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The Changing Meanings of Diaspora: The Chinese in Southeast Asia

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Introduction

Dispersed over all corners of the earth, the Chinese diaspora—estimated to be around 60 million—is the largest in the world. It constitutes an important part of the Asian diaspora, not only because of its size, but also because three-quarters of the Chinese diaspora still reside in Southeast Asia today. Due to geographical proximity and trading ties, the Chinese diaspora has a long history in Southeast Asia, which was the main destination of emigrants from the Southern Chinese provinces of Fujian and Guangdong until the 1950s. From then onwards, remigration from Southeast Asia, Hong Kong and Taiwan to North America, Australasia, Europe and Japan led to a more geographically diverse Chinese diasporic landscape. Following the start of economic reforms in the People's Republic of China (PRC) during the late 1970s, places of origin of Chinese emigrants also became more varied as the latter departed from all over China, and not merely from the traditional emigration areas (*qiaoxiang*) in South China. Even though the Chinese diaspora is unique in many ways, it can also illustrate some of the broader concerns and changing contexts pertaining to the Asian diaspora. These include questions of identity and homeland ties; the various factors that contribute to divisions within diasporas; the attempts of governments to incorporate diasporas; and the changing relationship between states and diasporas in different historical periods and geo-political contexts.

Three Meanings of Diaspora and the Chinese in Southeast Asia

In its original meaning, the term diaspora refers to the 'scattering' of Jews and Armenians that connoted suffering and oppression as 'victim diasporas' (Cohen 1997). As such, the term implies forced exile, a shared group identity shaped by common experiences of hardship, and a longing for a homeland in need of reconstruction. Although multiple uses of the term have marked its proliferation since the 1990s, we still find some reference to this original meaning in literature on diaspora, such as in the emphasis on identity and collective memory, experiences of alienation in host societies, and the preservation of homeland ties among diasporic communities.

Scholarly literature of recent decades also includes new meanings of diaspora. In one sense, the term has become integrated into broader attempts to deconstruct 'bounded and static understandings of culture and society' against the background of newer paradigms such as globalisation and transnationalism (McKeown 1999: 308). In other words, as a project of resistance, diaspora exposes the limits of the nation-state paradigm and focuses instead on interconnections at both sub-national and transnational levels. Here, the role of networks is particularly relevant in what McKeown has referred to as a 'diasporic perspective' that pays attention to transnational flows and connections (ibid.: 307). Diaspora in this sense also challenges the understanding of movements as linear and unidirectional, as in older conceptions of migration. Culturally, diaspora signifies a revolt against a single narrative in favour of diversity, heterogeneity, or what McKeown (1999) calls 'diaspora-as-difference'.

In a third sense, however, the term diaspora has become a 'category of practice' employed by states to claim populations beyond national boundaries and 'to appeal to loyalties' (Brubaker 2005: 12), reflecting the tendency of 'nationalizing transnational mobility' (Ho, Hickey, and Yeoh 2015: 153; Xiang, Yeoh, and Toyota 2013). As a political category, governments have used the term to erase differences in an attempt to appeal to as broad an audience as possible. Since it is in the interest of nation-states to conceive of 'their' diasporas as homogenous groups that can be managed and that share

their loyalty to the 'motherland,' the notion of difference so central to diaspora-as-critique comes under threat in this third use of the term.

The homogenisation that underlies diaspora is not just specific to the political use of the term; it also underlies its original meaning. Conceiving of diasporas as groups that share the common experience of forced exile minimises internal differences, such as those of class, race, religion, dialect, origin, occupation, or generation. Hence, scholars have warned of the dangers of essentialisation and homogenisation when applying the term 'diaspora' outside of specific historical contexts (Wang 2004; McKeown 2005; Hu-DeHart 2015a). It is thus important not only to focus on the historical experiences of the Chinese diaspora, but also on divisions within Chinese communities.

The tension between the diverse meanigns of diaspora as group identity and homeland ties, as resistance against static and unilinear accounts of migration and a celebration of difference, and as a term employed politically to create unity is also visible in changing research paradigms on the Chinese in Southeast Asia, which continues to be a main geographical focus of research. Until World War Two, the Chinese were perceived of as 'unchanging' sojourners in scholarship, (Purcell 1951). The term *huaqiao* (overseas Chinese) mostly appeared in official discourse and in scholarship to refer to the period before World War Two, when Chinese bachelors from the southern provinces of Guangdong and Fujian migrated to Southeast Asia with the intent of returning to China. Up to the 1960s, the term 'Nanyang Chinese' (*Nanyang huaqiao*), which suggested the existence of a unified and homogenous community, was commonplace in research. During the 1950s and 1960s, in the context of the rise of nationalism and the Cold War, researchers mostly framed identity questions in terms of studies on the assimilation of the Chinese in several Southeast Asian countries (Skinner 1957). This nation-state framework used in studies up to the 1980s gradually made way for a 'diasporic perspective' that focuses instead on transnational mobility, links, flows, institutions, and networks (McKeown 1999).

