

Chinese Migrant Networks and Cultural Change

PERU, CHICAGO, HAWAII, 1900-1936



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Chinese Migration in Global Perspective

"Lee K. K.," a Chinese laundryman interviewed by sociologist Paul Siu in the 1930s, said, "We overseas people can find no place in China. We can only spend money when we get back to China. No matter how much money we bring home, but as soon as the money is spent, we must come back here."¹ Yet, in *The Chinese Laundryman*, his University of Chicago Ph.D. dissertation based on his interviews, Siu wrote, "No Chinese laundryman . . . has ever seriously attempted to organize his life around the laundry, saying, 'I feel at home in this country and laundry work is my life, my career, and my ambition. I hope to be a prosperous laundryman.'"² At first glance, these two statements seem to leave the Chinese migrant in a limbo, neither here nor there. Attempting to define himself in terms of China or the United States, he finds himself at home in neither. Although the experience of Chinese laundrymen in the 1930s as interpreted by Paul Siu is not exemplary for all Chinese migrants, these two quotations still illustrate a basic problem in talking about Chinese (or any) migrants: the difficulty of producing formulations of identity and history that are not centered in nation-states or some other territorially based sociocultural grouping. We have little means by which to describe lives and social organization that straddle those units. Even migrants who, in practice, lived lives and created institutions which spanned those boundaries were still reluctant to conceive of themselves beyond one of the territorially based anchors of their networks.³ Nonetheless, such a global perspective is necessary to understand cultural and organizational aspects of Chinese migration. It helps us to understand how migrants could, indeed, live both here and there. Such a perspective must be carefully articulated with a context of diverse local orientations and encounters, revealing the patterns that link them and how they emerge at particular historical moments in a shifting global order.

NATION-BASED RESEARCH

The disjunctions in migrant experience suggested by the opening quotations are mirrored in much academic work on Chinese migrants. Rather than dropping the migrants into a limbo, however, these works tend to assert one side or another as the proper center from which to understand migrant lives: either as immigrants who settled and helped create a new land, or as sojourners and *huaqiao* (overseas Chinese nationals) oriented toward China. Consider, for example, the following two quotations. The first is from a work of Chinese American history by Sucheng Chan:

Contemporary observers charged the Chinese with a refusal to assimilate to American ways, and many scholars have stressed how the Chinese have adamantly preserved their culture in the United States. Many Chinese values, practices, and patterns of social organization were indeed transferred to American soil, but the fact remains that Chinese communities that developed in America were by no means replicas of those in China.⁴

The second is from a *huaqiao* history published in Taiwan in 1993 by Huang Jianchun:

By and large, the social organization and customs of overseas Chinese . . . were all carried abroad from rural life in China. In the long term, the transference and preservation of Chinese culture abroad led to mutual development and an unbreakable bond between overseas Chinese society and the Chinese homeland. Much evidence shows the difficulty of severing the Chinese soul within those living abroad. Precisely because of this, the great majority of overseas Chinese had a great concern for the security of their country. This sentiment did not depend on the existence of the Qing or Republican governments, but mostly emerged from the natural disposition to cherish one's home.⁵

Each of these statements is taken from an exemplary work of primary research. While not entirely exclusive—potential for overlap appears in the ideas of “mutual development” and “transfer” of culture—they each emerge from very different research agendas that result in competing narratives of the history of Chinese migration. Chan's work is part of a larger project in contemporary Asian American studies to incorporate Chinese as important actors in American history. It emphasizes the adaptations of Chinese social organization in the United States, and explains them as necessary and unprecedented responses to unfamiliar challenges. Although Chan pays more attention than many Asian Amer-

ican historians to Chinese nationalism, transnational families, and continued links to China, she does not follow the implications of these descriptions so far as to reformulate her narrative of migration as a mono-directional relocation followed by locally conditioned transformation.⁶ In their most strongly America-centered versions, Asian American histories have treated continued links beyond America and the persistence of Chinese culture abroad as little more than by-products of exclusion and racism, and have seen Chinese Americans primarily as exemplars of long-standing American ideals of freedom, democratic principles, and individual struggle.⁷

Huang Jianchun, on the other hand, is firmly embedded in a tradition of Chinese-language scholarship that goes back over ninety years, emphasizing the enduring love, patriotism, connections, and contributions of Chinese to their homeland. Most original research has focused on participation in revolutionary movements, the restrictive and unsupportive policies of the Qing government, remittances, investment in and contributions to China, and economic success and recognition abroad.⁸ In its most extreme version, this scholarship may even talk of the patriotic resistance of Chinese emigrants against assimilation.

This disjunction is especially clear in debates over the idea of the Chinese immigrant as a sojourner. Scholars trained in Chinese studies tend to support some version of the sojourner concept as a useful approach to understanding Chinese migration.⁹ Asian American scholarship, on the other hand, rejects the sojourner concept, arguing that it is used by anti-Chinese agitators and immigration scholars to “exclude [Chinese] categorically from American immigration history.”¹⁰ Attempts to bridge these opposing views of Chinese as either settlers or sojourners have ended up as weak compromises. They usually assert that some were settlers, some were sojourners, and others changed their orientation over time.¹¹ The dichotomy between these two perspectives could be multiplied and complicated by examples from other places and disciplines. Taken together, however, they do not amount to a coherent panorama of the networks and processes of Chinese migration. Rather, the conflicts between competing nation-based claims regarding the histories of Chinese migrants serve to obscure and confuse the transnational activities of those migrants.

