizen.’ Chiang labelled these peoples ‘native nations’. Chinese’s latent sense of superiority mirrored the hatred targeting the Chinese diaspora. Both hindered efforts to promote real equality.

The belief that Chinese were in a league above other Asians (perhaps except Japanese) tainted China’s day-to-day diplomacy of defending the interests of Chinese migrants. The Nationalists wanted to make Chinese migrants the equals of Europeans and downplayed other peoples’ claims of rights. In South Africa, they repeatedly attempted to dissociate Chinese from the category of Asians. In March 1939, a proposed ‘colour segregation law’ would have driven Chinese migrants to an area where Indians and ‘black people’ resided. Song Faxiang, Chinese Consul General in Johannesburg, observed that Japanese migrants still enjoyed the same treatment as white people, which was ‘particularly unfair’ to Chinese migrants. In his letter to R. Stuttaford, Minister of the Interior of South Africa, Song emphasised that ‘the Chinese in the Union [South Africa] are of a higher social and educational standard than other coloured people, and an injustice would be done to the Chinese by their being compelled to live amongst other coloured people’. China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs concurred with Song’s actions and asked the Chinese embassy in London to press for the matter.

In February 1940, South Africa imposed wartime restrictions following the outbreak of war in Europe. ‘Asiatics’ were forbidden to leave South Africa unless they applied for approval and received a permit issued by the Ministry of Defence. Writing to Jan Smuts, Prime Minister and Defence Minister of South Africa, Song Faxiang protested that although Chinese migrants were ‘aliens of a friendly nation… they are not given the same freedom as other aliens’. The letter requested that South Africa ‘repeal the order as far as the Chinese are concerned, by having Chinese excluded from the definition of Asiatics… since the term Asiatic usually refers only to Indians in this country’. South Africa’s government replied that Chinese would be removed from the category of ‘Asiatics’. This ignored the fact that most Indians in South Africa were South

40 Wu Tiecheng to He Yingqin and T. V. Soong, 19 December 1942, KPA, Te 13/2.18.
41 Chiang Kai-shek, ‘Canjia cici Kaiulu huiyi zhi guangan’, in X. Qin (ed.) Zongtong Jiang gong sixiang yanlun zongji [Collection of the Thought and Speeches of President Chiang Kai-shek], xx (Taipei 1984), 287.
42 Fartsan T. Sung to R. Stuttaford, 4 March 1939, AH, 020-032104-0001.
43 Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Chinese Embassy in Britain, 23 March 1939, AH, 020-032104-0001.
44 Fartsan T. Sung to J.C. Smuts, 28 February 1940, AH, 020-032104-0001; Song Faxiang to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 24 April 1940, AH, 020-032104-0001.
African nationals and should at least enjoy the same rights as non-nationals like Chinese migrants.

Later that year, Song Faxiang fended off yet another case of infringement on Chinese rights. The Ministry of the Interior established a committee in Durban to investigate the extent that Asians ‘occupied’ the land reserved for Europeans. When meeting in June with Ellis Brown, Mayor of Durban, Song requested excluding Chinese from the targets of investigation as ‘Chinese and Indians have far different statuses and are incomparable’. Brown replied that the standards of living for Chinese in Durban were ‘far higher’ than those of Indians and that he had agreed with the Interior Ministry not to investigate the Chinese. Based on these examples, it is plausible that the Chinese idea of equality in migrant treatment could in practice mean more advocacy of Chinese status at the expense of other Asians.

After examining wartime ideas and actions, this article turns to China’s postwar diplomacy. Across Southeast Asia, nationalists sought to seize power following Japan’s surrender, their simmering resentment bursting out against the Chinese diaspora. Such anti-Chinese violence compelled Chinese diplomats to help the migrants survive the attacks. Although the overall goal remained the removal of discriminatory treatment, much of Chinese diplomacy consisted of reactive, piecemeal protests and ‘goodwill’ visits, which fell short of the major overhaul envisaged during the war. As Wang Chonghui admitted in 1948, ‘the task of protecting overseas Chinese is not fully implemented. Overseas Chinese in various places are still repeatedly subject to discrimination by local officials and people’. This section examines the Chinese responses to violence against the Chinese diaspora in Indonesia, Malaya and Thailand, the three principal destinations of Chinese migration.

