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INTRODUCTION

The Great Convergence

There the pilgrim on the bridge that, bounding
Life's domain, frontiers the wold of death.

—CHRISTOPH AUGUST TIEDGE

CHEN JINHUA WAS BORN in the Chaozhou region of southeastern China in 1911. His parents cultivated a fruit orchard on 15 *mu* (2.47 acres) of land, which was not a particularly large property—the average farm size in the area was 9.43 *mu*—but local communists reviled his family as "rich." His village comprised about a thousand Chens, but they also had kinfolk overseas who owned businesses in Siam and the British Straits Settlements. Jinhua decided to leave his homeland and join them in 1932. His village was located in the once-thriving commercial district of Puning, which had fallen on hard times after the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1912 and the eruption of communist insurgencies and Nationalist counterinsurgencies in the 1920s. A communist base had been established in mountains nearby, and comfortable farm families like the Chens were constantly harassed. "This is why I went to Siam, because of this situation," he recalled years later in an interview:

> There was nothing you could do. Because of this, our large household of twenty or thirty people all escaped. There was no way we could stay. Our family could not live in peace and enjoy our work. We lived in suspense the entire day. We were terrified the Nationalist army would come, and we were terrified that the communist army would come. If the communists came, even if you had no money, they would say "you're rich" and take it, whatever the amount. Otherwise they would detain you. . . . And if the Nationalists came, they would also detain you arbitrarily, and then beat you, beat you just shy of death. So we all fled.[1]

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Jinhua sailed to Siam, where his sister's husband owned a three-hundred-acre sugar plantation and refinery. The spread was so enormous, they rented most of the land to local Thais. Jinhua went to work in the refinery, which was staffed by Chaozhou émigrés who spoke his own Puning-inflected Chaozhou dialect. The business suffered during these Depression years, however. Perceiving that opportunities for advancement in his in-laws' rural businesses were limited, he first moved to the nearby city of Bangkok to work for a cousin and then hitched a ride on a Chinese-owned steamer heading south for Singapore, where his older brother peddled fish. Most of the Chinese migrants in his new village also hailed from the Puning district of Chaozhou and specialized in vegetable production. Encouraged by his brother to start at the bottom, Jinhua took the backbreaking job of "night soil" collector, someone who lugged buckets from gate to gate to gather excrement for use as fertilizer. His wages were relatively high, he recalled, laughing, because "no one else wanted to do it." His early sojourn in the British colony was full of such travails, but in time he made a new life for himself. After a decade trudging as a fruit peddler, he managed to establish his own fruit shop and, later, other enterprises. He married a woman his mother, back in China, selected for him. He raised a family, sent remittances home, endured the horrors of the Japanese occupation, and retired a moderately successful businessman who served the Chinese community in a number of philanthropic capacities.[2]

Chen's life story is unique in some ways, but it is emblematic of the larger trends characterizing the social and economic connections between southeast coastal China and Southeast Asia from the seventeenth to the early twentieth century. Sojourning overseas had become fairly normalized by his day, but catastrophes big and small—a feud, a flood, a government campaign—inclined villagers and urbanites alike to embark on foreign journeys for work and sanctuary. Many of these sojourners already had relatives or acquaintances living overseas on whom they could rely initially. Absent that close connection, they turned to other expatriates from their native place in China. A significant number of émigrés who achieved fame and fortune hailed from the trading classes at home or had family overseas who were engaged in commerce, shopkeeping, or other small businesses. Because of that overseas connection, families like the Chens tended to own more property and have more financial resources back home than their neighbors who lacked that lifeline. Although the vast majority of Chinese emigrants were males, female relations played an important role in commercial networking across the South China Sea. Siam was the default destination of the Chaozhou overseas sojourner after

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the eighteenth century, but the prosperous colonies of the British in Malaya and the French in Indochina also beckoned ambitious or desperate young migrants.

The most significant feature of Chen Jinhua's life for our purposes was his birth in Chaozhou, a commercialized region on the eastern seaboard of the great maritime province of Guangdong on the southeast coast of China. Chaozhou—known as Teochew (or Teochiu) in Southeast Asia—was simultaneously an administrative prefecture and a local culture in which people shared a common dialect and repertoire of ritual, spiritual, and social practices. After the seventeenth century, natives of this region joined the Fujianese and Cantonese in an astronomical migration of Chinese laborers and merchants to Southeast Asia. Ng Chin-keong long ago characterized the emergence of Chaozhou at this time in the larger history of the South China Sea as unprecedented; the Fujianese and Cantonese, in contrast, had long been commercially dominant.[3] This emergence was a uniquely modern phenomenon, reflecting the expansion of the opium trade, the formalization of colonial rule in Southeast Asia, and the political decline of China. The rise of Chaozhou across the watery domain of overseas Chinese was one of the more remarkable social developments in the interconnected history of China and Southeast Asia. This book attempts to tell that story and consider its historical significance. How did natives of this smaller, poorer, and phenomenally ungovernable corner of imperial China emerge among the commercial masters of the South China Sea by the twentieth century?