Another consequence of nation-based histories of migration can be seen in the way Hawaii has been enveloped by Asian American history at the expense of perspectives centered on the activities of migrant networks. Sucheng Chan treats Hawaii as an example of regional variation. Even pre-annexation Hawaii is teleologically projected as part of American history, as in the 1880s when Hawaii and California “led the nation” in the de-

velopment of capitalist agriculture, and "neither region was a frontier any longer."¹² This perspective would have fit the agendas of white Americans in Hawaii, but it would have been problematic to Chinese merchants and rice planters, not to mention native Hawaiians. Chinese in Hawaii may have taken advantage of the American market, but they were more directly linked to the Hawaiian royalty and business networks tying them back to China than to California. To be sure, Chan's primary purpose in making the link between nineteenth-century California and Hawaii was to underline the importance of economic transformations in shaping the flows of migrant labor. Nonetheless, a history written from the perspective of Chinese networks and economic expansion would have to cross contemporary political boundaries, by linking California more strongly with Mexico and Canada before the 1920s, rather than with Hawaii. It would create a vision of economic growth as something other than (albeit closely linked to) the political expansion of nations.

When talking about Chinese in Peru, Chicago, and Hawaii, it is certainly desirable to use vocabulary that recognizes their engagement in local sociopolitical relationships. Yet, the very act of putting all three locations in a single book implies the existence of links between these locations. Those links should certainly include China but should not be understood solely in terms of China-based assumptions. Moreover, a recognition of those links should not imply that Chinese experiences in all three locations were essentially the same. How can we recognize the particularities of each migrant community while simultaneously drawing attention to the extra-local connections of those communities, and to the physical movement, networks, and discourses that embed them within a much wider web of relationships that includes China, Hong Kong, and global orders of economic activity and status?

A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

A global approach to Chinese migration can help overcome the disjunctions between nation-based approaches. Such an approach might begin by describing the institutions, flows, and sentiments that made up a global circulation of people, goods, and money. To leave it at that, however, would merely add one more perspective to those that already exist. Thus, we must also understand how transnational activities articulated with more locally defined activities and identities. How did concerns particular to villages in South China, to overseas Chinese communities in non-Chinese nations, and to businesses, families, and networks that stretched across oceans come together as a single phenomenon? How were these

concerns entangled with economic and ideological shifts on a global scale?¹³

An emphasis on global patterns should not merely assert the primacy of global forces over local. Too often, local and global histories have positioned themselves in opposition to each other, with each side suspicious of what it sees as the other's claim to be the site of all social change and significance. Proponents of local perspectives often criticize global histories as totalizing narratives, offering programmatic schemes and excessively broad generalizations that marginalize the significance of local knowledge and agency. Unfortunately, this criticism is often justified. Even the more nuanced and sophisticated global perspectives tend toward reductionism, such as Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems theory, which claims that most social phenomena, from national development to family structure, are determined by their position within the capitalist world-system.¹⁴

Critics have countered this overdeterminism by describing how local societies are more complex than these master narratives can account for and by arguing that the effects of outside influences are mediated by local cultural and social structures. In short, global flows do not determine local social structures, but are appropriated and transformed by them.¹⁵ These localizing arguments are often convincing, but the empirical cases are usually limited to a narrow scope in time and place. Brought together, they offer only a disconnected hodgepodge of local variations. Eric Wolf has criticized this as a "model of the world as a global pool hall in which entities spin off each other like so many hard and rounded billiard balls."¹⁶ This metaphor is graphic, but perhaps somewhat exaggerated. The image of rounded sponges is probably more appropriate for more nuanced depictions of local perspectives, such that fluids and "influences" are transferred and absorbed by the balls. These sponges may be structurally altered or even dissolved by these influences, but in the aggregate they still do little more than bounce off of each other. Thus, they offer little contribution or challenge to the wider generalizations of global narratives, be they highly structured world-systems accounts of global economic polarization or accounts of the more generally appreciated but still poorly understood process of how the world has come to be organized into the nation-state system.

Ideally, a useful global perspective would see the world as a field for historical understanding, in the same way that nations, cities, and ethnic groups have already become arenas for the production and contestation of historical narratives. It would provide a stage from which to understand geographically dispersed activities, such as migration, which thread through and straddle territorially based units. Thus, a global perspective

would have to pay careful attention to how different scales and platforms of analysis articulate with each other, yet it would also challenge visions of the world order as a mosaic of discrete sociopolitical entities that are the primary units from which meaning and history are created. It would center attention on "links" and "connections," rather than marginalize them as secondary phenomena that occupy the interstices between nations or civilizations.

This articulation between different platforms of analysis can already be seen in the production of local histories. For example, the history of a village does not merely take the biographies of everybody who ever lived there, place them next to each other, draw out some similarities and differences, and describe a few examples of interaction between them. Villages also have institutions, patterns of land development and economic growth, demographic trends, and other features which are better perceived through generalization, statistical agglomeration, and histories of groups and issues written from perspectives other than those of individual participants. At the same time, none of these other perspectives necessarily obviate the insights provided by biographies. Similarly, the history of a nation-state such as the United States does not just take histories of smaller entities like Boston, Alabama, the Columbia River Basin, Ford Motor Corporation, and the Hopi Indian Reservation, put them next to each other, draw out some similarities and differences, and describe a few examples of interaction between them. Topics like presidential actions, federal legislation, foreign relations, war, and population movements can only be well understood at a national level. Other topics, like industrialization, ethnic relations, and cultural histories depend on local case studies, but such studies are meaningless if not set in relation to each other through an understanding of national (and global) patterns.

The key point is that national histories have become successful arenas for the formulation of historical narratives and issues. The relationships between national histories, local histories, and biography, while sometimes debated (perhaps not as much as they should be), are rarely seen as problematic. Scholars challenge and change national narratives, and even try to undermine the legitimacy of the nation by describing it as an ideological construction, but the politics and identity of nations still remain the arenas that have given shape to these debates. This sense of comfortable articulation is lost, however, when we move up to world history. Modern historical scholarship has its origins in the legitimization of the nation-state, and historians have been slow to move beyond those roots. The quest to delimit and elaborate the particularities and heritages of specific nations and peoples understandably makes many historians mis-

trustful of approaches that can potentially flatten and engulf the subtle details of local experience under global generalities. At a more practical level, the demands of archival research and commonly accepted standards of professional competence also make claims to expertise at a global level seem dubious.