In Indonesia, Chinese suffered from several massacres after Japan’s surrender, in part because their neutral attitude between Indonesian and Dutch forces agitated both groups. Many Indonesians felt that the Chinese continued to collaborate with the Dutch. A report produced by the Indonesian republican government in 1948 portrayed the Chinese ‘as an apathetic and “passive” ethnic group that cared “only about making business profits through trade”’. It claimed that the Chinese were ‘hoarding food such as rice through the help of Dutch military forces’ when Indonesians were fighting the Dutch for freedom.

The Chinese government turned to the Netherlands and Britain for saving Chinese migrants from the attacks of Indonesian nationalists. Jiang Jiadong, Chinese Consul

45 Consulate-General in South Africa to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 23 October 1940, AH, 020-032104-0001.
46 C. Wang, ‘Huaxiao yu zuguo’ [Overseas Chinese and the Motherland], in Zhongguo Guomindang zhong-gyangan weiyuanhui dangshi weiyuanhui (ed.) Wang Chonghui Xiansheng Wenji [The Writings Collection of Mr Wang Chonghui], 418–21.
47 Zhou, Migration in the Time of Revolution, 30. For more on Indonesian Chinese, see also C. Lin, ‘Guomin zhengfu dui zhanhou Yinni duli yundong shiqi de huaqiao chujing zhi siying’ [Responses of the Nationalist Government towards the Circumstances of Overseas Chinese during the Postwar Indonesian Independence Movement], Huaqiao Huaren Yanjiu, 1 (2011), 83–119.
General in Batavia, urged in February 1946 that Allied troops ‘pay serious attention to the safety of overseas Chinese’. Jiang complained that Allied troops neglected Chinese lives and assets when saving European prisoners of war and protecting European migrants. Jiang asked Chongqing to lodge this demand to London, whose troops briefly occupied parts of Indonesia after Japan’s surrender.\(^48\) Chongqing also ordered the Chinese embassy in the Netherlands to urge the Dutch troops to ‘protect overseas Chinese’.\(^49\) Responding to the demand of a county council in Fujian province – a main source of Chinese migrants – that the Chinese government ‘protect overseas compatriots’, the Foreign Ministry noted that it had already asked London and The Hague to instruct their own armies to protect the Chinese diaspora. The response did not mention any contact with the Indonesian government.\(^50\)

Attacks on Chinese in Indonesia did not stop, however. Indonesian nationalist guerrillas killed some 1000 Chinese in May 1946 in Tangerang, a city where Chinese had settled for centuries. The killing in Tangerang was the largest incident against the Chinese during the Indonesian revolution. The Chinese diaspora was suspected of connections with the Dutch whose troops were stationed in Tangerang.\(^51\)

China at first relied on diplomacy with western powers to calm the situation. Wang Shijie, T. V. Soong’s successor as Foreign Minister, urged the Dutch to compromise with the Indonesian nationalists and asked Washington to put pressure on The Hague.\(^52\) As pressure for action in Chinese public opinion mounted, the Chinese government dispatched Li Dijun, Chinese Envoy to Cuba, for a special mission in Indonesia in October–December 1946. After arriving in Indonesia, Li wrote that his impression of the Dutch East Indies and the Indonesian republic was ‘completely different’ from what he had gathered while in China. For Li, the advice for the Chinese diaspora to ‘remain neutral’ led Indonesians to believe that the Chinese government and diaspora sided with the Dutch. Worse, the Chinese official position was ‘bound by traditional legal viewpoints’ and focused on the Netherlands, which, ‘like a tiger’, lacked mercy. Li urged the Chinese government to change its Indonesia policy to a ‘positive and realistic’ one and to recognise the Indonesian government, which would ‘gain Indonesia’s favour’.\(^53\)

However, the Foreign Ministry did not accept Li’s suggestion. Wu Tiecheng and other Nationalist leaders were so suspicious against the Indonesian revolution that they only sent an observer to the ministerial conference supporting Indonesia held by India in January 1949. Wu wrote that to ‘protect the interests of co-nationals’, China should ‘avoid excessively blaming the Netherlands’.\(^54\)

