

# Chinese Migration and Entangled Histories: Broadening the Contours of Migratory Historiography

KELVIN E.Y. LOW\*

**Abstract** This paper broadens the analytical contours of Chinese migration by employing the paradigm of *histoire croisée*. By comparing three connected episodes within the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: (1) British expansionism; (2) Kuomintang activities and British migratory legislation; and (3) the interconnection of the slump in China's silk industry, the anti-marriage movement, and the inter-twinement of historiographies of China and Singapore – the entangled histories approach offers analytic purchase for which Chinese migration can be scrutinised with attention paid to the interpellations of historical contingencies and economic relations. The paper therefore analyses broader sociocultural and political patterns that inflect migratory flows, and considers the significance of how migratory historiography bears upon social memory of Chinese female migrants.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chinese Migration and Entangled Histories

Chinese migration in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries may be understood as part of the global wave of migration that took place in corresponding times.<sup>1</sup> Recent studies have contextualised migration and world history by comparing, for instance, transatlantic migration with Asian migration using a global comparative perspective that problematise the assumed distinction between Atlantic and Asian migratory processes.<sup>2</sup> Such works have also focused on micro and meso levels of migration decisions in analysing the relation between the family and migration in both western European and Chinese household economies<sup>3</sup>; as well as evaluating the interconnections between free white migration, European colonialism and non-Atlantic migration regimes through a closer examination of hierarchies of labour markets.<sup>4</sup> Fundamentally, these endeavours avail a broader global-comparative frame of reference<sup>5</sup> which transcends national or regional histories as organising templates.<sup>6</sup> It is my intention to recalibrate the focus

\* Kelvin Low is Assistant Professor of Sociology at the National University of Singapore. He may be contacted at [kelvinlow@nus.edu.sg](mailto:kelvinlow@nus.edu.sg). The author would like to thank the three anonymous reviewers, Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka, Gudrun Lachenmann, and Noorman Abdullah, for their invaluable comments on earlier drafts of the paper.

and broaden the contours of Chinese migratory history and historiography. By collectively appraising different components of migratory and global processes, the aim here is not so much to argue that the migratory West does not differ substantially from the migratory-rest of the world,<sup>7</sup> but that global patterns and structures of mass mobilities impinge on one another towards influencing the tides of Chinese migration.

Given the links between Chinese emigration and local, regional and global vicissitudes including socio-political relations with British Malaya and other Western powers, how can one recompose migratory historiography in the interest of maneuvering beyond variant models of push-pull socioeconomic and political dynamics<sup>8</sup> to consider links between other factors? What interpretive and methodological frameworks might be suitable toward examining these various dynamics and the impact on migration, social memory, and settler societies? Chinese migration is therefore a suitable phenomenon from which historical intersections may be compared toward illustrating the complex web of social and political milieu that has bearings on migration and other social consequences.<sup>9</sup> Besides, an added dimension of this paper addresses both synchronic and diachronic aspects of migrant history given that migration ought to be interpreted as a process rather than an event.<sup>10</sup> The purpose here is to reframe history and historiography of Chinese migration by juxtapositioning various points of migratory flows entwined within processes of colonialism, economic growth, and governance of peoples occurring in a specific historical milieu. What global forces impinged upon Chinese migration, and, likewise, how did migratory movements influence and shape global shifts of empire-building, governance, and political developments? The analyses pay attention to multiple convergent forces of historical contingencies, structural economic relations, as well as local cultural forms.<sup>11</sup> In this respect, migration ought to be evaluated within the frame of global history, whereby “different contexts [then] become visible at different levels of analysis”.<sup>12</sup>