During the 1980s, scholars also replaced the simplistic dichotomy of unchanging sojourners versus assimilated nationals with an understanding of identity as a complex and multilayered category, consisting of, among others, national, cultural, ethnic, and class identities (Wang 1985). With the growing impetus of cultural studies since the 1990s, researchers further problematized notions of 'Chineseness', multiculturalism, and diaspora as markers of cultural preservation, 'separateness' and 'proto-nationalism' (Ang 2003). Since then, the 'hybridity' behind terms such as *totok* ('pure' Chinese) or *peranakan* (ethnic Chinese of mixed origin) has been increasingly acknowledged (Ang 2003; Coppel 2012). In recent years, scholars have also paid more attention to the question of ethnic minorities and changes in identification modes of these communities in a global context (Barabantseva 2011; Leo 2015). At the same time, questions pertaining to agencies, interfaces, and marginality as a source of diasporic Chinese strength have also been addressed in recent scholarship (Liu 2006; Liu and van Dongen 2013).

Whereas earlier criticism of the Chinese diaspora focused on its spatial quality of China-centredness or the denial of localization, Shelly Chan has recently argued in favour of the use of the concept of 'diaspora' in a temporal sense. Diaspora, Chan argues, is less about deconstructing the model of center and periphery than it is about asking who is making claims about diasporas and for what purpose at specific moments in time. Hence, both center and periphery are contingent forces, subject to shifting interests, perceptions, and values in time (Chan 2015). Highlighting the tension between the various understandings of diaspora, and keeping in mind Shelly Chan's proposition regarding changing understandings of diaspora at different 'moments' in time, our overview discusses five main periods or 'moments.' They are (1) the early history of the Chinese traders in Southeast Asia and colonial expansion (15th-19th centuries); (2) the mass labour migration movement after the 1850s; (3) the nationalist movement of the early twentieth century; (4) the period of decolonisation and the Cold War; and (5) the period of China's reform and opening up (post-1978) in the era of globalisation and neoliberalism. Each period manifests changes in diaspora as homeland ties, dynamics of difference, and the perception of the Chinese state regarding the role and relevance of the Chinese diaspora. If we understand diaspora as a field of competing interests across time and space, shared

by diasporic communities, host societies, and the homeland, diaspora remains a useful category of analysis.

Early Chinese Traders and Colonial Expansion

Individual Chinese traders reached the south of the Malay Peninsula and mainland Southeast Asia as early as the Qin and Han dynasties (221 BCE-220 CE), but it was only with the growth of commercial activities in Southeast Asia in the thirteenth century that Chinese communities arose (Wade 2009; Zhuang 2001). Under the Yongle emperor (1360-1424), Zheng He's maritime excursions in the fifteenth century (1405-1433) served to formalize relations with Southeast Asia under the tribute system. Even though overseas trade was banned during the mid-fifteenth century, in 1567, a partial lifting of the ban led to a *de facto* legalisation of trade and the increase of private junk trade.

Before the arrival of the Portuguese and the Spanish in Southeast Asia in the sixteenth century, the Chinese were active as commercial middlemen in the region. During the early colonial period, they worked as artisans and labourers, and as 'tax farmers' under colonial rulers. Under this system, the Chinese secured licenses to collect taxes on local goods and services for the colonial authorities, with opium, spirits, gambling, and pawnshops becoming lucrative areas (Kuhn 2008; Skinner 1996). This system built on the local system of indirect rule of 'officers' in pre-colonial Southeast Asia, the so-called *kapitan* system, in which top merchants operated as leaders of Chinese communities.

As traders, mostly Hokkien merchants from South China engaged in private trade, exchanging Chinese goods such as ceramics and silks for Southeast Asian products such as spices and sandalwood. A vast business network connected the Hokkien traders from the Kyushu Islands to the Malay Archipelago and crossed communities in Korea, Kyushu, Taiwan, and Manila. These networks were based on family, native places, lineage, guilds, and personal ties, consolidated through practices such as the adoption of sons from within the clan or sworn brotherhoods (Chin 2010: 174, 193, 196). Already during this early period, the Chinese community was far from homogenous. In the early urban settlement of Spanish Manila, for example, it consisted of Chinese leaders who acted as middlemen,

rich merchants who provided products for the famous Manila-Acapulco galleon trade, small merchants and artisans residing in the Chinese quarter (the *Parián*), and labourers offering food and services (Kueh 2014).