The history of southeast coastal Chinese at home and abroad cannot be recounted merely within the geographical framework of the colony, nation-state, village, macroregion, or treaty port, or within the social framework of the "Chinese" or "overseas Chinese." Traditionally, the cultural identity of sojourning Chinese was determined by native place of origin, reinforced by common dialect and personal connections. If they did not entirely embrace this identity when they departed their villages, it was strengthened and reinforced simultaneously by the overseas native place institutions that advanced their interests and by colonial authorities, who were intent on classifying the identities of those who arrived on their shores. The history of transnational Chinese capitalism and migration must be grounded in the cultural dynamics of native place affiliation. Millions of Chaozhouese migrated to Southeast Asia from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-twentieth century. Many of those travelers remitted a portion of their earnings to their families back home and stayed in touch in other ways. Chaozhou thus was distinguished by a territorial boundlessness.

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Emigrant communities at home maintained strong connections with sojourning Chinese, and local events rarely remained exclusively local for long. Events had repercussions that rippled back and forth across the seas, illustrating the intimately shared historical experiences of people living in multiple locations across a vast water world. The proper geographical framework of analysis—however imprecise and ever-evolving—is the uncharted borders of that maritime sphere within which Chaozhou families collectively dwelled. I refer to that geographical space as maritime Chaozhou and to those kinfolk as translocal families.

Across empires, kingdoms, colonies, sultanates, and oceans, their collective social and economic experiences were translocal as well as transregional. The geographer Tim Oakes and anthropologist Louisa Schein have offered a succinct elucidation of the first term: "translocality means being identified with more than one location." This is not simply a matter of "self-identification," it also reflects how states or other institutions identify people in motion. Translocalism refers to the migration of people as well as to the circulation of capital, ideas, commodities, and disease.[4] Scholars tend to characterize it as a recent phenomenon that reflects the escalating pace of post–Cold War globalization, especially the globalization of instantaneous media communications. The translocal world of maritime Chaozhou nonetheless was driven by centuries of international commerce and labor migration that accelerated in the nineteenth century. The introduction of steamships and telegraphs had equally revolutionary effects on communications across the South China Sea, and in normal times almost as many Chaozhou sojourners returned to as departed from China every year. Like emigrants from other regions of southern China, they tended to travel to the same places, live in close proximity to one another, and establish institutions that reinforced the cultural bond within expatriate communities and with their home villages.[5]

This is a local study in a global context. It will elucidate the entangled history of southeastern China, Shanghai, Hong Kong, and the regions of Southeast Asia to which Chaozhou sojourners traveled after the seventeenth century—including Bangkok and Cambodia on the Gulf of Siam, West Borneo, southern Malaysia, Singapore, and the Mekong delta of Vietnam. As Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmerman have shown, entangled history is a methodological approach used in the study of individuals and institutions in a transnational context. Underscoring the complexity of foreign encounters, they assert that culture is not simply transferred from more powerful or

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wealthy groups to weaker ones or from "cores" to "peripheries," rather all parties mutually affect one another in subtle or profound ways.

Werner and Zimmerman offer useful insights into the transnational scale of analysis in history. This scale, they suggest, "cannot simply be considered as a supplementary level of analysis to be added to the local, regional, and national levels according to the logic of a change of focus." Entangled history on a transnational scale employs its own "space-structuring logic," enabling one to reimagine the space within which historical events take place. One cannot understand the full significance of an event that occurred in a village on the coast of China without considering its impact on a port city on the Malay Peninsula, over 2800 kilometers distant. Global history therefore must be "multiscopic." It must be analyzed across the multiple sites within which historical interactions occur. The transnational scale of analysis enables us to discern how a single event, or series of events, can generate transformations in various locations, transformations that then reverberate back to the original site and produce new changes.[6] Most transnational phenomena nonetheless are "shaped by the specificity of locales," as Katherine Brickell and Ayona Datta have observed.[7] The multiscopic approach enables social historians to focus on the human and local scale within a larger transnational sphere. Migrants may live a global life, but they do not experience it "globally." They encounter it in the quotidian world of the village, port, or colonial plantation. Multiscopic analysis enables us to discern the human experience of global change and thereby determine how disparate local arenas are shaped by similar global processes. It enables the social historian to write global history.

