

outside of that niche, even though such endeavors would occasionally be quite successful. The Chinese thus helped perpetuate the dominance of white business on the Islands.⁵⁴

Local structures are not sufficient to describe migrant economies and demographics. Chapter 3 describes family strategies in China that aimed at relatively short-term economic gain and encouraged migrants to move where quick profit could be made with relatively low start-up capital. They took advantage of the many Chinese businesses and institutions that were dependent on and perpetuated constant migration. The channels and networks created by these institutions shaped the migrants' adaptation to local economic opportunities, as well as their political and cultural development.



CHAPTER 3

Chinese Diasporas

The period from 1842 to 1949 can loosely be called the era of modern Chinese migration, when movement from South China was shaped by an increasingly lively and industrializing world economy. A global perspective highlights the transnational institutions and diasporic circulation of people, goods, money, and ideas that made up that migration. It is not necessarily a panorama of Chinese migration around the world, but an analysis of the different ways in which the nodes of migrant networks were linked together and how they changed over time.

A history of diasporic Chinese has yet to be written, but a focus on different aspects of diasporic activities—all of which were deeply interrelated with each other and with larger global forces—helps to highlight shifts that came to the forefront at particular historical moments. In rough chronological order, I discuss Chinese migration in terms of labor flows, networks, nationalist flows, and ethnicization. Labor flows from South China expanded rapidly from 1850 to the 1870s, sending workers to newly emergent cash crop economies around the world. These flows were most strongly determined by outside forces, but the Chinese also participated in their creation. The recruitment of laborers also laid the groundwork for networks of business and migration built on the particularistic relationships of family and village. By the turn of the century, most migration moved through these networks, dividing migration into a multitude of distinct grooves that entwined and intersected at key nodes. Nationalist flows describe the politics of defining and mobilizing Chinese identity in terms of modern nation-states, which became increasingly prominent after 1900 and reached a peak in the anti-Japanese war of 1937 to 1945. Ethnicization is the flip side of nationalism, whereby migrants began to interact and identify themselves primarily as part of local non-Chinese societies. This trend has always existed, but became predominant after the Second World War.

THE PEARL RIVER DELTA REGION

The vast majority of Chinese migrants to the Western hemisphere came from one of many villages within a small area of about ten thousand square kilometers on the west side of the Pearl River Delta in Guangdong province. Three or four days of walking, with perhaps a short boat trip or two, could have brought a prospective migrant from one of these villages to embarkation points in Canton, Macao, or Hong Kong (see figure 7). The coastal regions of Fujian province and the Chaozhou and Jiaying areas of eastern Guangdong also supported strong traditions of overseas migration; however, with the exception of a few boatloads of plantation laborers carried to Hawaii and Latin America in the mid-nineteenth century, they have produced few migrants to the Western Hemisphere until recently.

Migrants traveled abroad not merely as Chinese but also as members of a large range of other social identities that sliced the Pearl River Delta landscape. Kinship, village, administrative unit, dialect, and the subethnic distinction between Hakkas and *bendi* were some of the identifications most likely to be evoked by migrants abroad. At home, Pearl River Delta society could be even more complex, with distinctions between residents of hills, flatlands, and reclaimed delta lands; town and village; aboriginal groups and "civilized" Han Chinese; and the "boat people" (*danjia*), who

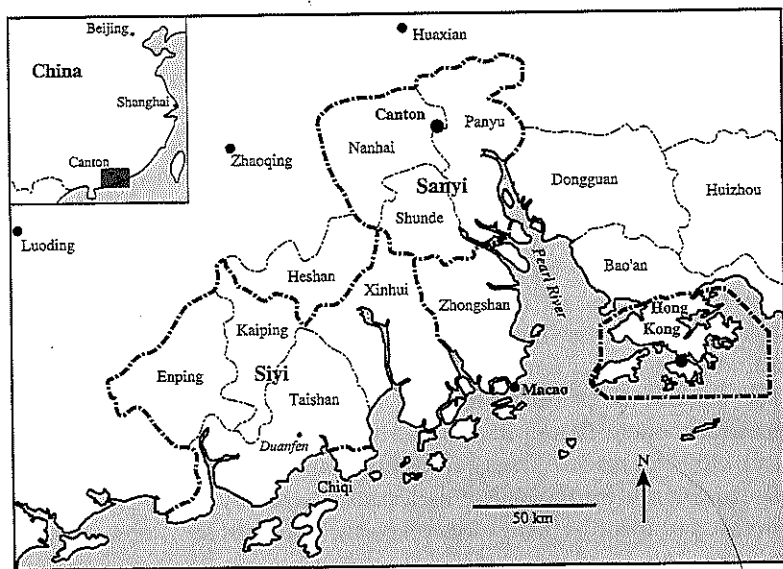


Figure 7 The Pearl River Delta Area

were believed to be an inferior caste and were treated accordingly by both their neighbors and the imperial administration.¹

Administratively, the core of this region was divided into nine counties: Zhongshan county (known as Xiangshan until 1924) just north of Macao; the counties of Panyu, Shunde, and Nanhai, which surround Canton and are often grouped together as the Sanyi (Three Counties); of Taishan (known as Xinning until the 1930s), Enping, Kaiping, and Xinhui, which are commonly grouped together as the Siyi (Four Counties); and Heshan county, which is sometimes added onto the Siyi, in which case they are known as the Wuyi (Five Counties). Zhongshan includes three nearly unintelligible dialect groups scattered in villages throughout the county: a dialect similar to Chaozhou speech, one more similar to Cantonese, and Hakka. In the middle of the nineteenth century, the Sanyi and the Siyi were somewhat more homogeneous regions in terms of dialect (although still encompassing large variations), and often defined themselves in comparison with each other. The Sanyi was wealthier, with greater proportions of flat and fertile farmlands and higher levels of commercialism and cash cropping. The Siyi was a more impoverished region of hills and small farmers. Accordingly, Sanyi people saw themselves as more cultured and cosmopolitan than the "backwater hicks" of the Siyi. Sanyi speech was often described as a variation of the "standard" Cantonese spoken in Canton city, whereas the varieties of Siyi speech were placed lower on the cultural hierarchy as unintelligible local dialects. This linguistic hierarchy was pervasive enough that many Siyi native place associations abroad held their formal meetings in standard Cantonese rather than in local dialects.²

Hakka (*kejia*, literally "guest families") migrants have accounted for at least 15 percent of Chinese migrants to the United States, Hawaii, and Peru. They came mostly from Zhongshan county, but from surrounding areas as well. Hakkas are a dialect group that had emerged in the mountainous Jiaying prefecture of northeast Guangdong by at least the twelfth century. By the sixteenth century they had begun to migrate into enclaves throughout southeast China, mostly in mountainous regions where they opened wasteland and produced forest products for lowland markets. They began to arrive in the prosperous Pearl River Delta area in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, even moving into the lowlands of Zhongshan county and establishing settlements among the *bendi* (literally "native earth.") Differences in language and custom—such as the unbound feet of Hakka women—were reinforced by *bendi* portrayals of themselves as wealthy, civilized lowlanders and of Hakka as untrustworthy, backwards mountain people, and began to harden into antagonistic ethnic boundaries. Official gazetteers often referred to Hakkas as "guest bandits" (*kefei*),

and some *bendi* even claimed they were not Han Chinese at all. Individual families or lineages might occasionally move back and forth between identification as Hakka, *bendi*, or even as an aboriginal group like the Yao, but the categories themselves were drawn with increasing rigidity.³

Tensions came to a head in the Siyi during the violent Hakka-*bendi* wars after 1853, which concluded in the 1870s with the resettlement of defeated Hakkas into southwestern Guangdong and the recently created sub-county of Chiqi, carved out of the southern tip of Taishan county (subsequently reintegrated in 1954). The wars also furthered the self-conscious elaboration of a Hakka ethos in Guangdong. Hakka ethnic pride agreed that Hakkas were distinct but described that distinction as a higher level of Chinese cultural orthodoxy, marked by diligence, honesty, origins in north China, and, during the Republic, patriotism and progressiveness. That is to say, they depicted their distinctiveness as a form of ultra-Chineseness, and their marginality was inseparable from the assertion of centralizing standards. Hakka emigrants were especially active in the creation of Hakka institutions and identities that often traced their roots to mythical migrations from North China. The historical emergence of the Hakkas, entwined as it is with migration, economic forces, and ideological struggles, offers a good prelude to similar processes that would take place among the migrants who spread out from the delta in increasing numbers after 1850.

ORIGINS OF MODERN CHINESE MIGRATION

Gradual changes across the South Pacific and Southeast Asia over the nineteenth century shaped the emergence of "modern" Chinese diasporas built around the expansion of capitalism, nationalism, and modernist ideologies. These changes included increased European colonial penetration into Southeast Asia, the expansion of global markets and economic networks throughout the Pacific, and the displacement of the Fujianese junk trade by European sailing vessels (managed by both Europeans and non-Europeans) in the first half of the century, followed by the relatively inexpensive steamship lines that helped increase and channel the flows of Chinese migrants in the second half of the century.⁴

Within these larger trends, the establishment of a British colony at Hong Kong and, to a lesser extent, the creation of treaty ports in Xiamen (Amoy) and Shantou (Swatow) on the South China coast had the most direct effect on the shape and volume of Chinese migration.⁵ First occupied by the British in January 1841, the island of Hong Kong was officially ceded

in the Treaty of Nanjing in 1842, a result of the Opium War between Britain and China. The significance of the Opium War has often been interpreted as marking the penetration and disruption of a traditional rural economy by Western capitalism. Much local research argues, however, that the depth and effects of this penetration beyond treaty ports varied greatly from place to place, and that these effects were not felt immediately but as a gradual series of adjustments over decades.⁶ The most immediate effect of the Opium War on the Pearl River Delta region north of Hong Kong was the shift in foreign trade to newly opened treaty ports further north on the coast, resulting in a short depression (further influenced by a depression in Britain) in an already complex, commercialized, and outward-looking economy.⁷ Of more long-term significance was the creation of Hong Kong as an outpost of British imperialism, closely linked to an expanding Pacific economy. Hong Kong and the treaty ports became portals through which local merchants could more easily search out and link up with economic opportunities, and facilitate access to laborers from South China. Before the 1850s, Pearl River Delta merchants had much experience with foreigners but, unlike the merchants of Fujian (who had managed much of the Canton trade through the early eighteenth century), tended to stay at home rather than travel overseas in search of profit. The establishment of Hong Kong marked the beginning of a decisive shift away from the Fujian merchant networks and Hakka miners from western Guangdong as the main axes of Chinese migration and toward Hong Kong as the primary node through which Chinese overseas migration increased to unprecedented volumes.