In the seventeenth century, Chinese trade in Southeast Asia expanded. Tin and gold mining and the growing of pepper and gambier arose in the region to meet Chinese demands. By the eighteenth century, the Chinese also gradually became engaged with setting up the rice trade between China and Southeast Asia. Some of these early labour migrant communities in Borneo, Riau, Bangka, and Johor set up 'kongsis' or partnerships between labourers, headmen and capital providers or *taukehs* that made them self-ruled and quasi-autonomous (Trocki 2005). Other forms of community arrangement during this period included the 'bangs,' organizations based on dialect and with complex internal hierarchies that cut across class divisions, that provided recruitment and that offered patronage (Kuhn 2008).

Each of the main dialect groups had its own niche occupations, influenced not only by the skills of the respective emigrants but also by networks and conditions in the host societies. The Hokkien, maritime traders since the 1500s, were present in Taiwan, the Philippines, Java, Malaya, Borneo, and Siam. The Cantonese specialized in, among others, trade and cash crops, and could be found in great numbers in Malaya. The Teochiu people, mostly based in Thailand, were known for shipbuilding, but also worked on plantations and engaged in businesses such as the rice trade. The Hakka migrated to Malaya (West Borneo) and Singapore, where they engaged in mining, forestry, and agriculture (McKeown 2010; Wang 1991).

The Qing government continued Ming policies of prohibiting migration and treating migrants as 'outcasts and deserters,' partly because of their actual support for the Zheng Chenggong (Koxinga) regime in Taiwan (Yen 1978: 7). Although emigration remained banned until 1893 (with bans on trade instated and lifted during the eighteenth century), the first half of the nineteenth century witnessed a rapid expansion of Chinese communities in Southeast Asia (Wade 2009; Wang 2009). Because of the trading ban, the

demands of trading itself, and the dependence on the winds for return, the early communities of Chinese traders in Southeast Asia were temporary and forced sojourners (Chin 2010: 157; Wang 1981: 120). Given the rapid growth of communities, evictions and massacres of the Chinese communities already took place in Manila (1603), and Batavia (1740) (Kuhn 2008).

Since those who migrated were male (mostly bachelors) and *huaqiao* who had the intent to return to China, a dual family system emerged. Maintaining a family in their place of origin, they married local wives. Because of this practice, 'creolized Chinese societies' such as the *Mestizos* in the Philippines and *Peranakans* in the Malay peninsula and the Indonesian archipelago, developed in a stable fashion in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Skinner 1996). Merchants of these communities, rooted in both local and Chinese cultures, made suitable revenue farmers. By the end of the eighteenth century, the economic position of the Chinese in Southeast Asia was secured through tax farming and strategies such as trade peddling and giving advance credit (Kwee 2014). Whether in European colonies or in monarchies not under colonial rule, the Chinese in Southeast Asia benefited from the protection of weak patron-states and the existence of occupational niches (Kuhn 2001).

During this early period, it was the socio-economic visibility of the Chinese traders and middlemen—as opposed to their physical visibility in other geographical contexts—that led to discrimination (Wickberg 1994: 70) and the preservation of homeland ties. Secondly, differences within this group identity were already manifest as the early 'sojourners' were not merely traders, but also labourers and artisans. Whereas Safran has identified 'pariah capitalism' as a trait of the Chinese diaspora, Wang Gungwu has warned against a singular understanding of the Chinese diaspora with 'business acumen and wealth' as such (Safran 1991: 89; Wang 2004). Since most traders belonged to the Hokkien dialect group during the early period, dialect was less important as a divisive factor (Kuhn 2001). During this early period, trading networks that defy nation-state approaches reflect the second meaning of diaspora, with some scholars emphasizing the

role of ethnicity in these networks (Curtin 1984). Finally, the Chinese state's primary strategy was to prevent migration rather than to obtain the loyalty of its diaspora.

Mass Labour Migration after the 1850s

Since the mid-nineteenth century, labour migration and the migration of those of lower socio-economic backgrounds complicated the picture of the Chinese diaspora as a socio-economically privileged class; migration was an economic survival strategy. The scale of labour migration from South China increased massively, facilitated by the emergence of large-scale transoceanic shipping between the 1870s and the 1920s. Domestically, population pressure (between 1790 and 1850, the Chinese population rose from 300 million to 420 million), price increases, inflation, the uprisings of the Taiping and Muslim rebellions, and the rise of warlordism are commonly listed as push factors (Hoerder 2012: 23). Regionally, following the Treaties of Nanking (Nanjing) (1842) and Tientsin (Tianjin) (1856) that ended the Opium Wars, the treaty ports of Guangzhou, Xiamen, Fuzhou, Ningbo, and Shanghai were opened for trade and British Hong Kong was founded in 1842. Whereas earlier migration had taken place through merchant networks in Fujian or miners from Guangdong, now, Hong Kong emerged as a centre of migration (McKeown 1999: 313-314; Sinn 2013). Here, the second meaning of diaspora as networks, connections, and flows stands out.