Most scholars of the overseas Chinese experience have argued that the mass migration out of South China in the nineteenth century reflected the empire's social, economic, and political decline. They have attributed the accelerated levels of emigration to large and generalized challenges plaguing the coastal regions, from demographic pressures on land to poverty, chaos in an age of dynastic degeneration, and the "increasing exploitation of peasants" after the 1850s. Moreover, the argument goes, Chinese were attracted to the investment and employment opportunities of the European colonial order, and the imperialist imposition of the treaty port system after 1842 (in the case of Chaozhou, 1858) made it easier for people to depart for those colonies. Chinese have been advancing features of this argument for as long as they have considered the phenomenon of migration out of southeastern China. Wei Yuan, for example, claimed in 1847 that Chinese from Fujian and Chaozhou

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risked the dangers of travel because "their native country was densely populated and the land was scarce."[8]

The present study does not dispute these well-founded interpretations. Chaozhou itself experienced ten violent antidynastic uprisings in the 1850s and 1860s, and the Taiping rebellion entered its convulsive death throes in its mountainous hinterland in 1866. After 1852 Chaozhou's international port of Swatow (Shantou) also emerged as the major Chinese site of embarkation for poor people who emigrated as contract laborers. They could not afford the price of a steerage ticket.

Nevertheless, Chaozhou's intensifying entanglement with Southeast Asia paradoxically reflected a highly adaptive economic and cultural vitality as well. Access to the territories along the South China Sea alleviated problems big and small: overpopulation on limited cultivable land, natural disasters, violent feuds, and government persecution. Siam, Johor, Singapore, and French Indochina in particular constituted an expanding frontier for Chaozhouese, providing thousands, and ultimately millions, of people additional territorial resources and investment opportunities, a boon that went bust only with the combined impact of the global Depression in 1929 followed by war and revolution in China.

Kenneth Pomeranz accounted for the contrasting modern fates of Europe and China after the mid-eighteenth century in his influential book *The Great Divergence*. Prior to that time, the more commercialized regions of China and Europe were roughly comparable in terms of productivity, food supply, capital accumulation, patterns of consumption, and other attributes of economic dynamism. After a late medieval and early modern heyday, both ends of the Eurasian landmass appeared to have been heading toward a "proto-industrial cul-de-sac." Deforestation, soil erosion, and an intensifying inability to produce the Malthusian "four necessities" of food, fiber, fuel, and building supplies on increasingly scarce fertile land threatened the prospects of both East and West. The more advanced economies of Europe—especially the British—nonetheless managed to ward off this looming disaster after 1800 while the Chinese succumbed to it. China, unlike Great Britain, Pomeranz argued, lacked the benefits of colonial expansion, a process that provided access to additional fertile land and resources. The Chinese empire therefore fell prey to ecological disaster and economic underdevelopment.[9]

Pomeranz shrewdly focused on the Lower Yangzi region around Shanghai to make this argument for it was one of the most commercialized and culturally advanced regions of the Chinese Empire and the logical place to explore

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the divergent fates of the early modern global powerhouses. He nonetheless might have shifted his geographical focus southward after 1750. His inattention to the port regions of southern China—specifically the internationally connected regions of Chaozhou, southern Fujian, and Canton—inclined him to neglect a different Chinese economic prospect. The commercial and demographic expansion of Chaozhouese and Fujianese into Southeast Asia and Shanghai resembled the colonial aggrandizement of Great Britain, Spain, France, the Netherlands, the United States, and Japan. Chaozhouese in particular benefited from access to the land and resources of Southeast Asia because they tended to specialize in commercial plantation agriculture: sugar, rice, and fruit production in Siam; pepper, gambier, and rubber in Johor and Singapore; and, in the twentieth century, rice in Cambodia and Cochinchina (Vietnam). They also engaged in agricultural production in support of other extractive industries like gold mining in West Borneo. A multitude of traders and shopkeepers likewise benefited from the commerce in such items. Historical sources identify these overseas territories as having been underpopulated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[10] Demographic pressures accelerated back in Chaozhou, but the problem was partially alleviated as the region's workers emigrated abroad and sent remittances to their families. Farmhands from Chaozhou usually worked for employers who hailed from their native place and who benefited from the steady supply of agricultural labor.

Chaozhou's access to the resources of underpopulated lands in Southeast Asia yielded ample supplies of lumber, food, minerals, and other resources, freeing farmers back home to plant profitable cash crops, like sugar and opium, more extensively. Indeed, the Chaozhouese shipbuilding industry was almost entirely offshored to Bangkok in the eighteenth century because access to Siamese lumber made large junk production there more cost-efficient (skilled Chaozhouese shipbuilders ventured overseas with the industry). Coastal Chaozhou and the regions to which local residents emigrated converged economically and socially after this time.