Migration abroad from South China was just one stream in a larger pattern of movement to cities, frontier areas, and rural areas throughout China, and into northern lands like Mongolia, Siberia, and Manchuria.⁸ A Cantonese villager was just as likely to migrate to the local county town, Canton, Shanghai, or some other urban center as to go abroad. Similarly, as villagers from relatively poor counties like Kaiping in Guangdong province migrated abroad in search of profit, so even more impoverished villagers from further inland would migrate to Kaiping to work as wage laborers on the lands left behind.⁹ In terms of the institutions and structural forces that shaped migration, the border of the Chinese empire may not be the most useful point at which to make a distinction between different kinds of migration. That is to say, flows of domestic and international migration shifted within the context of the same general forces. Institutions and networks channeled migrants and adapted to new situations whether in Canton or San Francisco, and economic shifts on a global scale over

the course of the nineteenth century were responsible for a gradual shift in the main streams of Chinese migration away from rural and frontier areas to port cities in China and throughout the world.

For the purposes of this book, however, we want to understand the increasing orientation of migration from South China to points outside of China after 1850. Explanations that draw attention to the mid-century rebellions and worsening land-man ratios as push factors generally fail to account for the particularities in time and place of this migration.¹⁰ The great increase of the Chinese population over the eighteenth century fails to explain why emigration from South China, and from the Pearl River Delta region in particular, did not take off until the 1850s and continued to grow in the late nineteenth century as political and economic stability returned and the population remained level.¹¹ Attention to the correlation of regional economic cycles with migration can provide more help in understanding long-term flows of emigration. During the century-long economic downswing of the Pearl River Delta area after the 1830s, Hong Kong was a portal to the increasingly lively economy over much of the Pacific. On the other hand, western Guangdong and Fujian provinces experienced an economic upswing over this same period. Migration also increased from these areas, although not to the extent that it did from the Canton area. Thus, some correlation of emigration with economic cycles seems probable but is not sufficient to understand why Chinese increasingly chose to migrate overseas at this time.

Similarly, although most of China experienced violent turmoil from the 1850s through the 1870s, other regions of China did not produce significant numbers of overseas migrants. The Red Turban rebellion, the Hakka-*bendi* wars of the Pearl River Delta area, and the other lineage and village feuds throughout South China in this period were milder in their destructive force than what was taking place elsewhere.¹² Perhaps only the laborers recruited through deception and kidnapping in the early years of the labor trade can be linked to social unrest. Even then, access to opportunities through Hong Kong and the treaty ports was most responsible for channeling local restlessness and lack of opportunity into concentrated overseas flows. Unrest and scarcity of local opportunities existed in South China, but, as we shall see below, emigration as a family strategy depended more on stability, precedent, and opportunity than on disorder and poverty. That the burst in overseas migration during the second half of the nineteenth century should flow through Hong Kong, Xiamen, and Shantou rather than northern treaty ports like Shanghai or Tianjin was a result of the connections and networks established through a long tradition of migration and exchange in the Pacific that gave people in South

China the experience and means to take advantage of opportunities presented by a changing Pacific economy.

LABOR FLOWS

One of the most immediate effects of the establishment of Hong Kong was the rise in Chinese labor migration over the subsequent four decades. Chinese had for centuries been working throughout Southeast Asia in mines and agricultural enterprises, recruited and organized through a wide variety of debt bondage and profit-sharing schemes.¹³ A few attempts had even been made by non-Chinese to import laborers to plantations in Trinidad and Brazil in the first half of the nineteenth century. After the middle of the century, however, this labor migration began to increase. Chinese migration to the British colony of Singapore—which was both a major point of transshipment and a free trade entrepot that had already attracted Chinese living in Southeast Asia—rose quickly in the 1840s. The recruitment of laborers to Cuba after 1847 and to Peru after 1849 would, over the next two decades, result in the first significant flows of indentured Chinese laborers outside of Southeast Asia. In these two cases, the rise of the Chinese labor trade was closely tied to the gradual demise of African slavery and the search by plantation owners for a viable alternative.¹⁴ In a more general sense, this increase in labor migration was tied to the expansion of world markets into the Pacific. Thus, labor could be used with increasing profit in agricultural and mining enterprises even in places that were not compensating for the demise of slavery.¹⁵ This more general development was closely linked to the establishment of Hong Kong as an outpost of British imperialism and a convenient site from which to escape the restrictions of the Chinese government against the recruitment of laborers. Some of the earliest attempts at labor recruitment in the 1850s by planters from Peru, Cuba, and Hawaii had been in Xiamen, but local resistance quickly turned recruitment efforts to the Pearl River Delta as a better base for such activities.¹⁶

The bulk of this labor migration was controlled by Chinese. In the villages of South China, Chinese “crimps,” paid by the head for each laborer they could recruit, used a variety of means to entice potential migrants, including kinship networks, material advances, promises of fortunes for the taking, payment of gambling debts, deceit, the purchase of prisoners taken in feuds, and kidnapping.¹⁷ Peru and Cuba were the only places for which non-Chinese controlled recruitment at every level above the village. In much of Southeast Asia, Chinese controlled the organization of labor all the way to the production and marketing of goods. The-

rise in Chinese labor migration was linked with the expansion of the world economy, but not only in terms of chattel shipped around in accordance with Western needs. Chinese actively participated in the production of capitalist expansion in the Pacific. At times, Chinese interests could even block Western needs. For example, entrenched Southeast Asian recruiting rings and officials opposed to Western-dominated recruiting forced a British attempt to recruit laborers for South Africa in 1904 to relocate its operations from Guangdong to northern China.¹⁸

Contracted Chinese labor migration peaked in the 1870s, although it has continued in some form or another to this day. More than any other aspect of Chinese migration, labor movement has already received much attention from a global perspective.¹⁹ Scholarly interest in this migration, however, views it primarily as an aspect of the expansion of Western capitalism, and little attention has been given to Chinese participation in its production or to how this migration led to the creation of further migrant networks. In fact, labor recruitment often led only to the temporary or permanent relocation of people and did not necessarily result in any permanent structures of migration. Extreme examples of labor migration as temporary relocation were the transportation of 62,000 laborers from the northern provinces of Shandong and Zhili to the South African gold mines in the first decade of the twentieth century, and of nearly 140,000 to France to build roads and dig graves and trenches during the First World War. Nearly all of these laborers were returned to China after the completion of their tasks, leaving behind few, if any, lasting structures of migration.²⁰ An example of permanent relocation appears in nineteenth-century Peru, where Chinese who had finished their indentures were left isolated and impoverished, with few active connections to China. They tended to take Spanish names, intermarry, and gradually integrate into the coastal lower classes, creating no strong transnational links.

The earliest laborers brought to any region tended to be either temporary or unable to maintain transnational connections, but they often laid the basis for more stable diasporic flows. Some would become merchants and craftsmen, and others would provide the connections and clientele to attract new merchants and craftsmen, who would, in turn, create a much wider and self-perpetuating system for the circulation of goods, money, information, and people. As these larger networks became established, migration in order to labor became less an end in itself and more of a first step in the hopes that after the contract was completed, or debts repaid, a real fortune could be made. Through Chinese involvement in managing the labor trade, global networks of migration began to emerge, rather than just movement and relocation. The profit to be gained by

organizing and transporting laborers facilitated the increased power of a diaspora elite that had a direct interest in the continued circulation and relocation of people. The greater the control of non-Chinese interests over migration, the greater the likelihood that labor migration would result only in dispersion rather than the emergence of continued migration and transnational connections.

DIASPORIC NETWORKS

The labor diaspora most clearly overlaps and provides groundwork for the network diaspora in the process of recruitment. Networks are the transnational institutions, organizations, and personal connections that made migration into a viable economic strategy and stable system for the circulation of goods, people, information, and profit. If labor needs drew increasing numbers of Chinese overseas after the middle of the nineteenth century, the networks created by these laborers and recruiters perpetuated migration through the first half of the twentieth century, long after the laboring opportunities had been greatly curtailed by exclusionary laws and the recruitment of workers from other areas. These networks not only facilitated and directed movement, but also depended on the continued generation of movement as a source of profit.²¹

Chinese participation in the gold rushes to California and Australia in the 1850s was even greater than the contemporaneous growth in labor migration and even more dependent on access to world communication channels that flowed through Hong Kong. As many as thirty thousand Chinese migrated to San Francisco in 1852 (*total* emigration from Hong Kong would not reach that level again until the relaxation of emigrant shipping regulations to Singapore in the mid-1870s), and migration continued at several thousand a year to California and Australia in the 1850s.²² Gold rush migration exemplified the credit-ticket system, in which labor and network migration become indistinguishable. Credit-ticket migrants arrived abroad indebted for the cost of their passage. This debt was transferred from transportation brokers to employers, and various migrant institutions or companies often assisted with the movement and supervision of these human investments.²³ This system was clearly a means of mobilizing labor, but it did not depend on indentures (although contracts for debt repayment were still common) and the extreme methods of physical force that characterized indentured migration. The legacy of the credit-ticket system was also more long-lasting than indentured labor in that even when the institutionalized practice of credit-ticket migration died out in a particular locality, the networks and organizations built on

kinship and native place still persisted and helped channel further flows of chain migration.