\(^48\) Jiang Jiadong to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 21 February 1946, AH, 020-010807-0045.
\(^49\) Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Dong Ling, 30 April 1946, AH, 020-010807-0045.
\(^50\) Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Yongan County Council, Fujian Province, 30 May 1946, AH, 020-010807-0045.
\(^51\) Zhou, *Migration in the Time of Revolution*, 19; A. Hanifah, *Tales of a Revolution* (Sydney 1972), 208.
\(^52\) W. Shijie, (21 June 1946) *Wang Shijie Diaries*. Available at: http://mhdb.mh.sinica.edu.tw/diary/browse.php?book=d3Ng&listNo=93D99EF6-3C4E-4052-B9C4-8CA52B487815 (accessed 11 January 2021).
\(^53\) Li Dijun to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 9 November 1946, AH, 020-010807-0062.
\(^54\) Wu Tiecheng to Chiang Kai-shek, 19 January 1949, AH, 001-060200-00003-012.
By and large, as Taomo Zhou concluded, the Chinese diaspora ‘received no effective state protection’ from the Chinese government (or, for that matter, the Indonesian government). Chinese diplomats might have sensed their limits. Zhu Jiahua, China’s Education Minister, wrote to Wang Shijie regarding complaints that Chinese migrants in Indonesia were offered little help in expanding their business and faced looting. Wang’s draft reply would reassure Zhu that the Foreign Ministry was doing its utmost, but a line noting that ‘the circumstances of our overseas nationals in the future will gradually improve’ was crossed out.

Chinese diplomats did attempt to negotiate with the Indonesian government – to little avail. In April 1946, Jiang Jiadong noted that Indonesia outlawed any kidnapping or murder of Chinese and dispatched officials to implement this measure. Yet the limited Indonesian personnel failed to enforce such regulations in the rural areas.

Furthermore, the Indonesian government regarded many in the Chinese diaspora as Indonesian citizens and resisted protests of the Chinese government. In November 1947, Niu Shuchun, a Chinese vice-consul, urged the Indonesian government to ‘investigate the whereabouts of 150 Chinese from Salatiga, Central Java’. M. Daroesman, Indonesia’s minister of state, rejected this demand, arguing that most of the people in question were Indonesian citizens and that China had no right to intervene.

In Malaya, some Malays in 1945 attacked the Chinese communities to take revenge against the Chinese-dominated Malayan People’s Anti-Japanese Army which tortured and killed Malays suspected of collaboration with Japan. Clashes halted briefly before the British troops reoccupied Malaya, but restarted as British policies appeared to favour the Chinese at the expense of the Malays. The British Military Administration (BMA), ruling the colony in the months following Japan’s surrender, announced in October 1945 the formation of the Malayan Union, which would make Malays and most Chinese (and Indians) equal citizens. Many Malays found it unacceptable that the political future of Malaya, which they thought belonged to themselves, could be swayed by the substantial Chinese population. Intelligence collected by the BMA observed in November 1945 ‘an appreciable concern among educated Malays regarding the future status of Malays in Malaya and… a fairly widespread belief that the Chinese are securing an economic grip of the country which, if unchecked, may eventually lead to political control’.

Chinese diplomats responded to anti-Chinese violence by protesting the cases individually. In November 1945, for example, a Chinese representative in Perak reported that Malays killed at least 176 Chinese in Perak alone. The next month, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs instructed Wellington Koo, Chinese Ambassador to London and a

55 Zhou, Migration in the Time of Revolution, 21.
56 Zhu Jiahua to Wang Shijie, 12 April 1946, AH, 020-010807-0045; Wang Shijie to Zhu Jiahua, 10 May 1946, AH, 020-010807-0045.
57 Jiang Jiadong to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2 April 1946, AH, 020-010807-0045.
58 Zhou, Migration in the Time of Revolution, 26.
59 B.K. Cheah, ‘Sino-Malay Conflicts in Malaya, 1945–1946: Communist Vendetta and Islamic Resistance’, Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, 12, 1 (1981), 108–10.
60 Ibid., 113.
leading diplomat, to protest and ‘preserve the rights of compensation for damage’. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs protested against the British Embassy in China at least three times in February and March 1946 regarding the killing of Chinese by ‘Malay natives’. The ministry urged British troops in Malaya to stop the killing, ‘punish perpetrators’ and ensure the safety of Chinese ‘lives and wealth’. The British usually promised to protect Chinese migrants, but were evasive on the issue of responsibility.