I employ the paradigm of *histoire croisée*<sup>13</sup> both as an interpretive and methodological framework. This manoeuvre goes beyond historiographical particularism or what Conrad terms “national instalments”,<sup>14</sup> understood as the output of historiography driven by the confines of the national perspective. Entangled histories – otherwise mentioned in the same breadth as “connected histories”<sup>15</sup>, history as analysed through a “relational basis”<sup>16</sup>, and the idea of “shared history”<sup>17</sup> – emerged in response to extant discussions on comparative and transfer approaches from which it draws upon some salient features.<sup>18</sup> Entangled histories stresses processes of intercrossings and intersections, and is both relational

and reflexive as an approach.<sup>19</sup> Where the comparative method focuses on synchrony and addresses similarities and differences between cases<sup>20</sup>, transfer studies in turn emphasise a diachronic logic<sup>21</sup>. The synchronic logic that comparativists employ has to do with adopting a cross-sectional approach, or what is termed as a “pause in the flow of time”.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, diachronicity in transfer studies refers to processes of transformation over time. *Histoire croisée* then conjoins these two registers so as to be more comprehensive in engaging with historical continuity and change.

McKeown argues that the various aspects of migration – including recruitment processes, institutional and social factors, boundaries and borders, networks, regulatory and legal stimuli or barriers – cannot be reduced to a single location, but ought to be analysed as interwoven conditions.<sup>23</sup> A parallel may also be found in Gozzini’s notion of a “migration system that takes into consideration a conjugation of similar factors”.<sup>24</sup> Broadly, the entangled histories approach corresponds to what is known as middle-range theories<sup>25</sup> that reflect upon a theorisation of migration. The interest lies in analysing “narratives about how things got ‘from here to there’ including the multiple contingencies and reversals encountered in the process”.<sup>26</sup> Such analysis would therefore aid in delineating relevant structural constraints as well as other obstacles that affect specific individual or collective endeavours. I illustrate below historical and historiographical intercrossings with regard to migratory courses and the socio-political conditions of China and British Malaya. These will also be interpreted in relation to Chinese women’s migratory patterns. The main goal of the paper is therefore to interrogate broader sociocultural patterns that inflect migratory flows,<sup>27</sup> as well as consider the significance of how migratory historiography bears upon social memory of Chinese female migrants in the long run. In what follows, I document three select entangled confluences which intersect with socio-political and economic dynamics taking place between China and British Malaya. I also provide a brief background to the larger study of which this paper forms a part, including some notes on the methodological approaches and sources of data employed in the ensuing section.

## **Background of Research and Methodology**

This article is drawn from a larger research project focusing on a group of Cantonese female migrants known as *samsui* women where I engaged with analyses on social memory and constructions of the nation.<sup>28</sup> *Samsui* women migrated to *Nanyang* (Southeast Asia) in the early decades of the twentieth century. Known in everyday parlance as *hong tou jin* (红头巾), translated literally as

“red-head-scarf”,<sup>29</sup> these women came from peasant families in the *Samsui* area of the coastal province of Guangdong in China.<sup>30</sup> They often toiled in the fields at a very young age and were therefore able to take up work at construction sites in Singapore when they emigrated. Some of them also worked on rubber plantations, ships (where they formed the cleaning and maintenance crew), and engaged in other odd jobs in factories as well as domestic service. In the case of working in the construction industry, *samsui* women were mainly hired on a contract basis that spanned between a few days or a week, depending on the construction project and labour requirements. This was in contrast to the *ma cheh* (Cantonese female domestic workers) who were usually hired on a permanent basis with both expatriate families and local employers.

These women have formed the subject of a plethora of social memory texts ranging from art, literature, popular history books, to media outlets (such as documentaries and television series) and public exhibitions over the past few decades. More often than not, they have been presented in the fore as paramount figures of Singapore’s built-up infrastructure and as paragons of thrift and resilience. Social memory and historiographical texts of these women are however selective and limited, given that attention has often been placed upon their distinct livery (with the red head scarf becoming iconic and synonymous with them) and their involvement in the construction industry. At the same time, they have been remembered as never-married female migrants who assumed the breadwinner role in supporting their families in China. These limited characterisations bring about a neglect of their everyday life experiences that include their marital background prior to migrating, their decisions to seek a livelihood in Singapore (as well as trips made to China after migration), or their varied roles as (adoptive) mothers and as daughters-in-law.