Despite these reservations, some themes and issues are still not easily contained within national histories, such as the environment, urbanization, and economic relations. Subjects like industrialization, migration, and ethnic relations cannot be adequately addressed until nationally based studies are put in a global context. The establishment of such a context, however, entails more than just extending the net to capture more data. For example, a person writing on Lowell, Massachusetts, is not expected to have a detailed knowledge of every person, ethnic group, factory, and event originating in Lowell. Rather, she is expected to have enough knowledge to be able to draw out patterns that fit the data that she does have. Thus, rather than seeing national and local histories as ends in themselves, a global approach will integrate localized research with knowledge of transnational activities and global patterns.¹⁷

Stu's Sojourners and a Global Perspective on Migration

Migration is a topic that obviously spans different regional and national histories and appears readily amenable to treatment from a global perspective. In practice, however, the concepts and vocabulary regularly used to describe and analyze migrants are deeply embedded in nation-based perspectives. A global perspective on migration has yet to be well articulated.

Many migration studies establish a polarization between concepts like push and pull, emigration and immigration, sending society and host society, or tradition and adaptation, which privilege the perspectives of nations that frame the two ends of migrant journeys. Metaphors like the "uprooted" and "transplanted" serve to describe migration as a kind of break, characterized by monodirectional movement and relocation in a new land. Ideas like assimilation and integration underline how interest in migration is usually justified by an ultimate interest in the inclusion of migrants into a national identity. Return migration, global patterns, and institutions that facilitate the transnational circulation of goods, money, and people are recognized and even researched by immigration historians, but such topics are rarely incorporated into the stories of particular groups in any meaningful way. The return migrants are people who drop out of the story, and the networks of circulation are of interest primarily

as the causes that pushed people into the new nation.¹⁸ Immigrants are seen as either here or there, and no room is left for more complex orientations and circulation.

The conceptual force of nation-based analytical categories is evident in the way they shaped Paul Siu's 1952 article, "The Sojourner." This article was an attempt to fill in the disjunction between the United States and China, to create a transnational space for migrants such as those described in the quotations at the chapter opening. Siu ultimately failed in this task, however, because of his dependence on the conceptual vocabulary of assimilation. He started with a conventional definition of sojourners as people who travel abroad to complete a job as quickly as possible before returning, but went on to describe how this ambition was rarely fulfilled. A sojourner's trip was often more permanent than originally expected, and the sojourner built a life in which he seemed to exist simultaneously in two different lands. When he did manage to return home, his relationships were no longer the same as before he left: "When [the sojourner] gets home he finds it hard to stay and wants to go abroad again."¹⁹ Thus, the sojourner's lack of orientation to his country of residence did not merely imply a more fundamental orientation to his country of origin. Both the new expectations developed abroad and the expectations of the people at home about what a person who had made such a journey was supposed to have become made a return to the past impossible. "As time goes on he becomes, unconsciously perhaps, more of a sharer in the racial colony, developing a mode of living which is characteristic neither of his home nor of the dominant group."²⁰

Even trips home gained much of their significance in the context of sojourning fellows: "The return trip is the result of a social expectation of members of his primary group as much as of his individual effort; their sentiments and attitudes make his trip meaningful. The trip shows that he is a person to be admired, to be appreciated, to be proud of, and to be envied."²¹ Whether or not a sojourner actually returned to his home country, or whether he even wanted to, was not so significant as the existence of a general discourse that constantly drew attention to the possibility of returning: "The sojourner may make several trips back and forth, he may make only one trip, or he may not make any trip at all. . . . The mere fact that one has never made the return trip is by no means proof that he is not a sojourner."²²

Siu tried to construct a migrant space as a focus of analysis in its own right, rather than as mere movement from one site to another. He was only partially successful, however, because his work was deeply embedded in the assumptions of assimilation. As an explanation of social

change, the idea of assimilation is inextricable from the perspectives and institutions of locally dominant societies. It rests on the binary conception of identity that one either is or is not incorporated into a particular society. Although Siu categorized cosmopolitan people like diplomats, foreign students, foreign correspondents, and anthropologists as sojourners, he perceived their social worlds as narrow and isolated from the mainstream of assimilation and acceptance. He thought that the sojourner was an exception to the rule, rather than a new approach to migration and culture in general, as shown by his frequent use of the word *deviant* to describe sojourners.²³ This is also evident in his off-handed suggestion that the race relations cycle could be modified from "contact, conflict, accommodation, and assimilation," to read "contact, conflict, accommodation, and isolation."²⁴ On one hand, this formulation was a recognition that assimilation was not inevitable, underlining Siu's insistence on the creation of a new identity. On the other, it takes a step back from a migrant-based transnational perspective and returns to the perspective of territorial national cultures setting the terms by which participation and isolation are understood.

The idea of assimilation is a powerful one because its biases are often cloaked in the garb of universal transformation. In its weakest form, this garb is merely the assertion that the process of dropping one culture in favor of another is natural and predictable. A stronger form is the way that many theorists viewed integration into modern American cities not merely as assimilation into a dominant culture but as emancipation into a modern society organized on rational and individualistic principles. This individualism was set in opposition to "culture"—the "traditional" bonds and customs that shaped life in the lands from which immigrants came. Robert Park, whose ideas informed much of what Siu wrote, spoke of migration as a step toward liberation from the bonds of culture, often using the word *emancipation* where others might say *assimilation*. Writing of life in American cities, Park asserted that "the breaking-up of the isolation of smaller groups has had the effect of emancipating the individual man, giving him room and freedom for the expansion and development of his individual aptitudes."²⁵ In this way, he projected the individualist rhetoric of the United States into a universalistic statement on human nature. Siu's sojourners were people restricted rather than emancipated by their distance from these norms.