After March 1946, clashes between Chinese and Malays started to subside. According to the report of Wu Baisheng, China’s Consul General in Singapore, Chinese diplomats embarked on visits to the western coast of Malaya, Johor and Malacca in 1946 for the purpose of ‘rehabilitation of refugees and resumption of bonding between Chinese and Malays’. They also gave speeches to and held parties with local Chinese and Malay leaders to improve Chinese-Malay relations. However, these activities often failed to tackle the roots of the communal conflict: some Malays suspected that Chinese disrespected Islam and Malays’ political status, and the prevalence of rumors easily fuelled conflicts.

The improvement in the situation had less to do with the interventions of the Chinese government than with the developments in Malaya itself. First, the British authorities ordered the Malay sultans to calm the actions of Malays. Second, in May 1946, Malay politicians established a national party, the United Malays National Organisation, to resist the British proposal of the Malayan Union. The target of Malay activists thus shifted from the Chinese to the British.

In Thailand, conflicts between Chinese and Thai police broke out as soon as Japan surrendered. Right on 15 August 1945, Thai police dispersed and beat up Chinese migrants in Bangkok who were celebrating China’s victory against Japan. Two days later, Thai military students insulted the Chinese flag and clashed with Thai Chinese who defended it. Attacks on Chinese then spread beyond Bangkok, culminating in the ‘21 September Incident’, where thousands of Thai troops and policemen fired on Chinese and looted their residences and shops. Only in November 1945 did the attacks die down.

As in the case of Indonesia, Chongqing was remarkably quiet initially, urging Chinese in Thailand to ‘remain calm’. As the conflicts worsened, the Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission as well as leaders and organisations of Chinese migrants urged Chongqing to intervene. Some migrants in Thailand, Vietnam, the Philippines and

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61 Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Wellington Koo, 5 December 1945, AH, 020-010607-0014.
62 Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Secretariat of Executive Yuan, 3 April 1946, AH, 020-010607-0014.
63 Wu Baisheng to Wang Shijie, 20 March 1946, AH, 020-010607-0014.
64 Wu Baisheng to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 30 December 1946, AH, 020-010607-0015.
65 Wu Baisheng to Wang Shijie, 28 August 1946, AH, 020-010607-0014.
66 K.O.L. Burridge, ‘Racial Relations in Johore’, The Australian Journal of Politics and History, 2, 2 (1957), 151–68.
67 Cheah, ‘Sino-Malay Conflicts’, 116.
68 See P. Hsieh, ‘1945 nian Taiguo junjing qiangsha huaqiao shijian [The Shooting Incident by Thai Military Police against Overseas Chinese in 1945]’, Gwoshiguan Xueshu Jikan, 16 (2007), 135–78.
elsewhere even urged Chongqing to send troops to protect the Chinese.\textsuperscript{69} Yet this risked interfering with the internal affairs of other Asians.

With military intervention being logistically and politically impossible – Thailand was under Britain’s South East Asia Command while Chongqing focused on dealing with the Chinese Communists – China resorted to diplomacy. This demonstrates the limits of the Nationalist capacity to intervene on behalf of Chinese migrants. Chongqing sent a team headed by Li Tiezheng, Chinese Ambassador to Iran, to establish formal relations with Thailand and negotiate a resolution to the anti-Chinese incidents. The team adopted a conciliatory tone. It reaffirmed China’s policy of respecting Thailand’s independence and sovereignty, and simply requested Thailand to ‘automatically abolish’ its anti-Chinese regulations.\textsuperscript{70}

However, Thailand refused to cede significant grounds to China. As Li Tiezheng’s team arrived in Bangkok in January 1946, Thai conservatives were set to come into power after victory in a recent general election, while France was demanding a return of territories of Indochina from Thailand. The more concessions made to China, the ‘more challenging’ the situation would be for the outgoing Thai government.\textsuperscript{71} In negotiating the Sino-Siamese treaty, Thai diplomats initially refused to include immigration matters as part of the treaty. Li then asked for the removal of barriers against migrants regarding ‘entry, fees and education’. However, the Thai side only promised that the regulations on entry and tax would not discriminate against Chinese, claiming that the same arrangements applied to the British and the French in the country.\textsuperscript{72} Li announced that China would not ask for compensation for wartime aggression against Chinese, but insisted that the postwar atrocities must be punished. Yet Bangkok resisted any punishment and even threatened not to sign the treaty unless Chongqing dropped this demand.\textsuperscript{73}