From these central nodes, coolies and labourers were shipped to the New World (the British West Indies, Cuba, and Peru) and Australasia to fill the void of the abolished slave labour and to work in the plantation economy or as labourers in the service of industrialization. Although the coolie agencies in these ports, as well as in Hong Kong and Singapore, were mainly foreign-owned, some were Chinese-owned; in addition, many relied on Chinese 'coolie brokers' (*ketous*) and subordinate brokers (Yen 2013). Ending in the 1870s, but continuing until the 1920s in Southeast Asia, the Chinese coolie pattern was short-lived; coolies only constituted one eighth of the 2.5 million Chinese migrants during the nineteenth century (Hoerder 2012: 25-26; Wang 1991).[1]

[1] According to McKeown (2010, 2011), the overall figure of 2 to 8 million Chinese migrants for this period is too low because it is mostly based on a limited number of Chinese and English sources that count

In Southeast Asia, colonial expansion and the increasing European demand for Southeast Asian products saw Chinese trade and retail business thriving, with the Chinese replacing existing traders. On the production side, a rising number of Chinese worked in mines and on plantations to deliver products for the Chinese, regional, and European markets (Kwee 2014: 292; Trocki 2005). From the late nineteenth century until the 1940s, European imperialism connected China and India more closely with Southeast Asia. Labour market integration and colonial policies led to mass migration of Chinese and Indian workers, with one estimate of Burma, Malaya, and Thailand receiving more than 15 million Chinese and Indian immigrants during this period. Under the indenture system, Chinese labourers worked in plantations in Malaya, Sumatra, British North Borneo, and Sarawak, where they cultivated rubber, coffee, palm oil, tobacco, sugar cane, and coconuts (Kaur 2014: 167-171).

With the arrival of the British in Southeast Asia and the foundation of the Straits Settlements (Penang, Singapore, and Malacca) in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, these places attracted both the intermediate Chinese merchant class, known as the Baba or Straits Chinese, and migrants from China. Starting in the early nineteenth century, direct colonial administration had signified the decline of the tax farming system in Southeast Asia and the role of the Chinese intermediate elite in this system (Kuhn 2001). This decline of the old elite would also impact community organizations.

Concerning group identity and relations with the homeland, with mass migration since the mid-nineteenth century, native-place organisations (*huiguan*) based on the intersecting 'segments' of dialect, locality, and surname (Crissman 1967) in both North America and Southeast Asia served to assist the migrants upon arrival. These 'adaptive organisations' (Wickberg 1994), hierarchically organized and with wealthy community members as leaders, helped the new arrivals with services such as housing and

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contract labor and 'coolie' migrants only. Based on Chinese-language sources, he argues that more than 20 million Chinese left South China between the 1840s and the 1930s.

employment. The organisational principles of the *huiguan* reveal the importance of kinship and family relations in the migration system, as well as the crucial role of language in networks. Dialect groups engaged in specific niche occupations, as noted above, and chain migration of those from the same local area and/or kinship group to the same destination occurred.

Apart from these native-place organisations, a number of other organisations also had important functions in colonial Southeast Asia, such as the secret societies and the trading guilds. Chambers of Commerce replaced the trading guilds that functioned as umbrella organisations of the *huiguan*, trade associations, and other associations during the late nineteenth century. As such, supra-dialect organisations were already in place as mass migration transformed the older intermediate communities. The voluntary organisations were also instrumental in the sending of remittances to the hometowns or *qiaoxiang*, which served as one of the most important and tangible linkages between the Chinese diaspora and China, contributing to the emergence of transnationalist capitalism (Wickberg 1994; Liu and Benton 2016).

As for the attitude of the Chinese state toward the Chinese diaspora, an important shift took place during this period. The Chinese government engaged in the protection of Chinese emigrants, with the first Chinese consulate being established in Singapore in 1877 (Yen 1978: 7). The question of the nationality of the Chinese overseas first emerged during this period, namely in the 1868 Burlingame Treaty between the Qing government and the United States. The Qing government did not recognize naturalisation of Qing subjects in the United States or after their return to China, thereby confirming that Chinese were *huaqiao* (overseas Chinese) who were legally, politically, and culturally tied to the Qing government (Shao 2009: 9). The Chinese state now recognized the existence of Chinese communities outside of China, considering them as Chinese nationals who belonged to the Chinese state.