The larger project therefore explores how *samsui* women are remembered and instrumentalised as pioneering figures in Singapore and China. It examines in greater detail the lives of these women through analytical lens located within the fields of social memory and migration studies. While I explore different scales of memory-making and the connection to migratory historiography in the larger study – by analysing varied perspectives of memory-makers, memory-making across nations (Singapore and China), and the temporalities and boundaries of memory-making in contemporary Singapore – the direction taken in this paper focuses on historical and historiographical analyses of Chinese migration between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries. Data employed for the present paper is drawn mainly from academic literature on Chinese migration spanning this period, popular history writings

that mention *samsui* women in accounts of the past, and archival materials (for example, Proceedings of the Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements, and Singapore newspaper articles in English and Chinese dated between the 1930s and 2000s) procured from the National Archives in Singapore.<sup>31</sup>

### Historical and Historiographical Intersections

I propose that adopting the notion of “global history”<sup>32</sup> is beneficial towards bringing to the fore “multipolar and pluralistic perspectives on the past”<sup>33</sup>. An examination of the three selected historical intertwinements will demonstrate how history and the idea of the nation-state are reconfigured and reanalysed within the context of transnational processes.<sup>34</sup> I conceive of historical intersections as the loci within which events and/or phenomena take place simultaneously; i.e. as it took place concurrently in the past (“History” as it happened across various nations). Historiographical junctures, then, point to the meeting points or what I term “synchronic situatedness”<sup>35</sup> where these pasts have been written either in consensual or contrasting ways.<sup>36</sup> Cumulatively, both historical and historiographical intersections are explored through examples drawn from three intercrossings where I demonstrate how one event leads to the other and come to impinge upon each other. The three entangled episodes to follow comprise both synchronic and diachronic analyses, given my main interest in teasing out socio-historical processes *in situ* as well as across a longer period of time so as to offer analyses on memory-making and migratory dynamics.

#### Entangled Histories I – British Expansionism and Chinese Emigration

The first historical intersection lies within British expansionism in *Nanyang* in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries where economic interdependency brought about Chinese immigration due to the high demand for labour.<sup>37</sup> This demand was later extended to female immigrants in the nineteen hundreds, especially with the boom in the rubber and tin industries.<sup>38</sup> The direction of labour migration was also steered towards British governed areas, given the anti-Chinese policies adopted by other Western nations.<sup>39</sup> Chinese labour immigration therefore arrived in the newly colonised Southeast Asian nations. The aim here is to first identify the crossroads where British expansionism and Chinese emigration meet, and then deliberate upon attendant socio-political consequences.

Mass Chinese emigration commenced from the mid-eighteenth century onwards and persisted right into the nineteen twenties.<sup>40</sup> While it has been widely acknowledged that such mass movement of people was enacted within China itself, other factors which catapulted Chinese emigration stemmed from external influences and circumstances. Western imperial ambitions spread its scope worldwide where the extraction of resources, the selling of manufactured goods, and the requirement of substantial numbers of labourers took place. A suitable point of departure may be traced to the Opium War of 1839–42. Fought between the Qing Dynasty and the British East India Company, the Opium War took place as the British wanted to defend their right to trade, while the Chinese wanted a “crusade against opium” due to opium addiction, market sluggishness arising from expenditure on opium, and other repercussions on the Chinese domestic economy.<sup>41</sup> The Opium War precipitated the engagement of China with Western powers such as the British and the French where several unequal treaties were signed.<sup>42</sup> One of the treaties, the Treaty of Nanking of 1842, included a clause where China had to agree to the opening of five Chinese ports in Fuzhou, Amoy, Guangdong, Ningpo and Shanghai to British trade. Chinese emigration was therefore facilitated as a result of the war, as the Nanking treaty provided a legal framework through which the recruitment of mass numbers of labourers was enacted.<sup>43</sup>