To break the deadlock, Li proposed that M. R. Seni Pramoj, Thailand’s Prime Minister, unilaterally announce that Bangkok would offer the most-favoured-nation treatment to Chinese regarding migration, education, choice of jobs and residence. Thai diplomats agreed. Li admitted that an announcement would not offer as much legal guarantee as a treaty, but could prevent a third country citing the treaty and demanding the same treatment for its nationals in China.\textsuperscript{74} The Sino-Siamese treaty was signed on 23 January 1946.\textsuperscript{75}

However, the anti-Chinese attacks remained unresolved. On 27 January 1946, another assault occurred shortly after Li met with Thai Chinese in Nakhon Pathom, a city west of Bangkok. Chinese media speculated that it was ‘staged… as a demonstration to the

\textsuperscript{69} ‘Guanyu Xianluo zhi baogao ji jianyi’ [Report and Suggestions Regarding Siam], 24 November 1945, KPA, Te 15/4.14. For calls of military intervention, see, for example, Hanoi Overseas Chinese Service Group to Nationalist government, 19 October 1945, AH, 001-067132-00005-037.

\textsuperscript{70} Wang Shijie to Chiang Kai-shek, 28 December 1945, AH, 020-010402-0035.

\textsuperscript{71} Li Tiezheng to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 11 January 1946, AH, 020-010402-0035.

\textsuperscript{72} Li Tiezheng to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 13 January 1946, AH, 020-010402-0035.

\textsuperscript{73} Li Tiezheng to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 22 January 1946, AH, 020-010402-0035.

\textsuperscript{74} Li Tiezheng to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 17 January 1946, AH, 020-010402-0035.

\textsuperscript{75} For a brief summary of the treaty, see H. Li and K. Tungkeunkunt, ‘Zhong Tai xiandai waijiao guanxi de jianli: Yi 20 shiji 30 niandai hou liangguo zhengshi jianjiao nuli wei zhongxin de kaocha (1932-1946)’ [The Establishment of the China-Thailand Modern Diplomatic Relations: Focusing on the Negotiations of Issue of Diplomatic Relation between Chinese and Thai Governments from 1930s on (1932-1946)], Nanyang Wenti Yanjiu, 160 (2014), 102.
A month later, Li’s team reiterated its demands of punishing anti-Chinese perpetuators, compensation and a promise that such incidents would not occur again. The new Thai government, formed just after the treaty was signed, ignored the protest.

Despite the progress regarding the Sino-Siamese treaty, Chinese diplomats found themselves occupied with speaking up for the Chinese diaspora through individual and often ineffective protests. The diaspora came under fire again at the Asian Relations Conference in early 1947, and Chinese representatives had to defend it. Although the conference delegates managed to agree to remove discriminatory treatment against non-citizen migrants, anti-migrant hostility persisted.

Before examining its debates, a background note on the conference is necessary. It was held by the think tank Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) with Nehru’s strong backing. The trigger for organising an Asian conference in India came from B. Shiva Rao, an Indian journalist and an ICWA member. Nehru hoped that the conference would ‘review the position of Asia in the postwar world, exchange ideas on the problems which are common to all Asian countries and study the ways and means of promoting closer contacts between these countries’. Delegations representing 28 nations came, covering almost all in Asia. Despite claiming to be unofficial and non-political, it was where Asia’s leaders outlined and debated their postwar, post-colonial visions of the world.

From the outset, the Nationalists were lukewarm about the conference. Dai Jitao, a close aide of Chiang, felt it hastily organised when much of Asia was still in turmoil, and perhaps secretly loathing India for stealing the show. Yet Dai urged that China participate in it because ‘the politics of Asian countries was interwoven’, and ‘India’s success would be China’s success’. The membership of the Chinese delegation was decided and dominated by the Nationalists. Seven of the eight Chinese delegates belonged to Nationalist institutions, including the delegation leader Zheng Yanfen.