The Early Twentieth Century: The Call of the Motherland

During the early twentieth century, the question of group identity and homeland ties and diaspora in the sense of states seeking to claim populations intersected most clearly. The 'formalisation' of institutions that confirmed homeland ties entered a new stage during this period, with an impetus from the Qing government. When Chinese consulates were established, the latter attempted to promote Chinese consciousness through cultural activities and Chinese schools. For example, the second consul in Singapore, Tso Ping-lung, who arrived in 1881, promoted interest in the Chinese Classics through the literary society, the Hui Hsien He (the Society for the Meeting of Literary Excellence). He also encouraged wealthy merchants to set up Chinese language schools (Yen 1978: 8). Apart from the already existing *huiguan* and Chinese schools, a third vehicle for the promotion of nationalism was the circulation of newspapers.

The latter allowed for virtual connections between émigrés and their hometowns in the form of *qiaokan* or overseas Chinese magazines. Through these magazines, the hometowns sought to involve migrants in the development of the hometown, with education being an important aspect of this. However, the *qiaokan* mostly encouraged loyalty towards the native place rather than the creation of broader 'imagined communities' during this period (Hsu 2000). Apart from *qiaokan*, revolutionary newspapers, books and periodicals were published in Tokyo, Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Singapore and circulated through local branches of the *Tongmenghui* (Revolutionary Alliance) and affiliated organisations. To reach illiterate audiences, the revolutionaries used newsletters to spread cartoons with revolutionary contents, set up 'reading clubs' (*shubaoshe*), first in Singapore and Malaya between 1908 and 1911 and later throughout Southeast Asia and North America, and 'drama troupes' (Yen 1978: 16, 18-19).

In the context of mounting local nationalisms and anti-Sinicism, in terms of diaspora as group identity and difference, during this period, there was a tension between identification with what Kuhn has referred to as the 'primary community' based on dialect, kinship, and native place, and the 'secondary community' based on supra-dialect, supra-kinship and pan-Chinese principles (Kuhn 2008). The Chinese state played an important role in this process as new migrants arrived from China, and as cultural and

political identification became a central issue. In combination with a new wave of migration, especially with female migration being permitted, communities that consisted of Chinese of 'pure' Chinese heritage born in China expanded. Both the Chinese and intermediate communities such as the *Babas* were therefore faced with choices regarding identification: they could preserve their distinct identity, integrate further into the host societies, or opt for 're-Sinification'. The latter meant adopting Chinese language and customs and identifying with the social and political interests of the Chinese community at large, a choice that was sometimes driven by local community leaders rather than the Chinese state (McKeown 1999). Here, diversity existed in the form of the different identification choices the Chinese communities made, with dialect and kinship divisions co-existing with pan-Chinese nationalism.

Identification choices were complicated by the presence of reformers and revolutionaries who competed with the government for the support of the Chinese diaspora. Between 1900 and 1911, revolutionaries led by Sun Yat-sen, reformers under Kang Youwei, and the Qing government alike courted the Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asia and elsewhere to support their causes. With the Qing government failing in its protection of the Chinese overseas against exclusion laws that emerged in the settler societies of North America, New Zealand, and Australia, the revolutionaries exploited anti-Manchu sentiment in overseas Chinese communities (Yen 1978: 8). Here, again, the term *huaqiao* served to unite the Chinese diaspora and to win their hearts and minds. Southeast Asian Chinese played an important role in Sun's efforts, with the Singapore branch of the Revolutionary Alliance founded in 1906. It became the Nanyang headquarters of the Alliance in 1908, but due to limited support, Sun Yat-sen relocated the headquarters to Penang in 1909 (Wang 1981:133). Even so, the majority of *huaqiao* in Singapore and Malaya did not support the revolutionaries (Duara 1997; Yen 1978: 13-14). In 1909, China proclaimed a 'Nationality Law of 1909' based on *jus sanguinis* or right of blood. Under this law, all those born of Chinese parents were Chinese.