Europeans who espied groups of Chaozhou Chinese living in Southeast Asia in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries referred to those settlements as "colonies." In 1834 P. J. Begbie, a British officer stationed in India, for example, called the self-governing gambier planters on the Malayan islands of Riau and Bintang "Chinese colonists." Missionaries referred to the Chinese settlements of West Borneo in 1839 as "the independent colony of Borneo." Colonial officials in India depicted Chinese activities that enmeshed the Siamese economy with that of the China mainland in the 1830s as "colonial." As

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late as the 1920s, the Dutch director of the Netherlands Indies Tax Accountants Service, J. L. Vleming, referred to settlements of Chinese on the island of Java as "colonies." Even in recent years, Leonard Blussé, a specialist in overseas Chinese history, characterized Batavia (Jakarta) from 1619 to 1740 as "basically a Chinese colonial town under Dutch protection."[11]

From a nineteenth-century European standpoint, Chaozhouese expansion into Southeast Asia was similar to that of the Western powers in that it shared some of the characteristics traditionally identified with the colonial project: commercial elites extracted raw materials abroad. They forged new overseas markets for the sale of goods and the investment of capital. They wrested control of indigenous territory and provided opportunities for the home country's "excess" labor supply. J. A. Hobson, the prominent British critic of imperialism, described the arguments of European business interests in favor of colonialism that prevailed in 1902: "We must have markets for our growing manufactures, we must have new outlets for the investment of our surplus capital and for the energies of the adventurous surplus of our populations." Although generations of historians in the Anglo-American academy have critiqued the "economic interpretation of imperialism," its logic was compelling to those who were engaged in the colonial enterprise overseas, and the latter understood Chinese migration to Southeast Asia in the same self-interested light.[12]

Europeans understood that their own colonial project in Southeast Asia prior to the 1920s was utterly unsustainable without the Chinese. As the former governor of the Straits Settlements, Frank Swettenham, declared in 1906, credit for the financial success of the colony was due primarily to the Chinese:

> They were already the miners and the traders, and in some instances the planters and fishermen before the white man had found his way to the [Malay] Peninsula. . . . They were, and still are, the pioneers of mining. . . . They brought all the capital into the country when the Europeans feared to take the risk; they were the traders and shopkeepers, and it was their steamers which first opened regular communication between the ports of the colony and the ports of the [independent] Malay States. They introduced tens of thousands of their countrymen when the one great need was labour to develop the hidden riches of a . . . jungle-covered country, and it is their work and the taxation of the luxuries they consume and of the pleasures they enjoy [i.e. opium], which has provided something like nine-tenths of the revenue.[13]

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Europeans also perceived the extent to which their colonies redounded to the benefit of the Chinese. Chaozhouese who returned home after sojourning abroad recounted a joke that was popular among the British in Singapore: in Southeast Asia, "the Europeans raise all the cattle, but the Chinese get all the milk." The joke exaggerated the disadvantages of the Europeans—and antagonized Chinese, who felt that they also did most of the hard work raising the cattle, so to speak—but it reflected British anxieties about the ways Chinese profited from the colonial enterprise without bearing the onus of being "imperialists."[14]

This colonial dynamic was different from that prevailing across the Atlantic Ocean. There was nothing quite like the Chinese mercantile elite in Spanish America, for example. In the South China Sea, "periphery" and "core" or "metropole" and "hinterland," or even "colonizer" and "colonized," were complicated and fungible. Obviously the Europeans and Americans held the preponderant military and governmental power, and a voracious Euro-American market demand led to shifts in the exports of certain commodities—tin and rubber in particular—by the twentieth century. Chinese nonetheless continued to dominate the intra-Asian trade.[15] The rice markets of South China, for example, had as many distorting effects on Southeast Asia as the policies promoted by London, Paris, or Washington. Haydon Cherry has shown how the Chinese-dominated rice trade shaped the prospects of the impoverished floating population of French Indochina, for example. More broadly, Li Tana has argued that the interconnected emergence of Saigon, Bangkok, and Singapore contributed to the rise of heavily capitalized networks of Nanyang Chinese rice traders.[16] What we see in Southeast Asia was a process of Western colonization that advanced Chinese interests almost as much as it did those of Europeans and Americans, mostly because the entire process unfolded across the longstanding translocal spheres of native place groups from Chaozhou and elsewhere in China. As Swettenham implied, British success across Malaya, and most certainly Singapore, was inconceivable without the Chinese. Colonialism in Southeast Asia was a transnational class project as well as an expansion of the European nation-state.