Transnational Families

Families were one of the most basic institutions making up migrant networks. Migration from South China was rarely a trailblazing endeavor on the part of an individual migrant. He quite likely followed in the footsteps of an uncle, father, grandfather, or even great-grandfather who had made the trip before him. Over generations, individuals from such migrant families may have been born in China and yet lived most of their lives abroad, returning to China only long enough to inseminate their wives and create the next link in the chain. Personal motivations often had a role in the departure of an individual: some boys longed for adventure, some were piqued by the sight of a returned villager flashing his accumulated wealth, some were trying to evade pillaging bandits or possible conscription by local armies, some wanted to escape an unpleasant family situation or a wife they did not like, and others just could not stand the idea of farming.²⁴ Whatever the personal ambitions of a migrant, his family often allowed him no choice, as migration was just one of a variety of investment strategies designed to keep the family line solvent. A prudent and fertile family might develop a safely diversified portfolio by assigning one son to work the family fields, one to hire out to the neighbors as a wage earner, one to study for an official position, one to take up some business opportunity in a nearby town, and others to seek fortunes in distant lands like Canada or Thailand. One of them was bound to bring success and wealth back to the family, or at least a steady stream of support.²⁵

The common depiction of Chinese migrant communities as bachelor communities is only accurate if we insist that families must be geographically unified nuclear units of cohabiting spouses and children. More important for many Chinese families was the maintenance of a patriline through time, from dead ancestors to descendants not yet born. Earning the material resources to maintain and extend this patriline and its physical manifestation as altar and household was often a primary motivation for migration. Many migrants left their villages only weeks after having married, usually just long enough to assure that their brides were carrying children. Many others made special trips back to China after a few years abroad, especially to take a wife and start producing descendants. As long as the migrant and his wife continued to share the same kitchen

as his brothers and parents, they continued to be a part of the extended family, no matter how long he had been away and what his family situation overseas was. Because of his income, the distant migrant was often the main decision maker of the family, even if not entitled to such status by seniority. When local violence led to China-based family members relocating in a county seat, Canton, or Hong Kong, remittances sent by migrants often assured that the family did not become permanently scattered. A formal division was the only way to break up the stem family, although a migrant was never excused from the wider responsibilities of the patrilineal descent line.²⁶ If division had taken place and the migrant moved his wife and children overseas, he would still often maintain a house in his village in case of a possible return. He would even spend money maintaining and improving the house, looking to impress fellow migrants abroad as much as people in the village.²⁷ Like the family, the village also became a transnational entity.

Migrant households could also be amenable to the establishment of more than one localized nucleus. When allowed by local sentiment and legislation, Chinese would occasionally form alliances with local non-Chinese women. Many of the local women married by Chinese, as well as wives brought in from China, were actually second wives. Polygamy was practiced by Chinese men born outside of China as well. If the migrant's first marriage occurred abroad, relatives at home might not even consider it to be a real marriage and still make plans to acquire a primary bride in the village. The primary wife usually remained in China, maintaining the household and raising children born of any of her husband's alliances. Some of these primary wives even encouraged the marriage of their husbands to local women, because the men were then more likely to feel the weight of their responsibilities and less inclined to gamble, visit prostitutes, or otherwise dissipate their earnings in the recreations common to men without families.²⁸

Alliances with non-Chinese women tended to incorporate the women into migrant networks as much as they integrated the grooms into local society, and not all non-Chinese wives realized what they were getting into. Reports of Peruvian women begging in the streets of Hong Kong in order to earn passage back to Peru caused repeated scandals in early-twentieth-century Lima.²⁹ They all told the same story of marrying a Chinese man in Peru, accompanying him to China, and then being left there as a secondary wife when the husband returned abroad. Most of the women claimed to have been impressed by how diligent and considerate their husbands had been at home. They traveled to China knowing noth-

ing of the other wife, or wives, fully expecting the same favorable treatment to continue, only to find themselves suddenly at the bottom of a spousal pecking order with no sympathy from their husbands. Hawaiian women, coming from a stronger tradition of multiple-partner alliances, seemed to be more open to the Chinese family situations, occasionally becoming close friends with the primary wife after moving to China. The most significant problem in Hawaii, at least according to Hawaiian missionaries, was the abandonment of wives and children in Hawaii by men returning to China.³⁰

Migration was not the only contingency that might lead to dispersed families. In silk-producing areas of the Pearl River Delta area south of Canton, the custom of delayed transfer marriage often resulted in wives not moving into their husbands' households for years after marriage. When they had access to the financial resources to support themselves, many wives tried to make this arrangement permanent, usually buying a secondary wife for their husband as compensation. Nonetheless, for the welfare of their souls after death, few women wanted to avoid marriage completely, often moving into their affinal home only when death was imminent in order to assure that the tablet containing their soul would be set on the family altar and properly worshiped. Other strategies to circumvent the necessity of a living husband included marrying the ghosts of dead men, arranging for their natal families to worship their tablet after death, or joining spinster houses that would provide the necessary worship. Some of these unmarried women followed the examples of their brothers by migrating to Canton, Hong Kong, and Singapore to work and send money back to their natal families.³¹

Tempting as it is, no direct connection can be made between these customs and the practice of dispersed migrant families. Delayed transfer marriage was restricted to very localized areas in which silk production provided an independent source of income for women. Moreover, from the perspective of the bride, delayed transfer marriage was the inverse of life as a migrant wife. A delayed transfer bride was determined to live apart from her in-laws, while the bride of a migrant lived with and served her in-laws even while her husband was absent. Nonetheless, the practice of delayed transfer marriage still highlights how integration into a family line was often a more important concern than the cohabitation of geographically localized nuclear families. Ancestor worship, centered on the family altars and graves in the home village, was an important medium through which to fulfill the duties of filial morality and provide for the comfort of the soul after death. Many of the first migrant associations

provided for the bones of the dead to be shipped back to families in China or at least to be worshiped with rudimentary sacrifices if they remained interred abroad. Even Catholic Chinese in Peru had their bones sent back when possible, despite the objections of the archbishop of Lima, who had his own fears that the bodies would not be properly cared for in China.³²

While families often provided the framework for migration, they could also be changed by migration. Many families considered the possibility of access to migration privileges when arranging marriage alliances for their children. Migration to Peru, the United States, and Hawaii after annexation was mostly possible through access to proper documentation that certified close kinship to certain classes of residents. False documents and the fraudulent transfer of valid documentation had a high market value in China. Using such documents was much less risky when the overseas resident sponsoring the migration was also a relative, and they were often provided as dowry or bride-price. Transferring such documents to people linked by marriage bonds meant a higher likelihood that they would provide more opportunities for further migration after the migrant established himself, thus strengthening interaction and bonds between affinal families.

Affinal ties were further strengthened through the provision of employment, assistance, advice, and companionship abroad. Such cooperation with affinal kin was much more common overseas than in China.³³ Women living abroad also took advantage of the absence of cohabiting parents-in-law to redefine their families, often maintaining a remarkable amount of contact with their natal families. Chinese family histories from Hawaii often note how immigrant mothers tended to be the most memorable and prominent figures at home, often keeping business records and educating the family while the fathers concentrated on work. At times they even ran separate household economies by raising and selling pigs, chickens, or eggs, or by pocketing extra profit when they sold something at a higher price than their husbands would have expected. They used the money to provide dowries for their daughters, to support their children's education, to pay for their own visits to China (during which they may have bought jewelry or other goods which could be resold abroad), and to invest in property that provided for them as widows.³⁴ Similarly, children in China usually had little contact with their maternal relatives, but those born abroad tended to think of family as both the patriline and matriline, perhaps even emphasizing the latter because of the influence of the mother. In 1937, Clarence Glick made a list of relatives (excluding grandparents) counted by thirty-six Hawaii-born Chinese. The list included 358

paternal relatives in Hawaii and 127 in China, compared to 528 maternal relatives in Hawaii and only 87 in China.³⁵

Transnational Villages

Migration as an economic strategy could go beyond single families to incorporate entire villages and lineages. In some villages, all the able-bodied men were sent overseas, leaving behind agricultural fields gone wild, and women, children, and elderly people living on remittances. A village two kilometers down the road without any significant advantages or disadvantages in local economic circumstances may have produced no emigrant families at all.³⁶ Some villages even established schools to train children in knowledge like language, geography, and bookkeeping, subjects that would be useful in their future lives abroad. The remittances might be used to maintain traditional rituals and lifestyle, or to develop a local commercial or political monopoly for a particular lineage. This occupational specialization in migration was similar to that of other villages and regions which became famous for producing furniture, edible delicacies, stonemasons, officials, generals, and prostitutes.³⁷

Chinese migrants throughout the world were people frequently on the move, making liberal use of telegraphs, mail, railways, and shipping lines to keep in touch with fellow-migrants and families.³⁸ Letters, sent both through regular mail services and put in the hands of fellow migrants making a trip home or abroad, were crucial for maintaining migrant networks and for reminding migrants of their responsibilities and the reasons why they had emigrated. Most migrants, however, failed to tell villagers at home how difficult their lives were abroad. Rather, they devoted much time at home to conspicuous consumption, providing entertainment and banquets for friends and villages, renovating their homes, giving gifts, showing off the sewing machines, radios, and cameras they brought for their families, and the gold watches, diamond rings, and suits of fine material they had acquired for themselves. Such behavior was intended as much to impress fellow migrants abroad, who were sure to hear of it through gossip, as to impress villagers in China. They also cultivated a reputation of success and wealth to be found abroad that helped perpetuate the cycle of migration. Most young men considering migration to the United States knew that they would probably work in an *yiguan* (clothes establishment), but very few had any idea that this meant a hard life of washing clothes rather than selling or making them.³⁹

Most migrants recreated their villages as networks of mutual supervision and support abroad by preferring to work with kin, buying food and

supplies from them, borrowing money from them, and selling their businesses to them. This often limited their horizons, but it also provided for the wide circulation of scarce resources. Not only could migrants apply to kinsmen for loans, but kinsmen were nearly obligated to provide them if possible. Debts could be carried for several years, and a single sum of money often circulated to provide start-up capital for several individuals.⁴⁰ These networks could be widely dispersed around the globe. Address books carried by Chinese arrested by immigration officials in Chicago listed individuals and companies located in New York, Montreal, Seattle, California, Vancouver, Alaska, Havana, Mexico, and Hong Kong.⁴¹ Like the family, the village also became a transnational entity.