Apart from the Opium War and the resultant diplomatic and commercial relations between China and the British, the prospects of the tin mining industry and other agricultural enterprises also attracted many Chinese newcomers to the region. For instance, most of the Chinese immigrants toiled as labourers in the various industries of tapioca and pepper farms, and sugar-cane and gambier plantations.<sup>44</sup> Control of tin production in Malaya, up to the middle of the nineteenth century, was in the hands of the Malays.<sup>45</sup> Since then, Chinese immigrants arrived in the Malay States of Perak and Selangor given the discovery of rich ore deposits in these mining districts.<sup>46</sup> Large-scale exportation of tin relied on Chinese miners who replaced the Malays in supplying tin to British and other European traders.<sup>47</sup> For the Malays, mining was typically carried out during the off-season of rice-planting as a way of supplementing their agricultural income.<sup>48</sup> Conversely, the Chinese worked full-time in tin mining. It was also noted that the Malay population’s engagement in padi-growing and fishing was “more congenial than regimented” which therefore did not sit well with the nature of mining that was regarded as “monotonous work”.<sup>49</sup> The Chinese were thus identified with the expansion of the Malayan tin mining industry,<sup>50</sup> where the important growth period of the tin industry commenced from the 1840s.<sup>51</sup>

Chinese migration in the latter half of the eighteenth century comprised mainly coolies rather than merchants. Such migratory flows partly resulted from the Peking Treaty of 1860, which facilitated contract labourers in working overseas.<sup>52</sup> In addition, Blythe denotes the inception of large-scale Chinese immigration to Malaya at around 1850, given the following reasons.<sup>53</sup> First, an increase in demand for tin was brought about as a result of the growth of the tin-plate industry in Europe and America.<sup>54</sup> Britain and America were the major importers of Straits tin in the nineteenth century.<sup>55</sup> Second, there was also an expansion in the tin mining industry in the Malay areas of Larut, Kinta, and Selangor in the 1880s, culminating in a boom in the industry in 1898. A marked increase in wages thereby motivated Chinese labour migration, where no fewer than 100,000 Chinese immigrants arrived in the Federated Malay States.<sup>56</sup> Specifically, the number of Chinese immigrants arriving in British Malaya, following the British Forward Movement of 1874, stood at about 150,000 immigrants per annum during the 1880s and 1890s. These numbers increased to more than 300,000 annually in the 1920s.<sup>57</sup>

In addition to Chinese migrant flows, a few words on the economic interdependency between the Chinese and the British are in order here. Chinese merchants served as middlemen who facilitated the functioning of the colonial economy including the production and exportation of commodities such as gambier, pepper, and opium.<sup>58</sup> For the Chinese, the British were instrumental in the sense that the presence of a colonial political and economic system buttressed Chinese economic advancement.<sup>59</sup> Trocki echoes a similar point by depicting the relationship between the Chinese and the Europeans as one where the former relied on the latter for both the supply of capital and protection of property, while the latter depended on the former for financial gains vis-à-vis the Chinese economic infrastructure.<sup>60</sup> This took place in the late nineteenth century where monopoly rights for the operation of gambling and opium dens were farmed out by the British to Chinese *towkays* who paid high prices for these “revenue farms”. British administrators therefore profited substantial annual revenue from these farms.<sup>61</sup> Ostensibly, this British-Chinese interdependency – what Chai terms as the “symbiotic relationship between the British administrators and the Chinese immigrants”<sup>62</sup> – further elucidates the usefulness of the entangled histories approach. Many layers of historical situations such as the development of commodity markets and diplomatic ties have been taken into account. These thereby help in explaining British-Chinese socio-economic relations during this period.

An attendant diachronic consequence of Chinese migration, together with the involvement of the Chinese labourers and mer-

chants in the colonial economy, is the emergence of a pioneer narrative which consigns Chinese immigrants as the “real pioneers and makers of modern Malaya”.<sup>63</sup> Typified as “the most industrious and useful portion of the Asiatic part of the population” and as “the most active and valuable agents in developing the resources of the Peninsula”,<sup>64</sup> this pioneer script which underscores Chinese migrants’ contributions is also extended to Chinese female immigrants such as *samsui* women, who have been recorded as “the mothers of Singapore”.<sup>65</sup>

Chinese labour migration forms part of the globalisation processes during the period of colonial expansionism and hence the term “global history” complements such a process of labour transfer. Cohen asserts that the migration of peoples forms a central theme of global history.<sup>66</sup> This process is mediated by the interpellation of economic, social and political circumstances. The link between the adoption of a “global history” in synchrony with the study of globalisation is therefore a suitable premise, given an advocacy for “historiography . . . to inject a narrative tradition into the study of globalisation”.<sup>67</sup> As McKeown argues similarly, analysing Chinese migration using a global approach is beneficial towards comprehending global circulations of commodities, people, and money. Attention is therefore placed upon the different links and connections that together form the broad contours of Chinese migration.<sup>68</sup>