In spite of Swettenham's magnanimous pronouncement, British administrators expressed misgivings about the economic power and demographic heft of the Chinese who emigrated in ever-increasing numbers to "their" colony. They fretted that they were not entirely in control, or, as Governor Frederick Weld observed in the midst of a crisis over the opium farms in 1883, "It is a question of who shall be supreme in this country."[17] This apprehension was

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not misplaced. Reading the colonial record across the decades of the nineteenth century, one is astonished by the extent to which the foreign powers served as colonizers fostering Chinese economic interests in the realms of defense, infrastructural development, and supervision of Chinese migration. British colonies were expected to generate revenue to cover their expenses, but much of the cost of establishing the Straits Settlements as a viable polity fell on the home government. During the five-year transition to full colonial status after 1867, for example, the Colonial Office, War Department, and Treasury heavily subsidized colonial defense. Even when this transitional period ostensibly ended in 1872, Straits authorities prevailed on these British offices to continue to share in the costs of military operations (in that year, of the £91,595 expended, the colony paid £51,195 and London £40,000).[18]

Moreover, by 1881 only 2,803 male "Europeans" (including Americans) resided in the Straits as compared to 143,605 Chinese males. The European figure included 906 British troops.[19] The British military establishment thus constituted one-third of the entire Euro-American male population. The Chinese-controlled opium regime by this point was supplying most colonial revenue, of course, and the heavy military presence contributed to the expansion of British imperial power globally. The British troop and civil servant presence nevertheless was protecting and administering a colony in which the vast majority of Chinese were either making money or helping their compatriots make money. The Chinese Board of Revenue and Board of War back in Beijing certainly did nothing to defend overseas merchants in Southeast Asia. The British, in contrast, fostered Chinese commerce in treacherous waters.

The extraordinary level of British labor inputs into maintaining the Straits was not limited to military defense. Governor Weld proudly itemized the infrastructural efforts of his government in the 1880s, efforts that included building prisons, hospitals, police stations, and reclamation projects across the major settlements of the colony.[20] The colonial record is bursting with itemizations of expenditures and relentless labor in the administration of lighthouses, sea walls, "lunatic asylums," vaccination campaigns, venereal disease monitoring, criminal and civil courts, harbor dredging, and the protection of Chinese migrants.[21] British shippers and merchants benefited from these improvements, and the work provided employment to middle-class British expatriates, but the efforts accommodated a far more numerous Chinese business and laboring community.

As the nineteenth century progressed, overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia left the state-building to others. In Siam they loyally integrated themselves into

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the monarchical order. Elsewhere they let the Euro-Americans bear the burden of constructing colonial states while they continued to dominate the process of resource extraction and commerce in food, lumber, rubber, tin, gold, and other commodities. Networks of Chinese expatriates thrived in the absence of international institutions designed to regulate movement across borders. A common South China Sea port culture evolved out of the Chinese sojourning experience. If the exploits of overseas Chinese constituted "colonialism," it was a translocal type forged informally by Chinese native place groups rather than politically and militarily by a conquering nation-state. This process transformed both Southeast Asia and China itself. The Chinese succeeded in this endeavor because their approach to overseas economic extraction was less expensive and more efficacious than that of the Euro-American variety. Euro-American traditions of economic expansion and power projection were heavily statist, relying on navies, armies, consulates, secret services, and legions of bureaucrats. They also were galvanized by a coercive doctrine of "civilizational uplift." This is a very expensive process by which to achieve economic domination abroad.

The Chinese, in contrast, pursued their interests in Southeast Asia informally after the seventeenth century. Aside from upholding tributary relations, the state was rarely involved in significant ways. Instead, Chinese relied on such institutions as merchant-dominated native place associations, gongsi partnerships, brotherhood societies, business networks, temples, and philanthropic organizations. Not only was this a cheap and effective approach to economic expansion, the process was controlled by those directly involved on the ground. Traditional Chinese institutions of economic extraction were superior to those of Euro-America. They were informal, adaptive, inexpensive, and ultimately more sustainable over the long term. Indeed, these institutions endure in Southeast Asia to this day, whereas the colonial authority of the British, French, Dutch, Spanish, Americans, and Japanese was swept into a vilified historical dustbin long ago.

Colonialism, however, is too limited a term to apply to the variegated experiences of overseas Chinese. Chaozhouese expansion into Southeast Asia and Shanghai reflected less a colonial than a territorial dynamic. By territoriality I do not refer to the jurisdictional basis of modern European states. In European political culture, territory "is an extension of the state's power," Stuart Elden writes; "territory is that over which sovereignty is exercised." Kai Raustiala, who studies territoriality in its legal dimension, notes that it is "the organizing principle of modern government. Territoriality refers to the exercise

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of power over defined blocs of space." The Westphalian conception of statehood after 1648 held that "each sovereign state has its own discrete and exclusive territory." Within this system, laws and rights are binding to the territory.[22] The correlation of geographical space with political power also informed the statism of European colonialism in modern Southeast Asia, but it constitutes only one type of human territorialism.