The mechanisms of trust and supervision that made up these networks could also expand beyond the reinforcement of links with fellow villagers. In 1904, the Chinese managers of a boarding house near a Chicago area race track claimed a "wide acquaintance amongst horsemen, jockeys, book-makers, bettors, and others who follow the races" and told immigration officials how they kept tabs on people who owed them money:

I have known my customers for years, and know their circumstances. When I need money, I know to whom I can go and collect on account, at any time, and I do so. . . . I keep track of them in their travels around the country, and as they improve their financial conditions from time to time, I shall be able to collect on the accounts, as I verily believe, for they are people who are likely to make money, and if I am here to attend to those matters, I can then induce them to pay me. . . . When by chance I meet people who can give me information about those above-named who owe me money, I shall make inquiries, and when I learn of one who is able to pay all or part of what he owes me, I shall manage to collect in some way.⁴²

Similarly, a Chinese in Vancouver interviewed in 1924 depicted both the flexibility and the disciplined insularity of these networks when he remarked that "[the Chinese] place no confidence in anything anyone says unless they are Chinese. But if a friend of theirs tells them that you are all right, they accept you entirely. They never question you; they are very friendly. Canadians who wanted to do anything could do it easily if they just went at it right."⁴³ Villagers and kinsmen may have grown up deeply embedded in these relationships of trust and cooperation, but life was not forever limited to the social arena described by these childhood bonds. People could behave so as to lose that trust, just as outsiders could gain access through appropriate behavior. The networks were not bounded, but gradually melded into the surrounding society.

Such a context makes it somewhat irrelevant to ask what a particular migrant's personal ambition was, whether he intended to settle abroad like an immigrant or to return to his home like a sojourner. A migrant had to mobilize the resources to which he had access, and these resources came hand in hand with social expectations and demands. To gain access to the resources of the migrant community, an individual had to live up to the standards that maintained his honor and the honor of his kinsmen, such as maintaining an active interest in the village, living up to his business deals, and having a wife who behaved virtuously. Not all migrants lived up to these demands, but few did not feel their pull. Even Chinese not born in the village could find themselves enmeshed in these far-flung networks. In 1922, a California-born Chinese accompanied his father back to China for the first time. Before leaving, he had told his American girlfriend that he would definitely return to the United States within six months, still single. After arrival in China he was forced to write otherwise:

But it was all useless for my refusal, and everyone was a stranger and against me, too, on the point of marriage and religion in this village away in the inland of China. Had I known the conditions that exist in our village, I would not have gone into the tangle. But it was rather hard for me to avoid it, for I must accompany my dad to his destination. . . . In those few days my life companion was fixed for me by my folks before I knew anything about it. . . . I got to do it, for to refuse will cause trouble on both sides.⁴⁴

This was a young man who had largely identified himself as an American, yet he was unable to avoid a future that lay far beyond the scope of his intentions and perceptions. These networks were both powerful sources of opportunity and burdensome responsibilities.

Hong Kong

Chinese Hong Kong was a city built largely on an economy of migration. Institutions and businesses in Hong Kong were links in a worldwide chain of services that supported migration and made it into a viable economic strategy. By the end of the nineteenth century, Hong Kong was more important as a hub for these networks than as a center of labor recruitment. Chinese Hong Kong was free from the exactions and corruption of Chinese officialdom, and it was underwritten by a British legal, administrative, and commercial infrastructure designed to promote free trade and access to the world economy. Thousands of business establishments in Hong

Kong, calling themselves letter offices (*xinju*), banks (*yinhao*), Golden Mountain Firms (*jinchanzhuang*), and companies (*gongsi*), specialized in the movement of goods, people, and money between China and locations around the world. Many of them maintained exclusive connections with stores and banks in China and abroad, sometimes as administratively integrated branches, but usually through less formalized connections involving kinship and village ties. Some of these businesses were financed as small partnerships and others by capital from larger companies, surname associations, and lineages both abroad and in China. Lineages in the villages and migrant associations abroad rarely took direct responsibility for their management, but the overlap in official personnel and funds could be significant.⁴⁵

Perhaps the most competitive and profitable service provided through these businesses was the movement of people. All aspects of migration were commoditized: steamer tickets, false identities, access to consuls and visas, successful medical exams, citizenships, human smuggling opportunities, and witnesses who could claim to be a migrant's mother or to have known him when he was a babe in arms. Migrants in the United States often claimed that anybody with enough money to give judges, lawyers, smugglers, and interpreters could eventually manage to get around the exclusion laws.⁴⁶ Many Hong Kong businesses had employees and associates in local consular offices who helped expedite customs and migration formalities.⁴⁷ These connections with officials and information about changing immigration procedures and border security were easily translatable into cash or favors and jealously guarded against competitors. For migrants who could not afford the fees, bribes, and surcharges attached to these requirements, the firms in Hong Kong would also provide credit. Larger firms even provided dormitories and waiting rooms. These businesses also served as links to employment opportunities abroad, which both assisted the migrants and helped the lenders to keep an eye on their investments. Thus, a well-integrated, transnational business network could simultaneously stake a claim in the lucrative migrant traffic, block access by competitors, and assure that their affiliated interests overseas would never lack for manpower and goods. Western companies that operated, chartered, and provisioned ships also shared in the profits of continued migration.⁴⁸ These services were essential to the maintenance of geographically extensive migrant networks that could persist for decades and over generations. Without the services offered by businesses and associations in Hong Kong and the treaty ports, migration would rarely have been feasible or lucrative as a survival strategy for a household. At the same

time, movement itself became a self-perpetuating source of profit, and an interest to be defended, above and beyond any other benefits that might be gained from migration.

Transnational Institutions

In Chinese migrant communities around the world, these networks were institutionalized as sworn brotherhoods, mercantile companies, and surname and native place associations. These associations called upon a variety of symbols, such as ritual oaths and bonds of kinship based on distant or mythical ancestors, to legitimize themselves and create lines of trust and control among their members. In turn, the very institutionalization of these symbols reinforced their significance as concrete concerns shaping the lives and culture of migrants.

In their smallest and least formalized manifestation, overseas organizations were gatherings of men from the same village and lineage in China who came together out of a sense of friendship, familiarity, and mutual responsibility that had been strengthened in the context of shared experiences abroad. These gatherings were often associated with a store or a couple of rented rooms, providing a place to stay during visits and hard times, remittance and letter-writing services, supplies needed by members in their work and daily life, and a chance for gossip and socializing. The members might look out for each other by sending a man to check up on a fellow who had not come to town for several weeks from his distant workplace or to fill in for a migrant who was unable to attend to his work. They also created an atmosphere of peer pressure and ostracism for members who patronized another store or did not live up to their financial or moral responsibilities.⁴⁹

Village, district, and surname associations were more formalized institutions, with officers, a charter, and, if possible, a meeting hall and altar. Many such associations developed out of smaller gatherings, whereas others were incorporated from scratch, often with the support of wealthier migrants whose interests they supported. The functions of these institutions varied but could include the usual mutual aid and mediating services, acting as vehicles of formal representation in the face of the larger migrant and non-migrant communities, coordinating fund-raising for charitable projects like hospitals or passage to China for indigent migrants, providing constituencies for socially ambitious individuals, and creating platforms to facilitate the organization of labor and credit networks. The most powerful institutions could even establish and enforce business regulations. The authority of these institutions often extended

back to China, where they could be called upon to mediate and intervene in village affairs.

Although the bonds of kin and native place were appealed to in creating these associations, larger associations extended membership to people who would have been strangers in China. In the end, migrant demographics and local political interests tended to shape the scope of membership more than alleged ties of common sentiment. Many associations even found ways to expand beyond a single surname, such as the Longgang Associations, which have appeared around the world as an alliance of the Guan, Liu, Zhang, and Zhao families, based on the oath of the Peach Garden sworn by four characters of the same names in a popular novel, *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. Similarly, the geographic divisions that defined native place associations were extremely flexible. The native place associations (often called *huiguan*) of nineteenth-century San Francisco were notorious for fighting, dividing, and fusing due to struggles between families, cliques, and classes. In 1862, the Deng and Hu families of Kaiping and Enping counties seceded from the Siyi *huiguan* to form the Hehe *huiguan*. Later, the numerically preponderant residents of Taishan county also broke off from the Siyi *huiguan* to form the Ningyang *huiguan*, except for the Yu family from Taishan, which joined the Hehe. By 1905 almost all the members of the Hehe *huiguan* were either Yus from Taishan or Wangs from Kaiping.⁵⁰

Smaller village and surname associations often incorporated themselves as subdivisions of larger associations, which then became excellent sites for the mediation of disputes between members of different smaller organizations.⁵¹ Many migrant communities produced a representative umbrella organization, often called a *zhonghua huiguan*, or Consolidated Chinese Benevolent Association (CCBA). Sometimes they were organized under the influence of Chinese diplomatic officials and performed many of the functions of a consulate. In situations where local government objected to the political organization of local Chinese, such associations were formed under the auspices of a hospital, school, or other charitable organization, such as the Tung Wah Hospital in Hong Kong. After 1906, the Chinese government encouraged the creation of Chambers of Commerce, some of which competed or collaborated with CCBA's to become central nodes of migrant communities. In all cases, these organizations presented themselves as forums for the resolution of major conflicts and as institutions which could represent the entire migrant community in the face of non-Chinese society. Membership usually had some pretensions to encompassing a cross section of the local migrant community, either through a formal system of representation by native place and other

powerful organizations or through inclusion on an individual basis of men widely recognized to be at the nodes of important social networks.

Migrant organizations have also been created around a large variety of other pretexts, including sworn brotherhoods, political parties, chambers of commerce, cemetery societies, religious groups, civic organizations, labor organizations, guilds, and literary clubs, some of which are discussed in more detail in chapter 4. Taken as a whole, they were the fabric within which migrant social life took place. In Paul Siu's work, the man without an association was the most isolated of men, and men who belonged to small associations were men without access to power.