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76 C.S. Chang, ‘Fresh Anti-Chinese Outbursts Reported in Siam’, Central News Agency English Service, 30 January 1946.
77 Hsieh, ‘Taiguo junjing qiangsha huaqiao’, 169.
78 The scholarship on the Asian Relations Conference is rather small but growing. An early but still important work is G.H. Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-alignment* (London 1966). More recently, see Chapter 5 of C. Stolte, ‘Orienting India: Interwar Internationalism in an Asian Inflection, 1917–1937’, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Leiden (2013); I. Abraham, *How India Became Territorial: Foreign Policy, Diaspora, Geopolitics* (Stanford, CA 2014); C. Stolte, ‘”The Asiatic Hour”: New Perspectives on the Asian Relations Conference, New Delhi, 1947’, in N. Miskovic, H. Fischer-Tine and N. Boskovska (eds) *The Non-Aligned Movement and the Cold War: Delhi – Bandung – Belgrade* (London 2014), 57-75; V. Thakur, ‘An Asian Drama: The Asian Relations Conference, 1947’, *The International History Review*, 41, 3 (2019), 673–95.
79 Stolte, ‘Asiatic Hour’, 58. In 1945, Rao attended a conference of the Institute of Pacific Relations (IPR), a multi-national foreign policy think tank focusing on the Pacific region, in Hot Springs, Virginia. Feeling that the conference sidelined Asian views, Rao contemplated organising an IPR-style conference for Asia.
80 J. Nehru, ‘Invitation to Inter-Asian Relations Conference’, in S. Gopal et al. (eds) *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Second Series, i (New Delhi 1984), 483.
81 Dai Jitao to Chiang Kai-shek, 1 February 1947, AH, 001-060200-00003-004.
who had worked at the League of Nations Secretariat and was a leader of a youth group of the Nationalist Party.  

Intriguingly, the session on race and migration at the conference said little on the relations between Asians and other peoples; perhaps it was assumed that all Asians would agree with racial equality. During this session, the real debates centred on racial relations and migration within Asia, with Chinese and Indian diasporas being obvious targets of criticism. Malayan delegates twice voiced their discontent about Chinese migrants, and required the Chinese or Indian migrant to ‘make a vital and final choice whether or not he wants to be a citizen of Malaya’. A Burmese delegate complained of the ‘ever present fear of being swarmed either by Indians or by the Chinese’. Burma felt ‘terrible to be ruled by a Western power’, but, sandwiched by China and India, ‘it was even more so to be ruled by an Asian power’.

The Chinese delegates were put on the defensive. Contrary to the prevalent Indian view that migrants should assimilate into the host country, they argued that Chinese migrants should remain Chinese if the migrants wished to. Those who remained Chinese should be treated ‘on a basis of reciprocity’. Then came a radical if infeasible proposal: if Chinese migrants harmed the livelihood of Burmese and Malays, China would ‘devise ways and means of withdrawing such population’. With this suggestion, the Chinese delegates managed to placate some of their Southeast Asian counterparts.

After trading blows, Chinese and other delegates came to some agreements. Hang Liwu, chairman of the session and Deputy Minister of Education in the Nationalist government, summarised the agreed principles of regulating racial groups: legal equality and religious freedom of all citizens; ‘no public social disqualification of any racial group’; ‘equality before the law of persons of foreign origin who have settled in the country’. The conference report, which would be forwarded to governments of the countries that sent delegations, also suggested that alien settlers retaining the nationality of the home country ‘should have equality before the law… enjoy safety of person and property’. Although such deliberations challenged the principle of non-intervention, they reflect the then common assumption that internationalism and nationalism were complementary. Ironically, however, Chinese and other Asian leaders tended to believe that migrants (or for that matter the ‘nationals’) could not declare their allegiance to more than one nation.

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82 For the selection of the delegation members, see AH, 001-060200-00003-004. The exception of the eight delegates was Mao Yiheng, a co-founder of the China Democratic Socialist Party, which promoted a ‘third way’ of democratic socialism but was inclined to the Nationalists.
83 Asian Relations Organization (ARO), Asian Relations: Being Report of the Proceedings and Documentation of the First Asian Relations Conference, New Delhi, March-April, 1947 (New Delhi 1948), 92. The speeches of delegates at the conference were mostly anonymous, only indicating the country they represented.
84 Ibid., 96.
85 Ibid., 96–7.
86 P.N.S. Mansergh, ‘The Inter-Asian Relations Conference’, 16 April 1947, British Library, IOR/Q/26/1/8, 11.
87 ARO, Asian Relations, 98–9.
88 See G. Sluga, Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism (Philadelphia, PA 2013).
The agreements made at the Asian Relations Conference did not materialise overnight; Chinese migrants still found their position precarious. In 1948, the Foreign Affairs Special Committee of the Nationalist Party found that Bangkok continued to breach the rights of Thai Chinese. This also demonstrates that the 1946 Sino-Siamese Treaty did not stem the discrimination on the Chinese diaspora. Restrictive immigration policies still irritated Chinese-Asian relations. Luo Jialun, China’s first Ambassador to India, asked Delhi to relax its visa policy for Chinese visitors ‘in the interests of Sino-Indian relations’. Luo defended legal Chinese migration: ‘the Chinese did not want to colonise India; nor could India be colonised so easily’. The memory of colonialism was so painful that it marred any move resembling it.