I instead invoke a more primordial idea of territorialism as the "primary geographical expression of social power," as the geographer Robert David Sack has described it. In this understanding, "territoriality is an indispensable means to power at all levels from the personal to the international. . . . In humans [it] is best understood as a spatial strategy to affect, influence or control resources. . . . It is a form of spatial behavior."[23] This conceptualization of territoriality dates back to the Neolithic and developed contemporaneously with the domestication of plants and animals. Territorial claims over time were made by families, tribes, and eventually states in ever-changing, multifarious processes that anthropologists have called "the unfolding of society over a territory."[24]

Territorial domination is often effected through the use of violence, as we see in the battles among Chinese native place groups across the Gulf of Siam. More commonly, however, we witness a spatial dynamic in which local and long-distance migration complemented preexisting orders of residence and political authority. Chinese mass migration fostered newer, nonstatist forms of territoriality in which others engaged in modern state-making while Chinese focused on territorial access, commodity production, and commerce. Chinese territorialism involved spatial strategies designed to appropriate local resources and maximize personal and group benefits without establishing formal governing authority. After the mid-eighteenth century, the economically powerful Chaozhouese in Siam subordinated themselves to the monarchy and gradually assimilated into the local culture. Miners, farmers, and traders from the wider Chaozhou region resided in West Borneo at the sufferance of the local sultan and, after the 1880s, the Dutch. The same can be said of the Chinese planters in Sarawak and the Straits Settlements in the nineteenth century. As the twentieth century progressed, Chaozhouese migrated in increasing numbers to the rice-producing and milling regions of southern Vietnam and Cambodia in French Indochina. In all these cases, they lacked sovereignty over the land, and yet they achieved near total domination of many of the resources and commodities produced in these territories. The very absence of formal sovereignty paradoxically enabled them to achieve unprecedented control

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over local resources. In its simplest form, Chinese territorialism was resource extraction and commercial supremacy without the establishment of a colonial state. Their power and influence were sustained through a mosaic of familial, brotherhood, and commercial relationships tessellated across the port regions of maritime Chaozhou: Bangkok, Singapore, Saigon, Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Swatow.

This book charts the rise and decline of maritime Chaozhou from the emergence of Chaozhouese polities along the Gulf of Siam in the eighteenth century to the collapse of the global economy in 1929. Part 1, "The Curse of the Maritime Blessing," considers the translocal repercussions of the violent campaigns of the Ming and Qing dynasties to sever Chaozhou from its natural water world from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. These struggles represented the difference between popular and dynastic conceptualizations of the maritime frontier (*haijiang*) in the early modern era. Ronald Po has defined this frontier as "the sea space adjacent to the Qing empire" and "a 'middle ground' or an in-between space that facilitates the flow of people, ideas, and commodities." Focusing on the Qing configuration of this space, he describes how the dynasty divided the ocean into "inner" and "outer" realms: "the inner sea constituted the empire's domestic seawater, where the emperor could claim ownership of maritime resources." The outer realm was considered strategically important, but also "a capricious domain that lay beyond the purview of administrative governance and economic extraction."[25] The Qing thus understood the frontier as a coastal littoral charted in dynastic cartography and rendered impregnable to threats from the high seas.

This study focuses on the maritime frontier as experienced by southeast coastal populations, whose lives reflected some of the ideas articulated by the pioneering expositor of the role of the frontier in history, Frederick Jackson Turner. Turner did not simply understand the frontier as geographical space, what he called territory that "lies at the hither edge of free land." He instead stressed that it was constantly changing and that frontier making was an ongoing process. It was not a hard boundary, as states were wont to draw; it shifted with the flow of human movement. "It is the graphic line which records the expansive energies of the people behind it," Turner wrote; "It is a form of society rather than an area."[26]

This vividly captures the movement of Chaozhouese overseas. Unlike the Qing, they did not conceptualize the outer realm as territory off-limits to international competition. It was viewed instead as a vital maritime pathway geographically linking the home territory to an ever-expanding frontier of

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settlement and economic extraction. One is tempted to resurrect the now-archaic use of "frontier" as a verb, as seen in the epigraph to this introduction.[27] To frontier is to engage in a relentless process of territorial expansion, to effect a convergence of the family village with the overseas community. Social frontiering constituted a process of geographical expansion that had little to do with the boundary-making of the state, as occurred in coterminous developments in North America.

The frontier expansion of southeastern Chinese villages nonetheless was distinct from the Euro-American variety. In his magisterial global history of the nineteenth century, Jürgen Osterhammel has shown that, in the latter case, "in the nineteenth century, the opposite extreme of 'city' is no longer 'country,' the realm of farming, it is 'frontier': the moving boundary of resource development." The frontier (or, by extension, the colony) became the "periphery" to the city. It was in the city that "the weapons of subjugation were literally forged." Osterhammel describes the familiar process of European expansion, in which the financial centers of London, Paris, and New York emerged as urban metropoles to expanding peripheries.[28] The difference in the Chaozhouese case is that the "city" in question was not the home port of Swatow but the overseas port polities of Hong Kong, Shanghai, Saigon, Singapore, and Bangkok. These dynamic metropoles themselves were economically and demographically incorporated into the expanding Chaozhou frontier. Urban enclaves of modern Chinese development, they simultaneously were embedded in the colonial or semicolonial expansion of the European nation-state and made secure by colonial naval power or the Siamese monarchy. The home port of Swatow was never as economically important to maritime Chaozhou as the collective impact of these distant cities. As the political order disintegrated after 1891, the overseas ports emerged as havens for investment, settlement, and banking.