These associations have often been depicted from nation-based perspectives either as mutual aid organizations that eased the transition into a new society, or as conservative associations concerned with the maintenance of traditional ways. In practice, these associations played both of these roles and more. They were also the means by which migration became a transnational field of activity.⁵² Locally, they made up the structure through which migrants could make business connections, have business deals guaranteed, give and receive favors, and build prestige. In China, they were institutions through which migrants could protect their families, contribute to their villages, and build their status within the village. They were also the vehicles through which funds could be raised to move families to Canton or Hong Kong when bandits threatened, to establish schools, build walls around villages, raise militia, establish village industries and commercial monopolies, rebuild ancestral halls, and re-edit genealogies. At the county level, they could work with or put pressure on local home-county governments; their activities ranged from getting local authorities to help chase down and prosecute embezzling business partners who had fled back to China to sponsoring candidates for election to local assemblies. Beyond the county, they were the infrastructure by which funds were solicited for reformist and revolutionary parties, disaster relief in China and abroad, the war against Japan, public works projects, rural reconstruction projects, and charities.⁵³

Hsiao Teh-seng's Correspondence

The correspondence of Hsiao Teh-seng is an excellent illustration of how networks could shape the life of an individual migrant. Hsiao arrived in Chicago in the summer of 1921, leaving a wife, two daughters, and a son in China. His younger brother, Teh-him, was already in Minneapolis, and many other relatives resided in the Midwest, Mexico, and Cuba.⁵⁴ Most of

Hsiao Teh-seng's written correspondence, however, was with his elder brother, Hsiao Teh-sin, who had lived in America previously and returned to China. Within weeks after Teh-seng's arrival in America, Teh-sin was already asking him to take care of some financial matters he had left unresolved there, including the collection of an unpaid debt from one cousin, with which he would repay money owed to another. Teh-sin also had opinions about how Teh-seng should take care of his own affairs. Referring to information provided by Teh-him about laundries for sale by clansmen who were returning to China, Teh-sin wrote, "You wanted to buy Uncle Sai-kai's business. I heard this business is pretty good; it consists of all kinds of machines. In Teh-gun's place, there is only one washing tub. You have to do it by hand with the rest. Upon reading this letter, please buy Sai-kai's business instead."⁵⁵ In the same letter, Teh-sin also asked that Teh-seng urge their kin in Chicago to buy stocks in the local newspaper in China, promising to list contributors' names prominently in its pages. His letters also referred frequently to money needed to edit the clan genealogy and have it printed up "Western-fashion."

Teh-sin did not expect only handouts and donations. By November he was urging Teh-seng to invest in a scheme he had worked up to manufacture hosiery out of imported material and to send some cloth samples. When soliciting investments, he appealed not only to pecuniary interests but also to honor and intelligence, writing of an aunt who had invested some of her remittance money that "she is a he-man-woman. To compare her with those foolish 'Golden Mountain Men' who only buy land in the village, she has far more brains indeed."⁵⁶ He said the factory would be an excellent occupation for village women who were then engaged in the rather unprofitable activity of making uniforms for a local army in Canton.

The variety of needs for money in China seemed endless. In late November, Teh-sin's concubine had been kidnapped by bandits, and he needed \$20,000 for ransom.⁵⁷ In December he wrote about the need for money to purchase a clan house in Canton, as the young clan members studying there had no place to stay during their vacations. "We are indeed losing face. . . . Please do not regard this as an unimportant thing."⁵⁸ Cousin Tah-wo wanted to purchase a son, and Teh-sin said it could easily be arranged if Teh-seng sent two hundred dollars. He also complained that money sent back to the family had all been taken by "Wu's mother," and he hoped that next time Teh-seng could send the money directly to him. In the summer of 1922, bandits attacked the village, and most of the families moved to Hong Kong. Teh-sin urged Teh-seng to round up contributions from the other kinsmen in Chicago, Minneapolis, and Duluth to

build a wall around the village. "The village's life and death is depending on you. Take note of this."⁵⁹ In August, he pressured Teh-seng to get the kinsmen to invest in a cement factory in which he had an interest.

Teh-seng and the other relatives in America had a hard time keeping up with the demands. By the end of 1922, Teh-sin wondered when the money would arrive: "I wrote to you, but you seem to pay little attention to me."⁶⁰ Although Teh-seng was an official in the Hsiao surname association in Chicago, he found it difficult to milk contributions from the members, particularly those from other villages. They delayed in the contributions to the Canton clan house by demanding that the contribution books be sent to Chicago to make sure that their donations were recorded properly. The clansmen in Duluth justified their delays in contributing by accusing the Chicago kinsmen of delaying even more. Teh-seng blamed this situation of mistrust and evasion on "some of the low-down, undisciplined individuals in our clan."⁶¹ By 1924, clan members in China, the United States, and Australia were making direct accusations of inappropriate use of village funds which had been sent back. They blamed Teh-sin for not making sufficient monetary efforts to get cousin Ying Sheung out of jail, saying he had spent the money collected for this purpose on his own household. In Chicago, the blame fell on Teh-seng's head, because, in addition to being Teh-sin's brother, he had also been responsible for soliciting and transmitting the money.

At the same time, relatives in China were asking Teh-seng to extend his moral influence over their family members in Chicago; one man asked Teh-seng to convince his older brother not to waste all of his money on aviation school. Other family members down on their luck in the Midwest asked for assistance in paying back their debts. Teh-seng's youngest daughter had no trust in the self-control of her new husband, who had emigrated to Chicago but had not written back for four years. She asked Teh-seng to watch over him, writing, "Please do not have the idea that he is only your half son and so you do not have to bother about him. Please tell me something about what he is doing."⁶² Teh-seng's nephew asked for help in his plan to migrate to America to learn English, writing that, "I am sorry to say that I, your nephew, am one who has no special ability, and cannot be expected to accomplish anything great, . . . but my ambition is still big." He thought that America would offer not only a chance to realize his ambitions but also to wash away the "humiliation of an embezzling uncle."⁶³ On his part, the embezzling uncle Teh-sin was also looking to Teh-seng to help relieve his humiliation, requesting that one thousand dollars be sent to cover the equivalent that cousin Teh-him (not their younger brother) had entrusted him to transmit to another cousin,

but which he had used for his own purposes instead. Teh-sin was quite indignant at being criticized for his treatment of Teh-him, writing that "it was I who looked after his brother and siblings [while he was in America]. I bought a nephew for him. . . . I now cut off my brotherly sentiment with that son of a bitch forever."⁶⁴

Teh-seng's wife and children were of little help in easing the pressure. They sent frequent requests for money to help with household expenses and provide gifts for relatives getting married. His older daughter wanted a gold watch, complaining that "big uncle's daughters have gold watches, but we do not. . . . My venerable one [her father] can use his own judgment whether jade should be inlaid or not."⁶⁵ His wife was particularly unsympathetic to Teh-seng's predicaments and had her own opinions about what he should be doing with his money: "Month after month, I was longing for your money, but all you sent were plain letters."⁶⁶ She also complained that his contribution of five hundred dollars to the Canton clan house was much larger than the two hundred dollars contributed by "one wealthy man" in the village: "I am so poor now, I have to pawn things in order to have money to buy food, while you go donating money, trying to wear your high hat."⁶⁷

She was even more critical of Teh-sin and his influence over the family, writing, "I do not want to take care of your home any more. Even though you are a slave to them, none of your brothers love you. Why should you have pity on your brothers? . . . Do not listen to his business propositions unless I have words agreeable to it. . . . You think I am happy here, but I am not. No matter how hard I please you, you do not seem to pay any attention to what I say."⁶⁸ Teh-seng replied in defense of his brother, and his wife claimed it caused her to fall ill for a month. She later wrote, "You said your brother and sister are dear to you. When I got sick, who ever gave me sympathy? Who ever showed their kindness by bringing me water and tea? When water is clean, the stones underneath are shown: In the course of time a person's heart reveals its kindness or evil. But you do not heed me. You just write and say this and that and make a crazy woman out of me."⁶⁹ The brothers were concerned that the frequent quarrels between their wives were losing face for the family.

The correspondence saved by Teh-seng declines between 1924 and 1930. When the Depression began to affect his earning ability, many letters from home berated him for not sending enough money, for not writing enough, and for avoiding responsibility. One cousin accused him of being devious and irresponsible: "You should be able to come home, but why do you have a new address instead?" As that tactic did not result in remittances coming his way, he later turned to pathos: "I have no right

to kill myself until I pay my debts. Life is tough."⁷⁰ The bandit problems in the village had died down, and many relatives were asking for money to move back and make up taxes they had left unpaid. Other relatives wanted money to open a rice store in Hong Kong. In Chicago, the local Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association had moved to a new address, and the Hsiao surname association had to scrape up money to present it with a suitable gift. Teh-seng's own house in the village was infested with termites, and his wife demanded he send money to take care of that. Her dissatisfaction ran far deeper, though: "There is a Lou-fal monastery near Canton; let me go there and become a nun, and let your brothers take care of the children. I am not your lifelong partner. Please think it over; when you are old in the future, are you going to depend on your children or depend on your brothers? I pray you send me two hundred dollars so that I can have money to spend in the monastery. Now, I do not care how hard you work in America; I have no more pity on you."⁷¹ Teh-seng's own needs turned out to be irrelevant in the long run, as he died within a year after receiving this letter.