Siu attempted to bridge the gap between the two poles of migrant life, but he was unable to develop a convincing alternative to narratives of migration dominated by the process of relocation and assimilation, partly because assimilation narratives had taken up a cloak of universal

truth that was hard to cast off, and partly because he followed the standard sociological practice of the time by describing sojourners in terms of mentalities and personal orientations. He never elaborated the social and institutional bases of sojourning, and was never able to see beyond the personal dissatisfactions of individual migrants. Moreover, this dissatisfaction was often expressed through a vocabulary of national identification which was increasingly prevalent during the early twentieth century.²⁶ His sojourners appear trapped in perpetual isolation shaped by personal choice and by prejudice from the dominant society. A discussion of the family strategies, business networks, native place associations, remittances, and investments that made migration, in and of itself, a source of profit and site of self-reproducing transnational circulation would provide a much better context from which to understand the orientations of sojourners. As Charles Tilly concluded in an overview of migrant networks, "Once we recognize the network structure of migration, some of the old, standard questions stop making sense. . . . It is not very useful to classify migrants by intentions to stay or return home, because intentions and possibilities are more complex than that—and the migrants themselves often cannot see the possibilities that are shaped by their networks. . . . In short, we ought to think of migration as we think of community structure: not reducible to individual characteristics and intentions."²⁷

Diasporic Perspectives

The glory days of assimilation as a central issue in the social sciences are long past. But issues of acceptance and integration still dominate most migration studies, while approaches like Siu's have fallen to the wayside. Of course, nation-based approaches to migration have been enormously fruitful, if the number of manuscripts and extent of debate are any indication. Nonetheless, our understanding of migration—both within and across national histories—can be further developed by a careful look at some of the assumptions that have heretofore shaped our analyses and by more thorough incorporation of extra-local processes and links that have been downplayed. Over the past two decades or so, a revival of the idea of diaspora and the formulation of other concepts such as transnationalism, globalization, and the deterritorialized nation-state have suggested alternatives to the nation-state as perspectives from which to approach issues of migration, global social organization, and identities that cross territorial and cultural boundaries. They all suggest frameworks in which mobility and dispersion can become the starting points of analysis. Many of

these approaches, however, present themselves as descriptions of recent shifts in global order and thus present difficulties for historical analysis.

For example, the idea of transnationalism implies the priority of nations as the basic units being crossed. Movement and migration are defined in opposition to states as a recent upswelling that subverts both the concrete mechanisms used to erect and patrol national borders and the ideological constructions of purity that legitimize states. A vocabulary of fluidity and hybridity has grown alongside transnationalism, further suggesting opposition to the kinds of static social categories promoted by state-building.²⁸ One consequence of situating transnationalism in opposition to states is to deny the way in which closely bounded territorial nation-states have risen coterminously with increased global migration over the past two centuries. The past is left, without critique, to the domain of nation-states and depictions of migration as a monodirectional process. No room is left to understand how the construction of distinct national-cultural units and the intermingling of people were different aspects of the same global historical processes.²⁹ Depictions of transnationalism as a field of fluidity and hybridity also tend to homogenize migrant groups (or, in what amounts to nearly the same thing, dissolve them into a formless field of infinite diversity) by avoiding analyses of class, hegemony, and the production of cultural distinctions within migrant flows. Thus, the idea of transnationalism provides few tools with which to construct a longer history of global migrant networks.

Recent work on globalization theory provides a promising vocabulary of nodes, flows, networks, and flexibility but also tends to situate itself as a description of phenomena that have emerged only over the past few decades, generally as a consequence of increasing global communication.³⁰ Moreover, discussions of globalization are largely divided into two poles that have yet to find a common space of interaction. One pole consists of globalization as a primarily economic force, placed in opposition to local cultures and constantly threatening to overwhelm them.³¹ This work has identified significant shifts in global economic patterns over the past century—in particular, the transformation from "Fordist" forms of concentrated capital and production to "post-Fordist" forms of flexible accumulation. Yet, despite claims to describe an unprecedented transformation, the basic arguments by both critics and celebrators of economic globalization still amount to rehashes of debates that have existed since before the *Communist Manifesto*, which argued, "The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian,

nations into civilization. . . . It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst."³²

The other side of globalization theory concentrates mostly on cultural flows and the production of identities and social imagination in situations of complex cultural interaction.³³ This work paints a subtle and complex picture of global interactions, but often at the cost of disassociation from concrete social, political, and economic processes.³⁴ The idea of diaspora has played a prominent role in work on cultural globalization, often as a field for the play of multiplicity, fluidity, hybridity, the dislocations of modernity, or the decentered textures of postmodernity.³⁵ These diasporas, however, are not depicted in a context of historical time, except to project back to an originary moment of dispersal such as the slave trade. Little attempt is made to trace how diasporic consciousnesses are embedded in shifting global structures. As a result, the very emphasis on diversity and self-determination is not historicized and can appear as a naive expression of contemporary ideals of self and social identity.

Use of the word *diaspora* has not gone uncontested, especially by scholars who recall the close association of the term with the particularities of the Jewish experience. Some scholars have resisted any extended use of the term *diaspora* altogether, while others have used the Jewish experience as a standard by which to define other migrations as diasporas.³⁶ Some scholars even propose checklists of characteristics to help determine what is and is not a diaspora.³⁷ Diasporas defined in this manner are quite the opposite of hybridity and multiplicity. Rather, they suggest essential and unchanging cultural identities that persist despite exile and dispersal. This approach is more of a prescription than a description of diasporas, defining them a priori as entities that exist outside of history. It describes diasporas by the very labels, such as Chinese, Indian, or Gypsy, which need to be interrogated when conceptualizing a diaspora. Historical analysis is then the construction of a linear narrative of origins and development for that group, rather than an investigation of the different processes whereby diasporic subjects have been produced at historical moments.³⁸ This approach to diaspora has much in common with nation-based histories. Even the territorial basis of national histories is preserved in the common assertion that diasporas are characterized by yearnings for the homeland.