Our story starts with the cataclysmic collision of these contrary perceptions of the maritime frontier, a clash that resounded across the history of maritime Chaozhou. Part 1 illustrates the importance of events in generating and redirecting large structural transformations in local and global history.[29] These early chapters focus on three developments that reshaped translocal life: the Chinese governmental campaign to forcibly depopulate the Chaozhou coast during the 1660s (which contributed to the emergence of a culture of feuding and fostered an itinerant class of "peasant intellectuals" whose antipathy for the dynasty hardened into a religious ideology); the great victory of the Siamese governor Taksim over the Burmese invaders of Siam in 1767 (which led

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to the enthronement of this half-Siamese, half-Chaozhouese warrior-merchant and the transformation of port polities across the Gulf of Siam into a Chaozhouese economic sphere); and Commander Fang Yao's purge of the brotherhood-dominated villages of Chaozhou from 1869 to 1873. Fang's campaign of rural pacification constitutes the central event binding both early modern and modern maritime Chaozhou as well as parts 1 and 2 of this book. Assuming control of military and even civilian affairs in the region, he slaughtered thousands of "Triads," pirates, and smugglers and drove approximately eighty thousand men into exile in Shanghai and Southeast Asia. This campaign accelerated emigration out of the region in the 1870s. It launched a heavily militarized form of provincial state-building that enabled powerful families to entrench themselves economically. Its sheer brutality temporarily pacified a theretofore ungovernable region and facilitated the participation of Chaozhou's establishment merchants in the capitalist order emerging across the South China Sea. Local communists channeled the deep reservoir of resentments left in its wake into an ideology of class antagonism and revolution in the 1920s.

This pacification campaign in southeastern China was also an important milestone in the history of Shanghai and Southeast Asia. There, locals felt its reverberations without being particularly aware of the event itself. The purge of the underworld element in Chaozhou, for example, led to a dramatic increase in criminality in Singapore after 1869, forcing British administrators to intensify efforts to reform the criminal justice system and formalize colonial rule across the Straits Settlements. The British had been unaware of the causes of the crime wave until 1873, when an investigation into the origins of a riot in Singapore revealed to them the changing social dynamics of the colony.

In Fang Yao's campaign, we witness the transformative power of the local event as its repercussions were experienced across political borders. His military onslaught intensified ongoing trends in maritime Chaozhou, fostering a type of entangled state-building in both Chaozhou and the British Straits Settlements on the Malay Peninsula. Historical incidents that occurred in two ostensibly separate geographical places in fact took place in one social and economic translocal sphere; they were distinct manifestations of the same event and shared mutually transformative consequences. Two states at the early stages of their development—one colonial, one provincial—sought to tame and subjugate the same set of free-wheeling sojourners who long had operated beyond the orb of governmental authority. In so acting, these states became transformed themselves. Entangled state-building is a transnational

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process in which emerging states approach developmental equilibrium as a result of shared historical experiences and economic trajectories. A multiscopic analysis of Fang's pacification campaign enables us to witness the intercrossed processes of state-building between Great Britain's colony in Malaya and the Chinese province of Guangdong, in which Chaozhou is situated. We also discern a larger process of entangled state-building across the South China Sea, a process that the circulation and taxation of opium, the most profitable commodity traded in modern Asia, accelerated.

For opium is central to this story. Part 2, "Winning the Opium Peace," shows how the spectacular success of many Chaozhouese merchants after the seventeenth century stemmed, in part, from their participation in the global commerce in this profitable narcotic. Opium was easily transported, and it financially buttressed the trade in other commodities associated with their sojourning experience: rice, sugar, fruit, gambier, and rubber in particular. Chaozhouese trading networks alternated between strategies of cooperation and competition with the imperialist powers across Asia. The remarkable solidarity with which they operated enabled them to squeeze the British and Americans out of the opium trade in Chaozhou and the burgeoning metropolis of Shanghai. Conversely, overseas, they participated in the syndicates that controlled the opium farms and provided the revenues on which the nineteenth-century colonial project in Southeast Asia depended.