The identification with China was the strongest during the 1930s. The 1911 Revolution was thwarted by the attempts of Yuan Shikai to restore the monarchy. The Beiyang

government in Beijing and Sun Yat-sen's Kuomintang in Guangzhou competed for legitimacy in a country torn apart by warlord factions. After unification in 1927, and especially after the Japanese occupation during the 1930s, Chinese communities abroad opted for 're-Sinification': they increasingly identified with China rather than with their hometowns and sent massive amounts of remittances to China (Clammer 1975: 13; Hsu 2000). Singapore played an important role in this 'Nanyang Chinese nationalism' during China's war with Japan. It was home to the headquarters of the biggest global overseas Chinese relief fund organisation, the Federation of China Relief Fund of the South Seas, which raised almost C$200 million and which also organized the sending of voluntary troops, technicians, and labourers (Koh 2013).

Overall, the three meanings of diaspora intersected in the question of political and cultural identification with 'China' during this period. The presence of consulates and efforts by competing political forces to reach out to the Chinese communities influenced the institutionalization of group identity. Diversity was a question of the degree of identification as the influx of new migrants from China transformed existing intermediate communities who had lost their socio-economic niches. Finally, the Chinese government now actively claimed its diaspora and made efforts to obtain its economic, political, and cultural support.

Decolonisation, the Cold War, and Remigration after 1949

With decolonisation in Southeast Asia, the 'pillars' of the Chinese communities (organizations, schools, and newspapers) were eradicated in some nation-states and preserved in others. Assimilation policies of different degrees, depending on factors such as the relative size of the communities and the nature of the political system, were put in place in the various countries of Southeast Asia. Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand implemented strong assimilation policies, with community organisations being dismantled and newspapers and school shut down. In Thailand, which had not been colonized, cultural assimilation policies such as the 'Thai-ification' of Chinese schools, political repression, and economic nationalist policies had already been in place since the early twentieth century (Skinner 1957). Malaysia and Brunei, both with Chinese

communities that constitute a large percentage of the total population, applied less drastic policies that allowed for the preservation of group identities. In Malaysia, for example, Chinese secondary schools continued to exist, but they were subjected to government control (Suryadinata 1997: 11-13). Even though the relevance of national assimilation policies during this period challenges the use of the concept of diaspora in favor of 'ethnic Chinese', the former remains relevant for this period because it was the *perception* of a unified Chinese diaspora, more loyal to China than to the host societies and in this sense a problem, that strongly influenced these policies.

Cultural assimilation was often coupled with economic policies directed at benefiting indigenous entrepreneurs. For example, in Indonesia, the *benteng* system, which restricted the import of certain goods to indigenous entrepreneurs only, was introduced during the 1950s. In 1959, the ethnic Chinese were also prevented from engaging in retail trade outside of cities. In the Philippines, the Filipino First Policy (1948-1972) led to the nationalisation of several industries; Malaysia pursued its New Economic Policy (NEP) (1970-1990) to increase the Malay share in economic activity. Differences within diaspora regarding cultural and political identification with China were hence intensified during this period.

As for the claiming of the Chinese diaspora by the Chinese state, after 1949, a contradictory policy of engagement and disengagement took shape. Initially, the PRC continued to engage with the Chinese overseas, returnees, and dependents and gave preferential treatment to these groups because it relied on remittances for efforts of economic development and industrialisation. However, in the context of the Cold War and the spread of Communism in Southeast Asia, the Chinese in the region come to be regarded a 'fifth column' serving China's interests (Wang 1981: 279). This perceived lack of political loyalty to the host countries was conjoined to suspicion caused by economic dominance rooted in the historical socio-economic status of the middlemen (Suryadinata 2007: 4).

The Nationality Law of 1909 had proclaimed all Chinese overseas as Chinese subjects, and the law of 1929 continued this *ius sanguinis* principle. With colonial administrations mostly relying on the principle of *ius soli* or place of birth as a basis for nationality, the resulting de facto dual nationality became a problem during the period of decolonisation (Kratoska 1993). In response to this, the Treaty on Dual Nationality between China and Indonesia of 1955 ended this ambiguity. Chinese nationals abroad were asked to choose a nationality, and they were usually encouraged to take up local nationality. *Huaqiao* who intended to return to China were separated from *huaren*, who chose host country nationality. Even though the treaty was not always applied the disengagement with the ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia continued throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

Between 1949 and 1961, about half a million Chinese arrived in or returned to the PRC, driven by patriotism towards China and tensions in Southeast Asian countries (Fitzgerald 1972). In 1965-1966, thousands more arrived in China when a coup in Indonesia was followed by an anti-communist purge that also targeted ethnic Chinese. The 'returned overseas Chinese' (*guiqiao*) were given a distinct legal status and they were segregated from local Chinese on overseas Chinese farms (*huaqiao nongchang*), and in special villages and schools, resulting in a 'unique form of ethnicity' (Ford 2014: 240). As class struggle in the PRC intensified, the 'foreign relations' of the 'disobedient' returned overseas Chinese (*guiqiao*) were considered problematic; they were labelled as members of an exploitative class in the early 1960s (Chan 2014: 233). During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), policies towards the Chinese overseas were discontinued and relatives of the Chinese overseas were persecuted because of 'capitalist' associations (Fitzgerald 1972). Hence, regarding the Chinese state claiming 'its' diaspora, this period witnessed the tension between engagement for the purpose of remittances and disengagement because of the perceived 'capitalist' ideology of the Chinese diaspora.

