

International Memory of the World Register

Qiaopi and Yinxin: Correspondence and Remittance Documents from Overseas Chinese (China)

2012-57

1.0 Summary (max 200 words)

Qiaopi are basically documents of “letters, reports, account books and remittance receipts” resulting from communication between Chinese emigrants overseas and their families in China. There are over 160,000 pieces of Qiaopi found and preserved in **Guangdong** and **Fujian** Provinces, recording first hand the contemporary livelihood and activities of Overseas Chinese in Asia, north America and the Oceania, as well as the historical and cultural development of their residing countries.

These correspondences are unique and significant records, and in their times, important vehicles in facilitating and promoting the cultural and political exchange between China and the rest of the world in the 19th and 20th Centuries.

Stories as told and reflected by *Qiaopi* cover a wide range of human activities. There were correspondences about family affairs, and there were also talks and reports on topics of economy, politics, culture, transportation and social life of both the emigrated countries (places) and their hometowns in China. Some even carry messages about military and international relationships. With its richness in content, Qiaopi are valuable supplementary source materials to official historical documents. Therefore, Qiaopi are unique and are one of the indispensable historical sources to the study of modern social, political and economic lives in areas “affected” by this massive labour movement.

(See Attachment 1-1)

2.1 Name of nominator (person or organization)

Guangdong Provincial Archives, PRC
Fujian Provincial Archives, PRC

2.2 Relationship to the nominated documentary heritage

China Guangdong Provincial Archives and Fujian Provincial Archives, together with their subsidiary institutions, are the owners as well as keepers of this nominated documentary heritage.

2.3 Contact person(s) (to provide information on nomination)

Mr Xu Dazhang, Director General of Guangdong Provincial Archives, PRC

Mr Ding Zhilong, Director General of Fujian Provincial Archives ,PRC

2.4 Contact details

Name	Address	
Xu Dazhang	No.128 Longkouzhong Road, Tianhe District, Guangzhou City,Guangdong Province PRC	
DingZhilong	No.80 Hualin Road, Fuzhou City ,Fujian Province, PRC	
Telephone	Facsimile	Email
020-3874 9019	020-3874 9017	xudz@gd.gov.cn ttk300@163.com
0591-8798 6642	0591-8788 3094	Jdc315@sina.cn

3.0 Identity and description of the documentary heritage

3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated

If inscribed, the exact title and institution(s) to appear on the certificate should be given

In this part of the form you must describe the document or collection in sufficient detail to make clear precisely what you are nominating. Any collection must be finite (with beginning and end dates) and closed.

Title of the Nominated Collection:

Qiaopi and Yinxin: Correspondence and Remittance Documents from Overseas Chinese

If inscribed on the MoW register, the exact title of the collection to appear on the certificate should be:

“Qiaopi and Yinxin: Correspondence and Remittance Documents from Overseas Chinese”.

The institutions to appear on the certificate should be:

Guangdong Provincial Archives of China and Fujian Provincial Archives of China.

3.2 Catalogue or registration details

Depending on what is being nominated, appending a catalogue can be a useful way of defining a collection. If this is too bulky or impractical, a comprehensive description accompanied by sample catalogue entries, accession or registration numbers or other ways of defining a collection's size and character can be used.

During the past 3 decades, professionals and historians from archives, museums, and cultural heritage authorities in both Guangdong and Fujian provinces took great effort in collecting Qiaopi documents. These institutions are primarily owners and keepers of these

records. Meanwhile, there are quite a few Qiaopi are collected and owned by private individuals.

“Qiaopi and Yinxin: Correspondence and Remittances Documents from Overseas Chinese” are mainly kept and managed in the following institutions.

1. Guangdong Provincial Archives:

Portion of Qiaopi and 150,000 electronic copies.

2. Chaoshan Research Institute for History and Culture:

About 100,000 pieces of Qiaopi and some 3,000 pieces of related documents.

3. Shantou Municipal Archives:

1819 pieces of Qiaopi and relevant documents.

4. Jiangmen Wuyi Overseas Chinese Museum:

About 38,000 pieces of Qiaopi and 2,000 pieces of related documents.

5. Meizhou City Qiaopi Archives:

12,886 pieces of Qiaopi and 6766 related documents are kept in the archives.

6. Kaiping Cultural Heritage Bureau:

There are 1,216 pieces of Qiaopi and 800 pieces of related documents.

7. Fujian Province Archives:

There are 10,966 pieces of Qiaopi and related documents.

8. Quanzhou City Archives:

There are 2,007 pieces of Qiaopi and 659 pieces of related documents.