These trends and debates can be seen in recent studies of Chinese migration, where a vocabulary of diaspora, multiplicity, mobility, flows, and shifting identities has risen to challenge visions based on tropes of mono-directional immigration and "cultural nationalism."³⁹ In response, such approaches have been rejected as a dangerous distraction from pressing is-

sues of local politics and acceptance. As Tan Chee Beng put it, in reference to Chinese ethnics in Southeast Asia, "We fear being perceived as scattered communities without a sense of belonging, whatever the good intentions of the term's users."⁴⁰ Both sides, however, have tended to see diaspora as a transformation in migration that has occurred over the past thirty years, roughly contemporaneous with the rise of this new vocabulary used to describe it. This debate has rarely extended into perceptions of history. For example, proponents of diaspora in Asian American studies have tended to describe the status of earlier Chinese migrants as primarily shaped by policies of "containment and exclusion."⁴¹ That is to say, they have left interpretations of the past to be shaped by knowledge produced from the perspective of discrete national units, without inquiring into the accuracy of such descriptions and the possibility that diasporic approaches could revise such understandings. Perspectives such as the one that Siu attempted to develop continue to remain in the shadows.

Grounding Migration

Some work on diaspora has tried to stake out a middle ground between hybridity and essentialized identity. It has appropriated diaspora as a way to conceptualize cultural bonds, ties to a homeland, transnational organizations and networks linking people together across geographic boundaries, and dispersion. It usually focuses on the concrete networks and discourses by which links and identities are maintained.⁴² The ability to trace processes and links that escape the purview of nation-based histories is indeed the strength of a diasporic perspective. Yet the autonomy of these global processes and identities should not be emphasized at the expense of disassociating them from the many local contexts where they touch ground.

How, then, can we talk about global links and networks without essentializing them, but instead embedding them in innumerable local adaptations and identifications? An answer to this question is closely related to our understanding of culture and its relevance in contexts of migration and change. Criticisms of essentialized diasporas have much in common with critiques of holistic understandings of culture as bounded, static, and totalizing. These criticisms have emphasized how the *idea* of culture is rooted in the ideological legitimization of inequality and domination. In this sense, ideas of diaspora and culture are aspects of the construction of an international world order of discrete groups, and they distract us from the complex structures of interaction. Yet, many critiques target the rather thin conceptualizations of culture that are, unfortunately, common in migration studies. These conceptualizations offer simple understandings of

culture as a set of superficial values and characteristics which are lost, gained, and replaced through the process of assimilation into the local society.⁴³ The social construction of culture may well have an ideological component, but the mere description of that component does not obviate the fact that human action takes place within institutional structures and socialized assumptions about appropriate behavior. These structures and assumptions may shape human action in mutually unintelligible ways, and their transformation is a much more complex process than mere loss and replacement.

Even among critics of the idea of culture, Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the *habitus* is one of the more widely accepted accounts of the creation and relevance of cultural difference. Bourdieu shows how individuals can become cultural actors without their actions being predetermined by culture, thus leaving room for adaptation and change that amount to something other than the mere loss and destruction of culture. The flexibility and potential for diversification within the *habitus* offer a good departure point from which to understand how migrants circulating through global networks could develop their own institutional structure and "culture" that spanned and interacted with a multitude of local contexts.

In Bourdieu's words, the *habitus* is "principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them."⁴⁴ The theoretical starting point for the *habitus* is that holistic cultural systems constructed from a bird's-eye view by anthropological observers are unable to explain the practice of individuals who have a partial, ground's-eye view of their social relations. Cultural actors do not possess the systemic cultural logic necessary to calculate in any absolute way their own best interests or to act with complete consistency in terms of that logic. Individuals agents interact with their environment through a loose process of metaphor and analogy, deploying and adapting familiar concepts in an unsystematic, ad hoc manner. The field of meanings and relationships in which these relationships are generated—the *habitus*—is "inscribed" onto the mental and physical attributes of individuals from childhood, through interaction with people and the environment. In fact, the *habitus* is inseparable from the social institutions, physical environment, and threads of domination through which it is manifested. This inscription appears as common understandings of body language, words, social obligations, and status distinctions. Within these common understandings, the "symbolic capital" of cultural status markers and deportment is entwined with and imposed by economic and physical power.

Bourdieu also emphasizes the power of history and precedent in generating and regulating perceptions, innovations, expressions, and actions:

The *habitus*, a product of history, produces individual and collective practices—more history—in accordance with the schemes generated by history. It ensures the active presence of past experiences, which, deposited in each organism in the form of schemes of perception, thought, and action, tend to guarantee the "correctness" of practices and their constancy over time, more reliably than all formal rules and explicit norms. . . . [The *habitus*,] at every moment, structures new experiences in accordance with the structures produced by past experiences, which are modified by the new experiences within the limits defined by their power of selection, [and] brings about a unique integration . . . of the experiences statistically common to members of the same class.⁴⁵

The *habitus* generates and restricts human action, yet every action also reconceptualizes those preconceptions and generates new ones, so that it is constantly changing through a process of innumerable accumulated ad hoc actions. For example, institutions come into being through principles of incorporation embedded in the *habitus*, and, in turn, the growth of these institutions and their momentum toward autonomous self-preservation are instrumental in reshaping the *habitus*.

The *habitus* is useful in that it outlines a cultural field within which distinction and change are part and parcel of the continual reproduction of cultural structures and assumptions. Lauren Benton has also invoked Bourdieu in her attempt to understand patterned interactions on a global scale by "reimagining global structure by bringing into light institutions that are constructed out of practice and do not exist at, or even bridge, separate 'levels,' but themselves constitute elements of global structure."⁴⁶ She sees the daily encounters of people and institutions as the very fabric of world history. "Like God and the devil, culture is in the details of patterns and associations, notions of strategy, and collective knowledge, which together both shape and represent those institutions. Thus, global institutions are not to be viewed as structures set against, and constrained by, cultural norms."⁴⁷ Similarly, the encounters of migrants around the world need not be seen as a series of cultural collisions, but as a constant process of mutual adjustment.