In sum, Chinese (labour) migration is layered with different issues surrounding loyalty to the Chinese court, interspersed with familial notions of piety. At the same time, it cross-cuts the search for a livelihood outside of poverty and famine in China. Other stimuli for out-migration include the outbreak of civil wars such as the Taiping Rebellion (1850–1864) and the Moslem Rebellion (1855–1873), rising birth rates in several southern coast communities, and increases in the cost of rice.<sup>69</sup> On the other end of the migratory spectrum lay British economic interests of colonial expansionism in the management of the tin and rubber industries, amid other imperialist agendas. While the British were initially keen on recruiting Chinese labour as addressed, their attitudes towards Chinese migrants later changed. This was a result of perceived threats of the spread of Chinese nationalism and the constitutive effects on the Chinese community in Singapore in the first few decades of the twentieth century.<sup>70</sup> This leads me to the second historical juncture which forms a suitable continuation of British changing policies with regard to the flows of Chinese immigrants. Therefore, my interpretation of both synchronic and diachronic historical processes is consequently illustrated.



## Entangled Histories II – The KMT and Aliens Ordinance

The second historical intersection concerns the legislation of the 1933 Aliens Ordinance which restricted the entry of Chinese male immigrants, and later on, Chinese female immigrants. This legislation is important for a number of reasons. First, with the restrictions placed on the Chinese male immigrants at the onset, a role reversal of the breadwinner had been enacted where females took on the task of providing for the family through their work overseas by sending remittances back home. This was, as Blythe suggests, an inadvertent consequence of the Aliens Ordinance where the “old custom of the husband emigrating and sending money back to China for the support of this wife and family was reversed . . . [with] the wife emigrating to earn money for the husband and family in China”.<sup>71</sup> This point is also advanced by Ginsburg and Roberts who contend that “many women were going to Malaya precisely because restrictions were placed upon men; the women began to assume the same position of support to the family left at home that men had done previously”.<sup>72</sup> Second, while the Ordinance cursorily appears as a move legislated to curb migratory overflows, other historiographies of the Ordinance raise issues concerning anti-Chinese discrimination,<sup>73</sup> given that the Chinese were the ones largely affected by the immigration quota. Third, and connected to the second point, the Ordinance was also passed in order to quell the activities of the Kuomintang (KMT) which was believed to be plotting the creation of an “*imperium in imperio* in Malaya to destroy British rule and harm the economy”.<sup>74</sup> The Ordinance was thus interpreted as being promulgated not only to manage the migratory demographics but also to contain the “Chinese problem”.<sup>75</sup> Related to this was the economic concern brought about by the outbreak of the Great Depression which saw the rubber and tin industries facing acute problems. Hence, an intermingling of these factors led to the implementation of the Ordinance.

I foreword the linkages between British governance and the developments which took place in both Malaya and China by drawing lessons from Lim’s work on British policy towards the KMT in Malaya between 1912 and 1931.<sup>76</sup> Lim’s approach, in principle, is congruous with the entangled histories approach:

[D]evelopments within the Malayan KMT had direct influence on the formulation of British policy, but equally important were developments of the KMT in China. Indeed, one cannot examine British attitude towards the KMT in Malaya without any understanding of the political vicissitudes of the KMT in China and of British policy in China. It is just as pertinent to take into account the British perception of things, whether they were objective or not . . . It is not so much a concern of right or wrong

policies, but an examination of the circumstances in which they were shaped and the rationale behind their formulation.<sup>77</sup>

The KMT was founded in 1912 in Guangdong, which was a combination of several revolutionary groups that took part in the overthrowing of the Qing dynasty in the Xinhai Revolution.<sup>78</sup> Its principle aim was the political unification of China.<sup>79</sup> Dr. Sun Yat-Sen assumed leadership of the KMT.<sup>80</sup> With the proclamation of China as a Republic in 1911, Sun was elected as its first President. However, as he realised his inadequate position in handling chaos, civil wars, and foreign intervention, Sun offered his presidency to Yuan Shih-Kai who was responsible for suppressing and pacifying the rebels during the revolution of 1911. Yuan took office on 10 March 1912 and began to restore law and order in China.