Economic Reform and the New Migrants since 1978

Even though diaspora as a community intent on returning has become more problematic since the start of the reform era, questions of group identity have received a new impetus with the arrival of 'new migrants' (*xin yimin*) from all over China globally. With the

liberalisation of migration laws in North America, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand, the latter became primary destination countries, but migration to Southeast Asia also continued. These 'new migrants,' estimated to have reached about 9 million, consisted of students who had remained abroad after graduation and of professionals, but also of chain migrants and irregular migrants. An important difference with the older generations of migrants was that these 'new migrants' were mostly highly educated Chinese nationals with vast transnational networks.

In Southeast Asia, due to growing land connectivity and investment from China, insular Southeast Asia in particular has witnessed the influx of new migrants. During the early 1990s, with support of the Asian Development Bank, the Great Mekong Sub-region (GMS) countries of Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, and China entered into an economic cooperation programme. Here, hydraulic projects and mining attracted a new wave of Chinese labour migration in countries such as Cambodia and Laos, which historically had smaller Chinese communities because of their inland location (Tan 2012). Consequently, a gradual restoration of the key institutions of the Chinese communities, such as schools, newspapers, and community organizations followed in these insular countries, even though Mainland interests and agents were largely driving this restoration (Nyíri 2012).

In maritime Southeast Asia, the number of new migrants from China has been smaller in comparison, but here too, the older communities have been faced with more economic, political, and cultural influence from Mainland China. This has prompted a new wave of 're-Sinicisation' or a renewed emphasis on Chinese identity in intermediate communities such as the *Mestizos* in the Philippines and the *Peranakans* in Indonesia. Apart from the celebration of Chinese ancestry, Chinese rituals and holidays have also been reinstated in certain Southeast Asian countries, even though these are manifestations of a *totok* ('pure') and not a *Peranakan* Chinese culture from a local perspective (Hau 2014). As such, there are certain parallels with the early twentieth century, when the rise of nationalism and the arrival of new migrants confronted Chinese communities in Southeast Asia with political and cultural identification choices that transcended identification based on dialect, class,

or native place. However, during the late twentieth century, Mainland Chinese capital was an important driver behind these choices.[2] Nevertheless, the local support for this renewed emphasis on 'Chinese' identity signifies an important shift with previous historical periods during which this identity was suppressed.

Adapting to new needs, voluntary organisations have transformed themselves into transnational and even global organisations. Although membership of some of these organisations remained based on kinship or locality, it became more open in practice and oriented towards business networking both with China and within the Chinese diaspora. New types of organisations emerged, such as professional or alumni organisations. These organisations set up regular large-scale events, often with the support of hometown governments in China (Liu 1998). New migrants also set up their own organisations. Hence, during this latest period, diaspora as group identity has centered around the question of the relation between the older and newer communities and the renewed influence of Mainland Chinese culture on the existing communities.

The family structure itself has also undergone massive changes. For some of the new migrants, education has become a migration strategy, with children being placed at prestigious universities in the West. New types of 'astronaut families', in which family members are spread between continents and shuttle back and forth to combine business with family reunions, have emerged (Waters 2005). Discourses on transnationalism have gone hand in hand with notions of 'flexible citizenship' shaped by strategic considerations and 'deterritorialized' forms of belonging (Ong and Nonini 1997; Ong 1999). Here, diaspora as the erosion of fixed and static boundaries appears most manifest. Even Chinese talent migration policies have made increasing room for contributions of highly skilled Chinese from abroad. In this 'temporal-spatial stretch', policies have facilitated contributions from abroad and the transnational circulation of talented Chinese (Leung 2015). Diaspora as homeland ties has equally been transformed in the Internet era, which permits 'transmigrants' to become multi-local and to 'manage and mirror their physical mobility in a globalized world' (Ip and Yin 2016: 166).

[2] We thank Wang Gungwu for bringing this point to our attention.