Teh-seng's correspondence gives a sense of the extent to which his day-to-day concerns were still framed by the bonds and social pressures of relatives at home, throughout the Midwest, and even as far away as Australia. In essence, the village had extended beyond its territorial boundaries to people scattered around the world. Teh-seng was expected to be active in providing for the security and prestige of his family and village—in the form of money for walls, genealogies, taxes, ransoms, clan houses, luxuries, business investments, and education—as well as to provide advice and pressure to kinsmen in Chicago. His own movement abroad was integral to supporting smaller migrations of kinsmen to Canton and Hong Kong. Native place and family associations gave social form to peer pressure, obligations, struggles for status, and his own feelings of shame and personal ambition. These pressures could be resisted and negotiated, but were inescapable as part of the fabric of migrant life. Yet Teh-seng's place in this fabric was not the same as if he had remained at home. The quality of his bonds and the level of respect he earned were increasingly dependent solely upon his ability to accumulate and judiciously distribute money. He continued to be linked to his village despite migration, but migration had also changed the nature of those links.

Migrant Grooves

From a global perspective, we can imagine these migrant networks as a collection of rays emanating from hubs in Hong Kong and other South

China treaty ports, spreading out in one direction to South China villages and in the other to different locations around the world, further branching out from secondary nodes like San Francisco and Singapore. For most migrants, these rays were isolated grooves, stretching from their villages, past the various nodes, and on to migrant communities where they worked. They were the institutionalization of the precedents and assistance of relatives and fellow villagers who had migrated before them and made further migration possible. They shaped the view from emigrant villages in such a way that social distance was not congruent with geographic distance. In the eyes of a villager, distant Jamaica may have seemed easier to travel to and more familiar than the local county town. Nearly all of the Chinese in Jamaica before the 1980s came from five villages located at the border of three counties between Hong Kong and Canton, an area that has produced few migrants to any other location in the world. The original 640 migrants had been recruited as contract laborers to Jamaica in 1884, setting in motion a chain of migration that has continued to this day. Moreover, for years after the opening of the Panama Canal, migrants to Jamaica still followed an exhausting and costly route by boat to Vancouver, by train to Nova Scotia (on which they had to pay high Canadian passage taxes), and finally by boat to Jamaica.⁷² This underlines the extent to which networks could crystallize into inflexible, self-reproducing grooves. The economic choices open to a migrant were limited by the precedents of previous migrants, the skills and connections they could transmit to him, and the boundaries of occupations conceded as "suitable" for Chinese by the non-Chinese society in which they lived.

Only a few elites were able to travel freely across these grooves. These elites also dominated the interaction between networks, channeling them through the dense institutional complexes that were the fabric of Chinese communities in migrant nodes such as Hong Kong and Chinatowns throughout the world. Credit, along with the institutions and symbols mobilized to protect and distribute credit, was crucial as a medium binding networks internally and necessitating cooperation between networks. Credit and debt were the bonds by which Chinese could mobilize and exploit labor, and provided the opportunities for individuals to obtain the capital to migrate and to establish small stores, distribution networks, and middleman occupations. The ability to guarantee and protect such exchanges lay in the cohesiveness of particular networks, which was facilitated by the formation of associations that could institutionalize the maintenance of trust and solidarity. Successful institutions were, in turn, made stronger by elites with access to connections and resources outside the network that could be mobilized to help guarantee internal transac-

tions. In turn, power and wealth became focused on the individuals and institutions who could dominate and control such access. The frequent incidents of conflict and competition within and between migrant associations emphasize the extent to which they were locked together in the pursuit of common goals.⁷³

These networks were often subversive to nation-states. They undermined immigration laws and other barriers against mobility designed to preserve territorial and cultural integrity. They introduced residents who might have no interest in loyalty and integration into the locale. Yet diasporic networks were also shaped by and even dependent upon nation-states. The small concentrations of Chinese in border regions like El Paso, Texas, and the desert of northern Chile on the Peruvian border draw attention both to these borders and to the profits that could be made by carrying people across them. The knowledge, connections, and ability required to transport goods and people past immigration and customs proceedings, both legally and illegally, were an immense source of power. The elites who could dominate these crossings had privileged access to goods and labor. They thus had an interest both in promoting the continued transgression of these boundaries and in confining interaction with non-Chinese to channels that they dominated.

These grooves were a transnationalism made possible through parochialism: local specialization in international movement. The meaning of "local" changed, however, as territory was replaced by transnational social bonds and institutions as the bases of parochialism.⁷⁴ At the same time, these grooves were inseparable from the expanding global economy and channels of trade, communication, and transportation established by non-Chinese. The picture that emerges is not a monodirectional one of global forces shaping local history, but of the most particular and localized bonds of family and village making up the very fabric of global movement.

DIASPORIC NATIONALISM

By the turn of the century, many of the Chinese who crossed national borders had also begun to reconceptualize their understandings of home, culture, loyalty, and self within the terms set by those nations and borders. The global politics that privileged members of strong and territorially sovereign states were increasingly obvious to many Chinese over the first half of the twentieth century. Home was no longer just a village where the family altar was located, a central node in a chain of relationships. It was part of a much larger entity, a motherland, which included strangers

who spoke unintelligible dialects and yet, if nationalist propaganda were to be believed, were inalienably linked to each other by virtue of race, culture, history, and affection. Moreover, they increasingly understood their own status as tightly linked to the status of China as a strong and territorially sovereign state. These transformations in personal and communal self-perceptions were not necessarily the direct result of encounters between Chinese migrants and the people among whom they lived; they arose as well from engagement with ideas and sentiments carried abroad by intellectuals and officials from China who were sensitive to wider global power relations and conceptions of peoplehood.

Officials, Reformers, and Revolutionaries

By the 1870s, representatives of the Qing empire were less likely to condemn emigrants as "traitors" and more likely to move across diasporic networks to establish links between migrants and the imperial government. Their early motivation (often prompted by international attention to the plight of contract laborers) was to bolster the prestige of the empire by establishing diplomatic representation and extending official protection to the migrants, and they were actively involved in the organization of *zhonghua huiguan* throughout the world in the 1880s. By the late 1890s, they increasingly saw overseas Chinese as a fruitful source of financial contributions and loyalty, obtainable in return for a few symbols of official recognition and opportunities to invest in modernizing projects in China. At the turn of the century, reformer and revolutionary nationalist organizers, many of whom had been exiled from China, joined these activities in a more concentrated and aggressive manner. They were both more diligent in searching for wide bases of contributions and support and more generous in their distribution and promises of recognition.⁷⁵

The first nationalist movement from China to gain a widespread following among migrants was the Emperor Protection Association. It was founded on 20 July 1899 in Victoria, Canada, by the exiled Cantonese scholars Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao.⁷⁶ It preached the establishment of a constitutional monarchy built on the symbols of empire and Chinese culture (its name derived from a belief that the emperor supported reform but was prohibited from acting on his convictions by the Empress Dowager and other court officials). The refined scholarly demeanor of Kang along with the engaging speeches and journalism of Liang appealed strongly to many migrants. Through the use and distribution of the symbols of empire, such as official clothes and medals, in return for generous contributions, the reformers appealed to the merchant-gentry aspirations

of the migrant elite while orienting them toward visions of a modernized and internationally respected homeland.

The interests of reformers and migrants converged in many respects. Joining the association was a chance for migrants to simultaneously promote their own prestige as politically active individuals and the prestige of China as an internationally respected nation. On their side, the reformers hoped to harness previously established migrant networks and the entrepreneurial skills of the migrants to their own fund-raising and organizational ambitions. In 1902, they created the Commercial Corporation, which owned banks, restaurants, hotels, mines, and rice brokerages in the United States, Canada, Mexico, Panama, Southeast Asia, and Shanghai. They funded land reclamation projects in Manchuria, Argentina, and Brazil and made deals with the president of Mexico to establish public streetcar lines and housing projects. The profits were to be used to further the cause of the reformers, particularly in their publishing endeavors, although individual investors were promised dividends.⁷⁷

Not all nationalist visions emanated from China. Some Chinese born in Southeast Asia were also interested in recovering Confucianism as a respectable national heritage. The earliest of such projects included late-nineteenth-century attempts by *peranakan* (a Malay-speaking Chinese minority that had lived in Java for several generations) elites to promote the founding of ancestral halls and reverse the trend of *peranakans* being seduced by the superstitions of Islam. This movement was eventually institutionalized in the Tionghua Huikuan (Zhonghua Huiguan) established in 1900 with an agenda of promoting education, reforming rituals, and "furthering knowledge and correctness among the Chinese in order that people might not remain ignorant or in an inferior position."⁷⁸ Later it also promoted the translation of Chinese classics into Malay, helped establish Confucian churches to compete with Christian churches and Islamic mosques, and provided scholarships for young Chinese to study in Europe or China.

In their desire to revive and reform Chinese culture in order to earn respect from non-Chinese, these overseas reform movements had much in common with the agenda of the Emperor Protection Association. A divergence of their perspectives can be seen clearly in the example of Lim Boon Keng, a Straits-born Chinese, trained as a physician in Britain. In 1898 he and Singapore lawyer Song Ong Siang established a Confucian Study Society to promote a deeper understanding of Chinese religion and reform the "superstitious" practices of local Chinese. In 1900, he also helped establish the Straits Chinese British Association "to promote among the members an intelligent interest in the affairs of the British Empire, and to

encourage and maintain their loyalty as subjects of the Queen."⁷⁹ However contradictory these two projects may seem, taken together they draw from a tradition of Chinese migrant elites in Southeast Asia as cultural and economic mediators and extend it to a conviction that acceptance by local Europeans depended on widespread recognition of China as a civilized and deeply rooted culture, capable of its own transformation into nationhood and of producing its own exemplars of modern cosmopolitanism. It was a nationalism not predicated on political loyalty to China.

After 1902, the Qing government began its own program of reforms in China. Some of the most significant changes in China included the abolition of the imperial exam system and, in 1907, the establishment of provincial councils and self-government organizations. Overseas, migrants were encouraged to establish officially recognized Chambers of Commerce, and officials became more aggressive in their overseas missions and fund-raising. Ironically, the increased recognition made migrants increasingly cynical and frustrated at the weakness of the government. Medals and clothing were no longer seen as sufficient compensation for increasingly frequent contributions to officials who remained unwilling or unable to serve the practical interests of the migrants. On the other hand, the aims of the government and the Emperor Protection Association began to converge, and reformers who had once been hunted down as traitors began to collaborate with progressive officials. By 1908, the reformers—who had changed their name to the Constitutional Party (*xianzhengdang*) after the death of Emperor Guangxu—had clearly become part of the migrant establishment, with prominent overseas merchants as officers, and the Commercial Corporation was engulfed by the profit orientation, corruption, and petty jealousies that plagued so many other overseas institutions.