9. Jinjiang City Archives:

There are 1,256 pieces of Qiaopi and 2,086 pieces of related documents.

10. Jinjiang Municipal Museum:

147 pieces of Qiaopi.

11. Quanzhou Museum of Overseas Chinese History:

40 pieces of Qiaopi and 5 pieces of related articles.

3.4 History/provenance

Describe what you know of the history of the collection or document. Your knowledge may not be complete, but give the best description you can.

Qiaopi are the legacy of Chinese overseas emigrants.

Qiaopi actually comprises two separate Chinese words. Qiao (侨) means Chinese emigrants; Pi (批) means letters and related documents. Qiaopi was also known as “**Yinxin**” (translated literally as “Letter with Money”) in the Wuyi areas owing to difference in dialectical pronunciation. Qiaopi Yinxin therefore means the correspondence between Overseas Chinese and their hometown families. But Qiaopi Yinxin are not just regular letters, they comprise also remittance receipts with some simple notes or messages. They are a combination of letters and remittance receipts. (In this nomination, we will refer to the collection as just “Qiaopi”)

Qiaopi were usually sent through post offices and private banking agents. Those documents created from processing Qiaopi by those agents, such as account books, remittance slips and deliver notes actually form parts of Qiaopi (and so do those historical office buildings, for that matter). These documents are regarded as “enclosures” or related documents of Qiaopi. Qiaopi were mainly sent back from Southeast Asia, America, Canada, and some from Australia, Cuba and Mexico. These places were and still are the major residing countries of Overseas Chinese.

There are currently over 160,000 pieces of Qiaopi collected in Chaoshan, Wuyi, and Meizhou regions in Guangdong Province, as well as Xiamen, Fuzhou, Xinghua, and Minxi areas in the province of Fujian. Of all the Qiaopi collected, around 150,000 letters and 9,700 enclosures are in Guangdong Province, about 11,000 letters and 8,900 enclosures are in Fujian Province. Guangdong and Fujian are the two provinces where most, if not all, of the overseas Chinese originated.

Since the 8th century, people from Guangdong and Fujian Provinces began to migrate to southeast Asia for economic reasons. After 1840, with the opening-up of the Qing China, thousands of Guangdong and Fujian natives, including those already settling in Southeast Asia, relocated themselves to Americas and the Oceania. These overseas Chinese left China in the pursuit of a better livelihood not only for themselves, but more importantly, for their families back home. They therefore sent letters and remitted money back from overseas on a regular basis.

Qiaopi started to appear around 1860, the oldest existing Qiaopi dated back to 1883. The traditional system and institutions handling these correspondence and remittance for the overseas Chinese ended in 1979 when Bank of China took over the handling business. “Qiaopi” as such has subsequently finished its historical mission as a result of this new development.

Qiaopi existed in large number in the overseas Chinese hometowns. They have become increasingly valuable after 150 years of its existence. Stamp collectors and heritage lovers began to collect Qiaopi in the 1970s and the government also followed suit in the 1980s.

According to the survey by the archival and cultural heritage bureaus in Guangdong and Fujian Provinces, the total number of Qiaopi currently found and preserved is about 160,000.

4.0 Legal information 法律信息

4.1 Owner of the documentary heritage (name and contact details)

Name	Address	
Guangdong Provincial Archives	No.128 Longkouzhong Road, Tianhe District, Guangzhou City, Guangdong Province PRC.	
Fujian Provincial Archives	No.80 Hualin Road, Fuzhou City ,Fujian Province, PRC	
Telephone	Facsimile	Email
020-38749019	020-38749017	;xudz@gd.gov.cn ttk300@163.com
0591-87986642	0591-87883094	Jdc315@sina.cn

4.2 Custodian of the documentary heritage (name and contact details if different from the owner)

Name	Address	
Telephone	Facsimile	Email

4.3 Legal status

Provide details of legal and administrative responsibility for the preservation of the documentary heritage

The 160,000 pieces of Qiaopi included in this nomination program are collected by both the Guangdong Provincial Archives and the Fujian Provincial Archives , as well as by their subsidiary institutions. This documentary heritage belongs to the public, its copyrights are

governed by laws and regulations relating to public archives and the intellectual property.

Guangdong Provincial Archives and Fujian Provincial Archives have administrative authorities over, and access rights to, this documentary heritage. From 2003 onwards, successive digitization and publishing work have been carried out so as to facilitate public and academic research.

Up till now, the digitization of all the 160,000 pieces of Qiaopi has been completed, and publication projects introducing the collection to the public has been carried on according to plan.