Nonetheless, the extension of Bourdieu's work to a global scale offers some problems. The *habitus* was an attempt to explain and describe cultural difference. It is dependent on childhood socialization into statistically common experiences and was certainly not meant to be understood

on a global scale. Bourdieu's description of how cultural actors improvise their actions without a systematic knowledge of the larger whole is certainly relevant to understanding the improvisations that must take place during intercultural encounters. Yet the improvisations he describes are still formulated in the context of principles and relationships embedded in the local environment and social organization. The limits imposed by this context are necessary to establish an order by which actions can be made meaningful and mutually coherent. The "immigration of ideas" to a different *habitus* always damages those ideas: "Such immigration separates cultural productions from the system of theoretical reference points in relation to which they are consciously or unconsciously defined."⁴⁸ When referring to Algerian migrants in Paris, Bourdieu talks only of influences which cause the degeneration of the *habitus*.

Thus, the *habitus* provides few tools for the understanding of cross-cultural interactions. When localized cultural inscription is privileged, it is hard to imagine intercultural relations as anything other than chaos or domination through brute force. Hybrid peoples like Chinese converts to Christianity, who rejected much of what they saw around them as being "Chinese" and "pagan" without ceasing to perform acts of Chinese custom, are lost in the cracks between *habiti*, transitional figures at best. Friendly relations across *habiti*, such as between the Chicago merchant Moy Dong Chew and local ward boss Hinky Dink Kenna or between rice farmer Wong Aloiau and King Kalakaua of Hawaii, are conceivable only on the most instrumental level. Nonetheless, as we shall see, such people and relationships occupied crucial interstices of migrant life. Links with outsiders were central reference points of migrant communities and institutions.⁴⁹

Culture(s) on a Global Scale

How can this notion of the mutually constitutive relationship of individual, institution, and collectivity be salvaged from the *habitus* and applied to situations of geographic dispersion and intercultural interaction to which no single *habitus* can be readily affixed? That is, how can migration be understood on a global scale? Some Chinese migrants had families and residences dispersed across the world, were skilled in the dress, language, and customs of more than one culture, raised different children in accordance with different cultural mores, and yet showed no signs of being "torn" between different cultures. The very idea that their identities should be torn, divided, hybrid, or even fluid gives priority to bounded and territorial perspectives as the norm. Is it possible to talk about such

people without resorting to a vocabulary of fragmentation and multiple identities?

David Palumbo-Liu has made a similar critique of Bourdieu: "In short, we have not yet been able to come up with a theoretical model that might predict the outcome of the transposition of cultural objects across an increasingly disjunctive world wherein the particular *habitus* of social agents is shot through with new information and new objects from around a globe to which we have yet to be habituated."⁵⁰ Palumbo-Liu, however, is primarily talking about objects and meaning as they move through and are differentially appropriated within a highly disjunctive global landscape. Migrants and their networks, on the other hand, maintain a certain amount of stability and connection across those disjunctions. How are we to understand networks and individuals that continue to produce their own meanings while simultaneously straddling such diversity and differential appropriation?

Perhaps the question of how to understand migration on a global scale would be better phrased as follows: How can we speak of migration as an intersection of multiple forces and discourses? One result of recent critiques of culture in academic writing has been a decline in the use of the term *culture* as a noun, and the blossoming of its use as an adjective. The precise meaning of a "cultural" analysis is still vague, but it generally implies a focus on discourse, representation, ideology, and description of the ways that meaning, social behavior, and organization are historically produced. That is to say, rather than being discarded, the idea of culture has been transformed into a fruitful analysis of the mechanisms and assumptions by which "culture" shapes our lives. The debates over culture have resulted in a more historically situated understanding of culture. Diasporic perspectives can be approached in the same way. Rather than focusing on the existence of discrete diasporas, we should trace the ways in which transregional structures and movement have shaped human activity and consciousness. Moreover, those structures and networks are not entities in and of themselves, but patterns that are inseparable from their local manifestations.

A Global Field

Two assumptions that go beyond Bourdieu's conception of the *habitus* seem necessary to understand cultural interactions at a global scale. The first is that mutual interaction is not necessarily dependent on socialization into broadly common principles. Bourdieu may still insist that meanings are damaged in translation without concluding that common

forms of communication are dependent upon common meaning. Inter-cultural relations can be understood as the development of common forms of communication and behavior that order participants without necessarily homogenizing their subjectivities.⁵¹ Difference plays an important role in the internal structure of groups. Therefore, the process of encounter and communication is just as likely to create a structure of difference as it is to result in homogeneity. I elaborate on this process in chapter 4, which describes how local communities and the imperial government in China interacted through ritual. Each side had differing interpretations of the ritual, yet through mutual participation a certain ordering was attained. Mediators who bridged those differences facilitated the process of communication, but their own status depended upon the maintenance of the differences. This process of creating a common and functional means of communication can both stabilize and obscure differences.

In the early-twentieth-century world, the formulation of difference took place through categories such as national character, culture and habits, and immigrant and ethnic heritages. Such formulations of difference also created broad similarities—such as the creation of internationally recognized state institutions, internalization of nationalism, and adherence to discourses of race and culture. These made up common languages of interaction by which the world was ordered. They did not necessarily preempt other interests and consciousnesses, but they did provide a forum for interaction.

If this field of interaction was to provide a basis for institutional and individual encounters that gave participants some confidence about what to expect, we must assume it had some structural form. Thus, we must also go beyond Bourdieu in assuming that some kind of cultural field is possible on a translocal scale, patterning the relationships of groups and peoples. Of course, such a structure would be qualitatively different from local *habiti*, and should not be understood as a kind of homogenizing global culture. It would only exist through its manifestation in institutions, local phenomena, and ad hoc encounters, always shifting and looking different from different parts of the world. Nonetheless, it would still occupy a space beyond any individual culture or group and pattern the relationships between them.