With the increasing conservatism and corruption of the Emperor Protection Association, many of its more activist and idealistic followers became disillusioned, and some transferred their loyalties to Sun Yat-sen and his revolutionary ideals. Since his establishment of the Xingzhonghui in Hawaii in 1894, Sun had been constantly traveling around the world in search of money to support his uprisings, although with much less success than the reformers. In general, he was less able than the reformers to appeal to the desires and imaginations of the influential migrants, and his emphasis on anti-Manchu race consciousness and the solicitation of contributions was often at the expense of practical organizational work. As a Christian, educated in Hawaii and Hong Kong, preaching a Western-style republic with almost none of the trappings of the imperial regime, his message appealed mostly to young Christians and radical students. With the exception of Japan—where radical students invited Sun to be president

of the Tongmenghui (Revolutionary Alliance) in 1905—and a few newspapers, Sun left few organizational legacies after he moved on and the glow of his charisma faded.⁸⁰

In 1910, Sun established a few Tongmenghui branches in the United States. His fund-raising tour through the United States in the first part of 1911 was one of the most successful of his career. His usual following of Christians and occasional sworn brotherhoods was greatly augmented by migrants disgusted with the commercialism and conservatism of the reformers and by others who turned to Sun primarily as a way to secure resources against local competitors for wealth and prestige who happened to be prominent Constitutional Party members. While Sun was engaged in his fund-raising, the revolution of 1911 took place in China without his participation. Although he was chosen as provisional president in 1912, he handed power over to military strongman Yuan Shikai in less than two months. His followers maintained power in Guangdong until 1914, but the wave of support for him overseas died out quickly, and few migrants supported his “second revolution” against Yuan in 1913.

Nationalism Abroad

Clarence Glick wrote as follows of Chinese participation in fund-raising causes in Hawaii in the 1930s: “A migrant who gave a large donation for famine relief in China might have been responding to three concerns simultaneously: compassion for the plight of the *tung bau* [fellow Chinese] with whom he had come to feel a nationalistic identity; desire to gain face with his fellow *wah kiu* [overseas Chinese] in Hawaii; and interest in demonstrating to the non-Chinese in Hawaii that Chinese were philanthropic and humanitarian as well as commercially oriented.”⁸¹ This observation captures well the way in which nationalism had become intricately woven into other migrant concerns. Although few migrants before the late 1930s developed the total commitment to Chinese nationalism that nationalist agitators had hoped for, its vocabulary easily intertwined with other ties that migrants had to their homes; with the drives by associations and individuals for status, wealth, and ways to display it; and with strategies to gain recognition from non-Chinese.

Overseas Chinese have often been considered the hearth of the Chinese revolution, but their reputation was earned more by default than intention. The spread of nationalist organizations and the internalization of nationalist values among Chinese migrants was a constantly negotiated process. Whereas many aspects of reform and revolution certainly

appealed to the ambitions and needs of migrants—for example, by promoting commercial and industrial activity—they also came into conflict with many of the migrants’ organizational and personal goals. This conflict is evident in the debate over the name for the first branch of the Emperor Protection Association in Victoria. Kang Youwei wanted to call it the Progressive Association (Zhonggou Weixinhui), with Save the Nation Association (Jiuguohui) as a secondary name. The merchant members, uncomfortable with the potential of this secondary name to annoy imperial officials, preferred the Commerce Protection Association (Baoshanghui) as a secondary name. The Emperor Protection Association (Baohuanghui) was a compromise.⁸² A similar manifestation of commercial influence on nationalism could be seen in Ou Qujia’s 1902 pamphlet *New Guangdong*, which couched a call for Cantonese independence in a mercantile metaphor of the nation as a corporation and its citizens as stockholders.⁸³

In the early years, some Chinese nationalist visions expanded to the scale of pan-Asian solidarity, a coming global “Great Unity,” or descriptions of Chinese overseas migrants as colonizers. Others shrank to the scale of Cantonese independence.⁸⁴ By 1908, nationalist orthodoxy had settled comfortably within the borders of the Qing empire as the public focus of loyalty, and many of the more transcultural and transregional versions of nationalism began to lose steam. Bicultural migrant elites had once been undisputed leaders of migrant society, accepting Chinese and non-Chinese titles and distinctions without any sense of contradiction and taking it upon themselves to lead nationalist and cultural revival movements.⁸⁵ By 1912, their very cosmopolitanism had become a cause for suspicion among ardent nationalists, as shown by a poster that appeared in Batavia: “Of what nationality is the Majoor [a Chinese official appointed by the Dutch]? Answer: Chinese and still not Chinese; native and still not native; in reality [he is] of mixed race! This bastard cannot return to China and cannot be named a European. He has no land to return to—only the Land of the Hereafter.”⁸⁶

This first great flurry of nationalistic enthusiasm had run its course by 1913 as the promise of the revolution faded. The general instability and cynicism surrounding Chinese politics over the next fifteen years meant that political parties remained small and uninfluential among migrants. But the schools, newspapers, fund-raising experience, and ideas created by nationalist organizers were still widely utilized, and ideologically devoted followers (many of them too young to have participated in pre-1911 mobilization) remained tireless in the zealous production of nationalist propaganda. Chambers of Commerce still sought recognition

from various republican governments, and a stream of generals and intellectuals that represented or opposed one Chinese government or another still traveled through Chinese communities throughout the world, giving speeches, writing articles, and collecting money with great fanfare and solemnity.

The conquest of China by the Guomindang (Nationalist Party) in 1927 led to greatly increased membership abroad. This also led to greatly increased factionalism at first, but party politics quickly lost the revolutionary stridency of its pre-1927 youthful membership as anti-Chiang Kai-shek factions within the party were silenced and purged. In the 1930s, the Guomindang devoted much effort to forging links with migrant merchants, actively supporting migrant schools and newspapers in return for loyalty and war contributions. Many migrants gratefully felt that their own status abroad rose along with Guomindang successes in foreign diplomacy. Migrants and party also willingly collaborated in rewriting history as the progressive triumph of revolutionary sentiment under the unfaltering leadership of Sun Yat-sen. Patriotic mobilization reached a zenith during the anti-Japanese war from 1931 to 1945, when almost all behavior was justified by a rhetoric of patriotism, and every public event was a collection movement.⁸⁷ Scattered accounts suggest, however, that even then many migrants resented the constant demands on their time and money and the regulations that routinely extracted their contributions, and they considered the most active fund-raisers to be hypocritical promoters of their own personal power.⁸⁸

Whether the nationalistic sentiments of migrant leaders were genuine or instrumental, they all benefited from the nationalist vocabulary of identity and ambition that could enhance rather than replace concerns for home village, prestige, and economic profit. Belonging to migrant associations began to imply more than mere embeddedness in particularistic networks. Interest in native place and family came to be seen as precisely the kind of basic affection that defined Chinese as Chinese, while the history of sworn brotherhood associations was retold as a story of persevering, anti-Manchu activism. Such sentiments often helped to revive faltering organizations and to bring more prestige to strong ones, and they contributed to an increase of native place and surname organizations around the world after the turn of the century.⁸⁹ The stated goals of most migrant organizations have always affirmed a commitment to the common welfare of the members, but a general change in emphasis occurred during the early twentieth century. In the nineteenth century, the care of the dead, mutual aid, and the organization of employment were of paramount importance to most associations. After the turn of the

century, commitments to education and development in the home village and to the political fate of China became common themes.

Subnationalisms

The vocabulary of nationalism could also be appropriated for the definition of smaller groups. In 1921, Hakka associations around the world attempted to link up as branches of a single, global Chongzheng Association. These associations promoted and distributed histories of the Hakkas that were framed as a history of successive migrations, using the tropes of nationalism to construct a diasporic ethnicity. They did not see this commitment to a Hakka identity and organization as separatism but as an expression of the bonds which the Hakkas felt constituted them as exemplary Chinese (although some Hakkas denounced the Chongzheng as a form of parochialism contrary to the goals of nationalism).⁹⁰ Many surname and native place associations attempted to form similar networks after the late 1920s.⁹¹ Similarly, in the 1920s, several sworn brotherhoods around the world linked themselves up as an international Zhigong Party, demanding political recognition in China.⁹²

Nationalist activities helped create a sense of common identity, but that identity could simultaneously fragment into new and hostile ones shaped by class, occupation, and education. Nationalism created a space where migrants from South China were most likely to come into contact with students, businessmen, and diplomats from other parts of China for the first time. These interactions often transformed mutual ignorance into mutual suspicion and distaste as they learned that their varying interests in China and Chineseness were not always compatible. Students and diplomats complained that the nationalist commitment of merchants and laborers was diluted by devotion to profit, parochialism, and petty jealousies. Migrants from South China resented the arrogance of students and officials, and were extremely critical of those who appeared to be quite devoted to reform while abroad, yet used the status of returned migrant in China to join the world of corruption, dominance, and arrogance they had once opposed.⁹³ Neither side was willing to conform to the other's vision of what modern Chineseness should encompass.

The most significant success of nationalism among migrants was the redefinition of China as part of a world divided into a patchwork of competing units, each defined by a bounded confluence of culture, race, territory, and state. The imperial institutions of Beijing were no longer a human-cultural nexus where cosmic and moral order were maintained but just one more administrative apparatus among many throughout the

world and one that desperately needed reforming. Chinese culture was no longer the universal way of being human, but just one national heritage among many. Along with this reconceptualization of China grew the conviction that the experience and status of Chinese abroad was a direct result of the status of China within the international system. If Chinese people were bullied locally, that was because China received no respect internationally. To be Chinese, anywhere in the world, was to be a representative of the motherland, to have a stake in the future of China, and to recognize the claims of China and Chinese culture over one's loyalty. Interestingly, when Chinese were most concerned with asserting their sovereignty and territorial rights, they came closest to conforming to a more traditional understanding of diaspora as a cultural entity scattered across the globe and yet linked by culture and yearnings for the homeland—a reminder that diaspora as a self-conscious identity grew along with the rise of nation-states rather than emerging in opposition to them.