4.4 Accessibility

Describe how the item(s) / collection may be accessed

All relevant publications on Qiaopi are accessible in libraries. Preservation institutions can also provide the original copies of Qiaopi for research, if physical condition permits. If the condition is not permitted, digitalized documents, microfilms, or photocopies are made available for researchers.

All access restrictions should be explicitly stated below:

Accessibility to original copies is conditionally restricted depending on physical condition of the documents.

Digitalized documents, microfilms and photocopies are however made available for public use.

Encouraging accessibility is a basic objective of MoW. Accordingly, digitization for access purposes is encouraged and you should comment on whether this has been done or is planned. You should also note if there are legal or cultural factors that restrict access.

Ever since 2003, a project to digitalise the 160,000 pieces of Qiaopi has been carried out and the project was successfully completed in 2010.

4.5 Copyright status

Describe the copyright status of the item(s) / collection

*Where copyright status is known, it should be stated. However, the copyright status of a document or collection has **no bearing** on its significance and is not taken into account in determining whether it meets the criteria for inscription.*

All copyrights are reserved by the Guangdong and Fujian Provincial Archives.

5.0 Assessment against the selection criteria

5.1 Authenticity.

The 160,000 pieces of the documentary heritage are basically correspondences belonging to individual families. The procedure of collecting and sorting out the documentary heritage has been undertaken by the scholars and experts in the field. The collection has been appraised by archival and heritage experts as authentic.

5.2 World significance

In modern times, international migration played an important role in the development of global economy and cultural exchange. Because of its tremendous scale and its spanning over a couple of centuries, the Chinese migration movement played an even more important part in the cross-cultural exchange between China and the west. Modern Chinese political upheaval (such as the 1911 Revolutionary movement), as well as the social, economic and cultural transformation during the 19th and 20th centuries, are to some extent results of western impact. The part played by overseas Chinese in bringing about these changes cannot be underestimated. Qiaopi are unique evidences of these contacts and subsequent social and political changes.

Qiaopi also represent the collective memory of both the Chinese living overseas and their families at home, documenting at first hand the various aspects of social, cultural and even emotional lives of both overseas Chinese in their respective residing countries, as well their families at home.

Qiaopi, as a class of historical evidence, are unique and unmatched of by other similar contemporary materials because they documented in a rather comprehensive manner the origin and development of this massive population move, as well as the nature, pattern, and behaviour of international migration at the turn of the 20th century.

Compared with other countries' international migration experience, the significance of Qiaopi appears to be somewhat unparalleled – they are huge in quantity and they span a very long period of time. Qiaopi are a unique example of trans-region, trans-nation and trans-culture experience, they are also unique evidence of the Chinese international migration history and the cross-cultural contact and interaction between the East and the West.

Qiaopi's position in the world cultural heritage in terms of international migration history and global cultural exchange should be recognised and honoured.

5.3 Comparative criteria:

Does the heritage meet any of the following tests? (It must meet at least one of them.)

1 Time

Since the 19th century, the global market has come to take its shape, the depth and width of cultural exchange was greater than any other times in human history. It was against this backdrop that Qiaopi was produced. As we have argued, Qiaopi are basically records of the time (1 to 2 centuries time span) on the cultural exchanges between China, Southeast Asia and Western countries brought by the Chinese emigration movement. Qiaopi I are also an important class of records documenting the development of Southeast Asia in the last 100 years, as well as the political, economic and industrialization process of countries in Northern America. They also recorded the tremendous change took place in the rural area in southeast coastal area of China. Of all the migration documents around the world, Qiaopi are unique because of their large number, wide distribution, their research value and their proper and well-established management system by the various collecting archives and institutions.

2 Place

“Qiaopi and Yinxin: Correspondence and Remittance Documents from Overseas Chinese” are instrumental in linking or connecting the Overseas Chinese in Asia, Americas and Australia with their hometown families. They recorded in detail the pivotal role of Singapore, San Francisco, Vancouver, Melbourne, Hong Kong and even Havana in Cuba during the migration era. Qiaopi not only recorded the international activities in trade, finance and movement of goods, they also recorded the history of urban development of these cities which happened to be the major settlements of overseas Chinese, as well as ports where newly arrived Chinese immigrants were processed. All these cities played an important role in promoting the development and cultural exchange of the Asian and Pacific regions. The influence is with us today and is still going on.