Roland Robertson, in his writings about globalization, has attempted to articulate a "global field" as a "sense of a general mode of discourse about the world as a whole and its variety."⁵² He writes,

The global "system" is not reducible to a scene consisting merely of societies and/or other large-scale actors. Individuals, societies, the sys-

tem of societies, as well as mankind, are to be treated in terms of one coherent analytical framework. . . . As the general process of globalization proceeds, there is a concomitant constraint upon such entities to "identify" themselves in relation to the global-human circumstance. In addition, globalization also yields new actors and "third cultures"—such as transnational movements and international organizations—that are oriented, negatively or positively, to the global-human circumstance. . . . I will argue that cultural pluralism is itself a constitutive feature of the contemporary global circumstance and that conceptions of the world-system, including symbolic response to and interpretations of globalization, are themselves important factors in determining the trajectories of that very process.⁵³

Robertson's global field has four primary reference points by which contemporary people make sense of the world and interact with each other: (1) national societies, (2) the world system of societies, (3) selves, and (4) humanity. These components both complement and contradict each other. For example, we can simultaneously feel ourselves to be members of a unique society and yet claim to think and act in terms of all humanity; or we can assert our own individual uniqueness while simultaneously believing that unique national and cultural heritages decisively shape people's subjectivity. The idea that societies have enough in common to partake of a world system of societies and the idea that all people have their individuality in common provide bridges between different components. At the same time, these contradictions are integral parts of the structure. For example, the supposedly universal values of humanity provide standards (such as diligence and the capitalist spirit, or human rights) by which inequality among societies can be explained and justified.⁵⁴ As Bourdieu would have it, any systematic logic suggested by these reference points is illusory, but they shape human practice nonetheless.

Robertson argues that these reference points are not absolute aspects of human identity, but are particular to the contemporary process of globalization. Unfortunately, Robertson's understanding of history as a process of increasing world connectivity that has expanded from early modern Europe is not fruitful. A better historical approach would be to trace shifts in the global field over time while also considering fields that are not necessarily global but transregional in scale. A field of Chinese migration in the early twentieth century could be defined by four components: (1) networks, (2) international status, (3) ethnic identity, and (4) individuals. These are briefly described here and further elaborated in chapter 3 as aspects of particular historical moments. The actual field of Chinese migra-

tion is in reality far more complex than these four components suggest, but to formulate it in this way does, to rephrase Robertson, help conceptualize a general practice of Chinese migration in the early twentieth century as a whole *and* in its variations.

Networks

Networks are almost indistinguishable from institutions: the businesses, families, native place associations, and sworn brotherhoods that fill this book. These institutions were the nodes in interlinked networks that moved people throughout the world. These networks were built on, perpetuated, and produced symbols like initiation rituals, family ideology, communal worship, and common language. Thus, they were the channels by which domination could be exerted and profit accumulated. Networks and institutions were also the sites at which global forces like markets and labor opportunities were channeled into the production of actual human movement.

Far from being homogeneous, the institutional nodes of these networks took on different faces in different situations. Family and lineage came to the forefront in villages in China, while sworn brotherhoods were a common means of networking people beyond individual villages. Native place, surname, sworn brotherhoods, and businesses were most relevant abroad, and even these took particular configurations in local situations. In Chicago, the network of traditional institutions was particularly dense and powerful, with sworn brotherhoods rising to the top. In Peru, businesses were the most appropriate means to take advantage of opportunities for social mobility. In Hawaii, reformulated versions of native place and surname associations, as markers of ethnic heritage, best served the interests of locally born Chinese and their weakening transnational networks.

International Status

The significance of international status is somewhat different than that of national consciousness. It is difficult to gauge the extent to which Chinese migrants had developed a deeply rooted national consciousness before the anti-Japanese war and how this was different from earlier accommodation to the imperial bureaucracy, shared written language, and rituals. Clearly, however, migrants did increasingly link their fates to the international reputation of China. They sought diplomatic representation, looked for recognition from the Chinese state, and helped propa-

gate visions of a modernizing China. They also sought status within local states by portraying themselves as respectable merchants, willing and able to engage in the commercial activities of a modernizing world. The organization and reorganization of Consolidated Benevolent Associations and Chambers of Commerce under the patronage of Chinese officials (which may have helped forge at least a regional consciousness among South Chinese migrants) and expatriate political parties illustrate how this status consciousness interacted with the networks, causing transformations on both sides.

Ethnic Identities

Ethnic identities were formulated in terms of local social structures, although usually with reference to wider discourses of race, nation, and migration. The construction of a unique ethnic heritage in terms that justified inclusion into a larger national whole and the definition of differences as beneficial rather than harmful were common aspects of ethnic identities. The locally born Chinese of Hawaii were most deeply invested in an ethnic identity. They constituted themselves as a group in multiethnic Honolulu that exemplified the kind of pioneering immigrant heritage that made America strong. Pride in the modernization of China was used to underline the suitability of Chinese as American citizens, and links to China and migrant associations were reformulated as ties to an immigrant past that was the basis of a local civic identity.

The self-representations of Chinese in Peru and Chicago developed a more complex interweaving of local and international discourses. The Chinese in Peru drew on their official connections and international trading activities to present themselves as cosmopolitan merchants helping to develop untapped natural resources and link the nation to international markets and modernization. Rather than striving to become objects of integration into Peruvian society (which was still very amorphous and subject to debate, in any case), the Chinese tried to identify with Europeans and North Americans as the standard-bearers of Peruvian nationhood. That is to say, the more they defined themselves in terms specific to the Peruvian situation, the more they identified themselves in terms of Chinese citizenship, transnational networks, and international status.