Postwar Chinese officials were occupied with protecting the Chinese diaspora and, to a lesser extent, reaching agreements with other countries on eliminating discrimination. However, their prejudice against other Asians did not completely disappear, as three examples from the period 1948–9 suggest. First, in August 1948, when signs were already turning against the Nationalists in the civil war, Chiang Kai-shek still attempted to emphasise China’s status when asking for more US aid. Chiang told John Leighton Stuart, US Ambassador to China, that Asian countries such as India, Siam and Vietnam all ‘looked up to’ China; these ‘eastern peoples’ possessed ‘shallow’ knowledge and ‘primitive’ politics. Second, K. M. Panikkar, arriving in China in 1948 as India’s ambassador, found that the Nationalists, especially the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, were ‘genuinely friendly’ but ‘a little patronizing’ towards India. The Chinese leaders behaved like ‘an elder brother who was considerably older and well established in the world, prepared to give his advice to a younger brother struggling to make his way’. Third, in a report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in January 1949, the Chinese Consulate-General in Kuala Lumpur bemoaned that Malays ‘had simple brains and a lowly culture’. They were said to be undiligent and ‘simply focused on short-term pleasure’. The report claimed that the British favoured the Malays and neglected the Chinese precisely because Malays were like ‘Adou’, the infant name of Liu Shan, emperor in the state of Shu Han in the third century AD notorious for being unfit for governance. This refers to the fact that Malays in the Federation of Malaya, founded by the British in 1948 as the successor to the Malayan Union, could automatically become Malayan citizens while Chinese not born in Malaya or who failed to meet the residency requirements were excluded.

Influenced by these views, diplomats on the spot continued to seek to distinguish the Chinese from other Asian groups. For sure, China supported the India-led UN General

89 ‘Waijiao zhuanmen weiyuanhui di shibaci huiyi jilu’ [Minutes of the Eighteenth Meeting of the Foreign Affairs Special Committee], 7 October 1948, KPA, Te 30/536.21.
90 ‘Note of Conversation Dr. Lo Chia Luen, the Chinese Ambassador F.S. regarding Indo-China relations’, 29 June 1948, National Archives of India, 422-CA, 1948.
91 X. Qin (ed.) Zongtong Jiang gong dashi changbian chugao [Preliminary Draft of Detailed Chronology of Major Events of President Chiang Kai-shek], vii, Part I (Taipei 1978), 123–4.
92 K.M. Panikkar, In Two Chinas: Memoirs of a Diplomat (London 1955), 26–7.
93 Li Qin to Wu Tiecheng, 27 January 1949, AH, 020-010607-0039.
Assembly resolution in December 1946 that condemned South Africa’s Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Act. Known as the ‘Ghetto Act’, it restricted Asians’ rights in occupying and owning land, and limited voting rights to Indians who met the educational and property qualifications. However, it must be remembered that China dropped the issue of racial equality at both Cairo and the Dumbarton Oaks Conference in 1944, which discussed the blueprint for a new international organisation that became the UN.94 Although the main reason was to avoid creating difficulties during the great-power meetings, it also hints that China was content with this omission if the status of Chinese could be raised through other means.

Before supporting India at the General Assembly, Chinese diplomats had again attempted to place Chinese above the category of Asians. China’s Foreign Ministry instructed its Consulate-General in Johannesburg in 1946 to appeal to South Africa for removing Chinese from the definition of ‘Asiatics’ in the law. The Consulate-General contended that Chinese in South Africa had ‘no political ambition’ and posed ‘no threat to the rule and economic life of Europeans’.95 The Department of European Affairs even contemplated a compromise: if South Africa was willing to offer concessions to Chinese, China would not support the UN resolution spearheaded by India.96 It was South Africa’s intransigence that pushed China to India’s side.