The opium trade generated a significant portion of the capital accumulated by the titans of Chaozhouese commerce. This enabled them to diversify their investment portfolios and invest in banking, manufacturing, shipping, real estate, and film. In local biographies published today, they are celebrated as "businessmen" and "philanthropists," and their participation in a now-reviled transoceanic trade tends to be discounted. Of course, the same can be said of the many American fortunes that were forged in the very same commerce: those of the Lows, Delanos, Russells, and others.

The heyday of maritime Chaozhou from 1767 to 1929 reflected more than the role of its sojourning classes in the drug trade, however. An ethos of cooperative networking, adaptive commercial strategies, and stalwart solidarity enabled them to compete effectively with foreign imperialists at home and abroad. Scholars of imperialism in China have begun to complicate the history of Chinese "semicolonialism," a system in which the Chinese government retained political sovereignty but was militarily forced to concede economic privileges and "territorial enclaves" to foreign business interests. While underscoring the victimization of Chinese by the violent expansion of Western pow-

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ers and Japan, they point to instances of indigenous agency in shaping the contours of imperialism in such realms as public health, medicine, and business. This scholarship also points to the complexities of the semicolonial encounter across China, though the experiences of treaty ports like Shanghai and Tianjin or the colony of Hong Kong continue to be heavily emphasized.[30]

The present study seeks to contribute to this conversation by illustrating the ways southeast coastal operators successfully resisted and, on occasion, dominated the foreign interlopers. When scholarly attention is shifted to a region like Chaozhou—especially Chaozhou as part of a larger maritime world—the history of imperialism in China appears transformed. The region was "opened" to Westerners as a result of a brutal war, the Second Opium War (1856–1860). Local people nevertheless prevented the British from traveling freely throughout Chaozhou for almost a decade thereafter. To the consternation of foreign merchants, translocal entrepreneurs maintained near total control of the regional economy and disciplined Europeans into conducting business in the Chaozhouese manner. Aside from the shipping sector, they marginalized Euro-American economic power in their home base. In the Lower Yangzi region around Shanghai they drove the foreigners out of the remunerative opium trade. Overseas they dominated the extraction and wholesaling of several products essential to the industrial revolution that was unfolding across the globe and sidelined the British from such industries as rice-milling. British consuls in the treaty port of Swatow protected the local property interests of Chaozhou residents of the Straits who had become naturalized "British subjects" but who nonetheless lived part time in Chaozhou. The British facilitated the emergence of these Chinese as thriving capitalists at home and abroad. Chaozhouese were disdained throughout China for their purported cultural deficiencies: their "violence," "clannishness," and dogged success in business. Unlike so many of their compatriots, however, they competed successfully with the British in the international arena. A scholarly reimagining of the historical geography of southeast coastal China enables one to discern that success and the extent to which the British inadvertently served the interests of their Chaozhouese competitors prior to the 1920s.

Part 2 nonetheless ends with the earlier theme of the accursed blessings of life lived along a maritime frontier. The translocal nature of the economy and family structure—so essential to overcoming the demographic and ecological challenges of the modern era—also contributed to the growing class inequalities of the Chaozhou region. The remittance system in particular exacerbated social antagonisms because families that benefited from the largess of overseas

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relations thrived while those who lacked such translocal affiliations suffered in comparison. By the 1920s wealth and diaspora were entirely interconnected in areas with significant emigrant traditions, and the class tensions and transforming nature of rural violence in the 1920s and 1930s presaged the larger revolution to come in the 1940s.

The triple impact of global Depression, total war, and revolution in the 1930s and 1940s seriously disrupted the ties between Chaozhou and the lands of the South China Sea. Indeed, a wartime famine prostrated the region in 1943, illustrating the vital necessity of commerce with Southeast Asia, which supplied Chaozhou with a significant portion of its grain supplies. The centuries-long link to a larger maritime world ensured the very survival of the homefolk. Overseas Chinese usually responded effectively to the philanthropic needs of their villages in the wake of such disasters as the deadly tropical cyclone that struck the coast in 1922, but they could do nothing to alleviate the tragedies of war two decades later.

This study focuses on maritime Chaozhou before those disasters struck, when sojourning merchants and laborers alike successfully expanded the geography of their economic possibilities. Here I consider the relationship between an important Chinese sojourning community and the development of capitalism in East and Southeast Asia from the eighteenth to the early twentieth century. Pomeranz was right to point to the ecological challenges confronting the Chinese mainland after 1750, but understanding Chaozhou across its translocal world enables us to see, not a divergence with European modernity, but a convergence in colonized sites that were critical to the industrial revolution and accelerating levels of capital accumulation. Southeast coastal emigrants participated in a Chinese sphere of commercial modernity that adapted to political and cultural transformations. With superior institutions of migration and a masterful application of legal and illegal tactics in their competition with Western imperialists, they emerged among the commercial masters of the South China Sea, serious rivals to the foreign powers before things began to fall apart in the 1930s.

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