Chinese in Chicago, on the other hand, were just one of many migrant groups trying to make a living in a rapidly expanding industrial metropolis. In this context, local Chinese elites found it in their best interests to dominate an isolated ethnic enclave. They presented this enclave as a self-reliant business community, specializing in laundry services and

mild exotica. Although they were relatively removed from the antagonism and debates that had surrounded the Chinese on the West Coast, the legacy of Western networks still strongly shaped the associations and occupations of Chinese in Chicago. Through tightly controlled associations and connections with local politicians, they even managed to protect gambling and laundry activities from the interference of aggressive racketeers and other outsiders. Chinese nationalism and links to home villages were important themes among Chinese in Chicago, but they were played out in the context of struggles for power between migrants trying to dominate the circumscribed resources of Chinatown.

Individuals

In the case of migrants, the individual was often *homo economicus*, more a reference point for the articulation of self-interest than a self-conscious focus of identity. Economic gain was often the main purpose and justification of migration, and it was the main thing that could be translated into cultural status back home and abroad. Migrants moved through networks and manipulated symbols of status with an eye toward profit and the manipulation of others who could be exploited for profit. Some individuals, such as Aurelio Powsan Chia in Lima and the Moy brothers in Chicago, had a significant effect on how networks took shape locally. In turn, the opportunities created by migrant networks and the expectations of family shaped the direction of individual ambitions. As ethnic identities developed, however, more self-conscious individual identities grew along with them. These identities were often articulated in terms of cultural conflict. Such a formulation was not necessarily the natural result of migration and integration but was closely linked to discourses of group distinction and assimilation that were increasingly popular throughout the world.

Although I have argued for the necessity of a global perspective on Chinese migration, none of these four reference points offer a particularly global vision. Taken individually, they were all rather parochial in their outlook. Taken together, they describe a complex transnational field of migrant activity. This field was, in turn, integrated into larger structures of global economic flows, international relations, and national self-definitions. Chinese migration contributed to the ever-shifting shapes of these structures, whether through the international negotiations of Wu Tingfang in Peru, the participation of Chinese in the definition of Hawaiian identity, the importance of Chinese in shaping the border-guarding machinery of the Bureau of Immigration, their role in extending world

markets into Peru and Hawaii, or their contributions to the changing ideals of nationalism through their support of various Chinese political activists on a global stage.

OVERVIEW OF SUBSEQUENT CHAPTERS

Chapter 2 compares immigration laws, demographic statistics, and economic activities of Chinese migrants to Peru, Chicago, and Hawaii, presenting important background material for the second half of the book. It also develops my argument for the necessity of a global perspective by showing that many common explanations of migrant situations based on local or national circumstances are insufficient for understanding the similarities and differences between these locations. In particular, most discussions of the American exclusion laws are unable to account for their very different effects in Hawaii and the United States, and no consistent correlation can be found between local status, economic success, and new immigration.

Chapter 3 outlines a global perspective on Chinese migration from 1842 to 1949, focusing on the three components of networks, nationalism, and ethnicity mentioned above and trying to situate them as historical processes. Chapter 4 looks at associational practices and ritual behavior in South China in order to contextualize Chinese migration as the extension of a cultural and organizational landscape that is also a result of constant adaptation. The discussion of Chinese ritual emphasizes how lines of communication developed that both defined and preserved group solidarity and difference, which helps to illuminate how migrants could integrate into local situations without necessarily losing their links to China. Space for the incorporation of outsiders into migrant worlds existed even before contact, although that space would not necessarily remain the same after prolonged encounters.

Chapters 5–7 focus on Chinese in Peru, Chicago, and Hawaii in the early twentieth century. Local adaptations are depicted as aspects of diasporic networks and as examples of different ways in which the global networks and social organizations could themselves be transformed. Briefly, the Chinese in Peru tried to climb local ethnic structures by casting themselves as transnational cosmopolitans, the Chinese in Chicago forged a relatively secure niche for themselves through isolation and self-commodification as exotica, and the Chinese in Hawaii utilized their associations and networks for the purpose of identification as local ethnics. The conclusion (chapter 8) situates these three cases into a larger narrative of Chinese migration.

My choice of these three locations always arouses curiosity. One important reason is that migrants to all three places were from roughly the same small region of China, and they arrived at roughly the same time, thus providing a basis from which to describe variations. When I first formulated this project, I developed a complex list of overlapping differences and similarities that could be explained, such as the differing effects of American exclusion laws, the effects of plantation labor in Peru and Hawaii, the different numbers of female migrants, the differing reputations for assimilation, the rise of different institutions to prominence, and the relatively high levels of social and economic attainment in Peru and Hawaii as compared to Chicago.⁵⁵ Many of these comparisons still shape the argument in chapter 2. The project is no longer comparative, however, in the sense that a comparison usually tries to isolate variables that have caused differences. My primary goal now is to demonstrate the necessity of taking global processes into consideration when understanding migration. Those networks and processes cannot be understood in isolation from their manifestation in particular locations, and each location is treated as a case study to show different aspects of these networks. These three cases do offer a wide range of diversity by which to demonstrate these different aspects, yet that diversity could have been obtained by looking at almost any three locations in the Western hemisphere. All of them are aspects of the same global history and the same history of Chinese migration.



CHAPTER 2

Immigration Laws,
and the Limitations

Nation-based histories of Chinese immigration laws and social received lack of integration and the extreme Chinese immigrant communities. Yet, the exclusion laws in Hawaii in 1898 led to a ratio, unlike in the United States, where males persisted for nearly two generations in 1882. Moreover, in Peru, where strictly enforced until 1930, the proportion either Hawaii or the United States. Restriction on migrant demographics in all these places variable. Similarly, there is no direct link immigration. Proportionally more migrants than into Hawaii and Peru during the first despite deeper anti-Chinese prejudice and identity above the status of laundryman or resident.

We can better understand these variations in economic relationships and the survival strategies of families into account. The majority of migrants looking to maximize the advantage to the United States was attractive to new migrants in 1882 because it offered more opportunities for people to open small, independent businesses. The economic stratification in Peru and Hawaii conditions that produced many notable migrant success opportunities to new migrants after earlier generations had filled the niches. Yet some aspects of Chinese migration best explained from a local perspective. For example, of Chinese women to settle and raise families.