South Africa’s disregard of the General Assembly resolution compelled Chinese diplomats to return to their old tactic, but with Apartheid beginning in 1948 it became even less successful. In 1949, the Nationalists still tried to have Chinese exempted from the Asiatic Land Tenure Act. T. E. Donges, South Africa’s Minister of Interior, replied that its Parliament would block any exemption. The Chinese consul general Li Zhao countered by arguing that Chinese immigrants were ‘law-abiding and peaceful’ and that other countries had improved their treatment of Chinese immigrants. Li proposed two alternatives – South Africa would ‘either adopt some administrative measure or come into agreement with the Chinese Government’ to exclude Chinese from ‘discriminatory laws’ – to no avail.97

Nationalist China’s officials envisaged that discriminatory treatment against Chinese migrants would be removed in the postwar era. However, this often meant elevating Chinese to the level of Euro-American migrants and above other Asians, China’s plans for racial equality notwithstanding. Regarding Southeast Asia, some Nationalists even insisted that Chinese migrants be treated better than other foreigners. These goals aimed to raise the status of Chinese in the colonial–racial hierarchy rather than challenged it. In the face of postwar attacks on Chinese migrants, China found itself in a tight spot saving their lives rather than implemented its broader plans. The Asian Relations Conference was a major platform where representatives selected by the Chinese government conducted informal diplomacy to strengthen the position of the Chinese diaspora.

94 Liu, Partnership for Disorder, 129; H. Ye (ed.) Zhonghua Minguo yu Lianheguo shiliao huibian: Choushe pian [Documentary Collection on R.O.C. and United Nations: Origin] (Taipei 2001), 162.
95 Department of European Affairs to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 6 October 1946, AH, 020-032104-0005.
96 Department of European Affairs to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 26 October 1946, AH, 020-032104-0005.
97 Li Zhao to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1 June 1949, AH, 020-032104-0002.
The delegates agreed that migrants who retained foreign nationality be fairly treated, yet tensions persisted. The several decades after 1945 saw the gradual crumbling of imperial rule and racial hierarchy as accepted political forms. Yet not all Asian nations were equally passionate for a more equal racial order. Some nations – including those in the Global South – wavered between equality and their own versions of prejudice.

If Nationalist policies on migrant status differed from those of Nehru and others in the Indian National Congress, the leading nationalist force of India, they struck a chord with Japan’s. The promotion of migrant rights echoed Japan’s abortive ‘racial equality’ clause at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, which would have enabled Japan to achieve parity with western great powers in the League of Nations and helped resolve Japan’s immigration problems.98 Meanwhile, the latent belief of the Nationalists in Chinese superiority eerily resembled to an extent the argument of Japanese superiority for building the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere during the Second World War.99 What is different is that the Nationalist ambition was checked by its reliance on the US and Britain, its publicised claim to liberate Asian nations and, ultimately, its utter weakness after the war with Japan.

After the Chinese Communists came into power in 1949, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) first continued the Nationalist practice of recognising all Chinese migrants and their descendants as Chinese nationals.100 In an attempt to improve relations with Southeast Asian countries and its image, the PRC reversed course, moving closer to Nehruvian India’s position. It announced at the Bandung Conference in April 1955 – a conference of 29 Asian and African countries organised by Indonesia, Ceylon, India, Burma and Pakistan – that it would encourage the Chinese diasporic population to adopt the citizenship of host countries and would cease to be responsible for those who did so. To this end, it concluded with Indonesia the Bandung Dual Nationality Treaty in the same month. After that, by and large, Beijing refrained from officially intervening in Chinese diasporic affairs – until the end of the twentieth century. The PRC again reversed course, moving closer to the Chinese Nationalist position in the 1940s. A more powerful, confident PRC extended its authority in cases of emergency to people of Chinese descent with foreign citizenship, claiming that they too were part of the Chinese ‘family’. How far this would again arouse the uneasiness of host countries over potential Chinese interference deserves attention.

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98 N. Shimazu, Japan, Race and Equality: The Racial Equality Proposal of 1919 (London 1998).
99 J.A. Yellen, The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere: When Total Empire Met Total War (Ithaca, NY 2019). See also U.M. Zachmann, ‘Race and International Law in Japan’s New Order in East Asia, 1938–1945’, in R. Kownner and W. Demel (eds) Race and Racism in Modern East Asia: Western and Eastern Constructions (Leiden 2014), 453-73; E. Hotta, Pan-Asianism and Japan’s War 1931–1945 (New York 2007).
100 For more on PRC policies towards the Chinese diaspora, see J.J.H. To, Qiaowu: Extra-territorial Policies for the Overseas Chinese (Leiden 2014).
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**Biographical Note**

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