In spite of the seeming erosion of boundaries, however, the Chinese state has become once again pro-active in claiming its diaspora. Although the PRC relaxed its emigration restrictions during the early 1980s, it also promulgated the 1980 Nationality Law, which reiterated the no dual nationality principle of the 1955 Sino-Indonesian Treaty. During the first stage of economic reform (1978-1994), China particularly sought investment from the Chinese diaspora, with the majority of investments coming from the Chinese in Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia (Smart and Hsu 2004). Since 2000, it has focused on the development of high-tech industrial development parks and knowledge-intensive development models, with highly skilled Chinese being the focus of policies. Hence, the Chinese state continues to play a significant role in regulating mobility patterns through a well-established system of diaspora policies and institutions (Liu and van Dongen 2016).

As China emerges as the second largest economy in the world and takes on a more assertive foreign policy, the age-old question of identification and internal divisions with the Chinese diaspora has resurfaced. However, it has done so in a different national and regional context of firmly established Southeast Asian states, thus exercising a much stronger degree of political, economic and cultural control over their ethnic Chinese populations. Re-engagement with the Chinese in Southeast Asia driven by economic interests and based on Mainland understandings of 'Chineseness' ignores the complex identity processes of those who belong to different generations, classes, dialect groups, and places of origin, and who have been subjected to a variety of identity politics in their countries of residence.

Conclusion

The tension between the three meanings of diaspora in the five main 'moments' discussed reflects not only the changing nature and interests of the Chinese diaspora, but also the changing nature and interests of the Chinese/Southeast Asian states. Firstly, group identity, even though based on a set of stable organizational principles, altered in tandem with both policies in China and in the host societies. Initially condemned by the Chinese state as traitors, the bachelor communities of Chinese 'sojourners' set up trading

partnerships, utilised vast networks, and gradually secured their socio-economic position during the early colonial period. With mass migration, they set up native-place and other organisations, schools, and newspapers, which received support from the Chinese state during the height of political and cultural identification with China at the turn of the twentieth century. During the period of decolonisation and the Cold War, Southeast Asian governments suppressed the same community organizations for fear of being extensions of the Chinese revolution of 1949. Since the start of reform and opening up in the late 1970s, 're-Sinicization' efforts or the explicit cultural identification with 'Chineseness' reflect the tension between local and Mainland understandings of 'Chineseness.' Changes in the relation between Chinese communities and the homeland are also reflected in shifts in migration patterns. These evolved from the willingness to return to China permanently, not only during the early period but also in the case of returnees during the Cold War, to complex patterns of remigration and temporary migration.

Secondly, that diaspora is not a single and static entity is clear throughout the various historical periods. Merchants, artisans, and labourers already constituted part of the Chinese diaspora during the early colonial period. They furthermore organized themselves based on the intersecting principles of dialect, native place, and surname, even though supra-dialect organisations were already present. Class distinctions are equally important, as petty merchants and labourers complicate the image of the socio-economically established middlemen. Specific connectivities, networks, and flows demonstrate the relevance of thinking of diaspora-as-difference in addition to the broader strokes of homeland ties as discussed above. Variations in political and cultural identification and the tension between local and trans-local identification marked the early twentieth century, when the Chinese government actively reached out to Chinese communities in Southeast Asia. With decolonization, local policies in Southeast Asian countries with regard to community organizations, Chinese language schools and newspapers further influenced differences regarding political and cultural identification with 'China.' Since the reform and opening up, the arrival of 'new migrants' in Southeast Asian countries adds another layer of dynamic regarding identity-as-difference. Finally,

we should note that increasing variation in channels of migration, types of employment, places of origin, motivations for migration, class backgrounds, and religious diversity add to the lack of the existence of 'a' Chinese diaspora.

In spite of this diversity and fluidity, however, the Chinese state has since long laid claim on 'its' diaspora, even though the markers of belonging and unbelonging have shifted over time. At first unwilling to accept migration and considering its diaspora as traitors, the claiming took the form of preventing emigration. The Chinese state first actively reached out to its diaspora during the late nineteenth century, with a peak during the early twentieth century. During this period, the Chinese diaspora was part and parcel of the struggle for ideological legitimacy between the CCP and the KMT. After decolonization, the Chinese state engaged in a precarious balancing act of engagement for the purpose of remittances and disengagement because of ideological distrust. Since reform and opening up, this ambiguity has made room for a full-fledged charm offensive and the promotion of a Mainland understanding of 'Chineseness,' driven by economic investment and, more recently, regional infrastructure projects under the 'One Belt One Road' initiative that was launched in late 2013 to economically and strategically connect China with its neighbouring countries alongside the maritime Silk Road and Central Asia. It remains to be seen what the long-term implications of the dynamic interaction between older communities, new migrants, and the renewed Sino-Southeast Asian connectivity in the context of a rising China will bring. The latest diasporic 'moment,' in short, has yet to run its course.

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