3 People

“Qiaopi and Yinxin: Correspondence and Remittance Documents from Overseas Chinese” are a priceless documentary heritage collectively created by the ordinary folks of overseas Chinese and their family members coming from almost the lowest social strata of the Chinese society. Since the middle of the 19th Century, China began to open up itself to the outside world and learn to modernize after the western model. The Chinese immigrant workers

coming from the south-east coastal areas of China, had the unique opportunity to “travel” overseas and see the outside world. They had become the first Chinese people in modern times coming into contact with the west and played an important role in the ensuing cultural interaction. As a result, they brought back new ideas of their residing countries to their hometown and inspired many of the young advocates for changes or even revolution in China. The rest of development is now history. Qiaopi and the people behind it are therefore instrumental in instituting China’s modernization process.

4 Subject and theme

“Qiaopi” basically exist in the form of letters exchanged between Chinese emigrants and their families in China. In Qiaopi, Chinese oversea workers expressed their care and love for their countries and family members, as well as their strong attachment to things in traditional China. Qiaopi also reflected the influence of Western and Southeast Asian cultures and their being assimilated by local cultures in the towns and countries where these Chinese emigrants originated.

For example, the Western concept of justice and fairness was adopted in the village management. The concept of gender equality also took root and was reflected in traditional local education and clan system management. Other examples include the spread of Christianity and Catholicism in the countryside, the emergence of social conscience as expressed in charitable activities, and even the 9-player volleyball game was introduced to China and became very popular.

In conclusion, Qiaopi witnessed the interaction between foreign and local cultures and how overseas Chinese helped their hometowns connect with the outside world. Most important of all, they serve as an irreplaceable spiritual bridge linking the emigrant workers to and their families at home.

5 Form and style 形式和风格

Qiaopi are written in a traditional Chinese correspondence format and style of a thousand-year-old. It is a collection of calligraphic styles with different writing tools, such as Chinese ink brush calligraphy, hard-tipped calligraphy and seal cutting calligraphy.

Chinese traditional moral values, customs and way of thinking could be seen through the words they chose and used and the ways of addressing and greeting.

Qiaopi are especially valuable nowadays in a world where most people communicate employing modern technology and medias. Qiaopi have become more and more valuable and

significant when the art of writing traditional Chinese letters is gradually declining.

6 Social/ spiritual/ community significance:

From the nineteenth century to the present day, the migration of Chinese overseas has been a continuous movement. Initially the result of the need for labour in other countries and the opportunity for migrants to send money back to China to support their families, the movement continued in more recent times for reasons such as family reunion, carrying out business, studying abroad and investing overseas. These overseas migrants are now distributed among more than a 100 countries in every region of the world. Within them, being remote from their place of origin, lie the concept of “home” and the idea of a “hometown”. It is a feeling that is common to them all. The more remote they are from their hometown, the stronger and clearer the emotion is felt.

In the past, letters were the basic and vital tool and method for them to keep contact with their relatives back home. The absence of their families and homesickness for their hometown found expression in the short letter, which also sustained their spirit. A Chinese saying goes that “A letter from a relation is as precious as ten thousand pieces of gold”, so, when the overseas Chinese and their families read their letters to each other, everyone felt a great spiritual comfort and enjoyment. The correspondence was, indeed, the tie between them, connecting their feelings and maintaining their relationships. Further, it was a spiritual dynamic that encouraged them to work hard and to live bravely. It was also an important way of intensifying their cultural and personal identity.

Therefore, “Qiaopi and Yinxin: Correspondence and Remittance Documents from Overseas Chinese” capture and reveal the thoughts and feelings of overseas Chinese, together with their families, throughout more than one hundred years of the Chinese diaspora. It has become a repository for the common spiritual wealth and inheritance of overseas Chinese throughout the world, and is thus highly respected, while its influence and cohesive force have continued to the present day.

6.0 Contextual information

6.1 Rarity:

“Qiaopi” recorded activities of overseas Chinese emigrants and evidences of impact of intercultural and international interaction. Extant Qiaopi comprise thousands of correspondences and remittances. In terms of quantity, they are of course not ‘rare’. They are “rare” in the sense that they are the only primary source for the study of the significance and impact of modern Chinese international migration and at the same time, they constitute the richest and most comprehensive source covering many aspects of human activities.

6.2 Integrity:

One hundred and sixty thousand pieces of Qiaopi are kept with related documents such as account books, photographs and remittance receipts from the same family. Letters and remittance receipts of many families are basically well preserved except for some which are slightly damaged. As Qiaopi are paper documents and the earliest ones go back to 130 years ago, most of them are nearly 50 - 100 years old, therefore the ink on some early Qiaopi has faded and the papers turned yellow.

But given the massive quantity of the collection, as a whole, these “damages” do not have adverse effect on the integrity of the “emigration story” which Qiaopi are purported to tell.