ETHNICIZATION

As increasingly hard lines of identification were erected around ideas of race, culture, and political sovereignty in the early twentieth century, behavior that appeared to express hybridity or divided loyalties became increasingly suspicious and untenable. Public choices had to be made. For most migrants, the choice to identify with China and diasporic nationalism was easy. Nonetheless, a slowly growing number of migrants chose to identify with the land where they lived, choosing to become American, Filipino, or Thai, for example. In other words, they were reorienting themselves as local ethnic minorities. This was especially true among Chinese who were born outside of China, but over the early twentieth century, growing numbers of Chinese began to cut themselves off from transnational networks, relocate entire families abroad, and identify as residents and citizens of new lands.

Such identifications tended to be extremely difficult. Regardless of his sincerity, an individual was likely to encounter racial and nationalist sentiments which made any attempts to take part in local institutions or to be accepted as a fellow national difficult, if not impossible. Such exclusions were exacerbated by physical differences, claims over migrant loyalty from China, and policies of colonial regimes and native rulers that separated Chinese into a special mercantile class or dehumanized them as alien laborers. Becoming accepted as an ethnic group—if even that was possible—was sometimes a compromise that fell short of the desired goal of complete assimilation.

Foreign-born Chinese often found themselves in a doubly difficult situation, because many migrants also indulged in a variety of prejudices against children, especially girls, who had been educated in non-Chinese schools and had adopted local ways. They were known as "brainless" (*monao*) and as "bamboo segments" (*zhusheng*), that is, hard on the outside but hollow beneath the surface.⁹⁴ They were criticized for not sufficiently respecting their fathers or husbands, and for leading loose, frivolous lives. The rejection and marginalization of hybrid possibilities was increasingly common in the early twentieth century. Among Chinese it was closely associated with the formation of nationalist political identities.

Only after the Second World War, when further migration had been cut off and it became clear that most Chinese migrants around the world were there to stay, did ethnic identities appropriate to pluralist polities begin to be negotiated. These usually emerged in some sort of hybrid formulation such as Chinese American, Filipino of Chinese descent, or *lookjin* (Sino-Thai). Such identities were predicated on the idea that it is possible to be Chinese and still belong to the national community. Many ethnic Chinese consider themselves to be locals, yet still feel they are outsiders because of cultural difference or rejection by the wider society. At other times, citizenship and local identities were assumed almost entirely for the sake of commercial interest, with little change in subjective orientation. At the other extreme, many second- or third-generation migrants rejected China and all things Chinese as representing backwardness and the social awkwardness of parents, and as generative of exoticizing and marginalizing attitudes. The details and subjectivities of these identities were very much a product of generational attitudes, local politics, and state building, drawing on cultural and organizational traits that flourished locally as well as on local histories of struggle and resistance.

Global Aspects of Ethnicity

A national rather than global perspective is most relevant to understanding the emergence of ethnic Chinese. Chinese ethnicity is a space in which the identity and meaning of being Chinese is most strongly formed by local social relations and national ideologies, where Chineseness becomes a heritage, a political status, or merely a physical appearance. Nonetheless, a national perspective is still not sufficient. At the very least, the diasporic networks and economic interests that moved laborers and merchants around the world must also be taken into account to understand the interests that shaped its members into a local community. Moreover, these interests did not always grow irrelevant as locally born Chinese began to

identify themselves more completely as local ethnics. Many young Chinese ethnics, frustrated by the obstacles that blocked their attempts to integrate into local societies, turned toward diasporic nationalism as an alternative, looking back to a China they may have once scorned. Some even physically moved to China, not knowing the language or having any connections there but still hoping to use their education and skills to help "save the nation."

Continued attention to diasporic links also helps us to understand the discourses and practices used by non-Chinese to characterize Chinese minorities. Just as labor migration, migrant networks, and Chinese nationalism were embedded in economic and political relations on a global scale, so local political attitudes were embedded in globally circulating discourses of race and images of Chineseness. One of the most famous examples was the pamphlet *The Jews of the East*, written by King Vajiravudh of Thailand in 1914, in which he applies tropes of the eternally alien Jew, learned during his studies in London, to the Chinese, depicting them as inassimilable outsiders, loyal only to money. Depictions of Chinese as degraded, as parochial sojourners, as a Yellow Peril, or as scheming, insular businessmen—many of which seemed all the more accurate when observers from local perspectives viewed the diasporic activities of Chinese—had wide currency at an international level, which helped legitimize their local application all the more. At the same time, the Chinese themselves could appropriate and redeploy these images as industrious, peaceable businessmen who refrained from political agitation, contributed to local economies, and integrated local nations into global market opportunities.⁹⁵

A comparison of recent ethnic identities with the creole Chinese identities created in earlier centuries can help highlight how ethnic identities are embedded in global historical trends. Peoples such as the *peranakans* of Java, the Babas of Malaysia, and the mestizos of the Philippines were the descendants of intermarriages between Chinese migrants and local women that began several hundred years ago. They spoke (and still speak) various Malay and Chinese creoles, yet were known for maintaining certain aspects of Chinese dress and ritual life that had long been dropped by more recent Chinese migrants.⁹⁶ As with ethnic Chinese, the formation of these creole groups was strongly situated in local political and social relations. Yet the important marker of difference tended to be cultural practice rather than race. That is, a modern ethnic Chinese may, in terms of clothes, language, and habits, be in harmony with the mainstream national culture where he lives and still be marked off as a minor-

ity, whereas a creole may be physically indistinguishable from the surrounding population yet be distinguished through cultural markers. Both *peranakan* and Chinese ethnics still exist as different groups in parts of Southeast Asia today. This distinction arose both because the new waves of migrants that began arriving in the second half of the nineteenth century were not well incorporated into limited *peranakan* networks, and because of the rise of the diasporic nationalism which often disparaged and isolated creolized Chinese as not modern, not truly Chinese, or as running dogs of the imperial powers.

Contemporary ethnicities have not emerged in regional isolation but are entwined with modern global politics. They are also built on the institutions and activities of migrants who maintained transnational networks and links to China. Neither global processes nor the more parochial concerns for village, family, and profit had an abstract existence. Both were manifested through local situations and institutions. Subsequent case studies describe some of those different manifestations.

CULTURAL FLOWS

Cultural threads run through all the networks, institutions, and identities described so far. Culture appeared in one form as the familiar language, symbols, habits, "inscribed" behaviors, and organizational principles given shape in networks, credit practices, and associations. Culture also took the form of imaginative constructions of identity such as those mobilized in nationalism or claims for ethnic identity. When successful, such constructions became aspects of migrant life that were taken for granted.

Cultural forms of organization shaped the actions and horizons of migrants, laying a basis for engagement with unfamiliar people and situations. Chinese migrants were attuned to global economic opportunities and could mobilize social and financial ties into new networks that took advantage of them.⁹⁷ Subsequent chapters describe the variety of ways in which migrant institutions also adapted to changing Chinese politics and to the environments of non-Chinese states and cities. Bonds of trust were established with people who were not Chinese. Cultural adjustments were also made in the context of more abstract global structures. One example was the growing awareness after the late nineteenth century that descent from a common ancestor was no longer sufficient to command political and cultural respect. Citizenship in an internationally respected nation-state had become a minimum requirement for recognition, both within the so-called family of nations and on the part of the local political pow-

ers where migrants resided. This also meant the reformulation of identity in the terms of international discourse, such as race, sovereignty, territory, and an objectified national culture.

At the same time as cultural forms created some level of continuity across migrant flows, those flows also served to fragment and reformulate the significance of the cultural forms. Migrants returning home from the United States impressed their neighbors by wearing gold watches and Western suits (specially ordered from Jewish tailors who were aware of Chinese tastes) that had long gone out of fashion in the United States. Up-to-date clothes that would signify to Americans that the migrant had become integrated into fashion trends would have failed to mark the migrant as a successful and cosmopolitan Gold Mountain Man back in China. Similarly, the houses and schools built by migrants were attempts to display modernization but were filled with a seemingly eclectic variety of objects selected to mark the builders as successful migrants, such as coffee that the occupants (if any) never drank, murals of open-topped sports cars in Hollywood, and swimming pools often used as fish ponds, as well as more familiar Chinese markers of prestige, such as books for families often unable to read them, rice fields at times when commercial investment was much more profitable, and elaborate ritual objects for family and communal worship.⁹⁸

Another example of shifting meaning appears in the "modern" weddings of Chinese in Singapore during the mid-twentieth century, in which couples wore Western clothes and got married by the dozens in mass ceremonies. These ceremonies were inspired more by trends coming out of urban China than by direct contact with the British, but were still directed, at least in part, toward the British as public expressions of the modern unity of the Chinese people, although the British tended to interpret them as a holdover of traditional Eastern communalism.⁹⁹

The process of selection and redefinition meant that the reinforcement of social and cultural boundaries was as likely an outcome of these cultural interchanges as homogenization or the blurring of boundaries. Yet these objects, like coffee and clothes, moved across boundaries in the bags of people, many of whom were surely aware of the discrepancies in their symbolic values. That is to say, meanings were damaged and reconstituted, but the men and women who transported these objects and activities consciously created and happily transgressed these discrepancies. They knew who they wanted to impress and how to impress them. If the mix of objects and activities came across as a murky symbolic chaos, it was only in the eyes of observers who drew unnecessary cultural lines. Global culture was not just a realm of homogenization but a space where

cultural and political distinctions were constantly negotiated. A fedora in Zhongshan or a mass marriage in Singapore was a clear marker of Western culture, but only in the same resituated way that chop suey and fortune cookies were examples of Chinese cuisine in Chicago. Each persisted because it had a particular place in the cultural landscape, and none would have emerged if not for connections and precedents elsewhere in the world.