Given the founding of the Chinese Republic in 1911, "British policy from 1911 was to prevent political refugees, political organisations and political riots from becoming institutionalised as forms of Chinese political participation in Malayan life under the aegis of the KMT".<sup>81</sup> Before 1911, the British colonial attitude towards the Chinese was that of drawing upon them as a source for capital, labour and economic expertise, while concomitantly keeping them quiescent politically. By 1912, it was thought that British Malaya was in need of protection from the onset of Chinese political and cultural nationalism. This was due to the perceived spread of Chinese nationalist sentiments and propaganda through the various outlets of vernacular schools developed by Chinese immigrants, the peopling of KMT branches, as well as the production of the immigrants' own newspapers.<sup>82</sup> Therefore, such developments brought about a shift in British governance from controlling the spread of Chinese nationalism to a hardening hand in the control of the KMT in particular. Interestingly, however, Purcell points out that the Straits Settlements government "denied that they regarded Chinese nationalism as a thing to be suppressed". Instead, the government only wanted aliens to "leave their domestic policies behind, particularly such manifestations thereof as conflicted with the interests and ideals of the country in which they were temporary residents".<sup>83</sup>

As a result of the incitement of violence and perceived spread of subversive propaganda, steps were taken by the British to control the situation. These include the 1930 Ordinance which declared the KMT an illegal society. Henceforth, any attempts made at organising KMT branches, or anyone who belonged to the KMT organisations, constituted a serious offence.<sup>84</sup> In reaction, the Chinese government protested against this ordinance and assured that the KMT was never interested in interfering with the affairs of Malaya and the British. According to Mills, the British's final

measure against subversive propaganda took form in the implementation of the Aliens Ordinance – first passed in the Straits Settlements, and later in the Malay states. This Ordinance made permanent the earlier Immigration Restriction Ordinance enforced since 1930. The Aliens Ordinance therefore gave power to the British to regulate immigration not limited only to labourers or domestic servants (which was the main purpose of the 1930 Ordinance), but extended the control to all adult male aliens. It follows that the Ordinance affected mainly Chinese adult males, given that they were the ones who were largely migrating to Malaya in large numbers.<sup>85</sup> Thereby, the Aliens Ordinance was perceived as an anti-Chinese measure, an issue to which I turn below.

Chinese coolies, Yong and McKenna point out, were “regarded as a political threat”, unlike their Javanese counterparts who were also a source of labour in British Malaya.<sup>86</sup> The increase in KMT activities in Malaya therefore induced changes in British policy with regard to the Chinese community. Banishment legislation was enacted as early as 1864 in order to quell the political subversion of nationalist activists. Such legislation also came about as a reaction to the disturbances and lawlessness caused by Chinese secret societies.<sup>87</sup> In 1913, amendments were made to the banishment laws. This was done to further tighten control and to eliminate political activists championing Chinese nationalism, which thus aided in the removal of political “undesirables”.<sup>88</sup> Further legislative measures pertaining to the control of immigrant labour can be discerned between the years of 1864 and 1953. They include the Chinese Immigration Ordinance of 1877,<sup>89</sup> the Labour Ordinance of 1912,<sup>90</sup> the Labour Contracts Ordinance of 1914, the Immigration Restriction Ordinance of 1930, the Aliens Ordinance of 1933, and the post-war Immigration Ordinance of 1953.<sup>91</sup> While the earlier Ordinances were passed to manage labour conditions and indentured labour in general, it was from the 1928 Ordinance onwards that the British adopted a stricter outlook in controlling the influx of “criminals and other undesirable elements”.<sup>92</sup>

Consequently, the passing of the 1933 Aliens Ordinance was met with much protest, hailed as an anti-Chinese move by various parties. A closer examination of the 1932 *Proceedings of the Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements* offer interesting insights into perceptions of the Ordinance as an anti-Chinese policy. It is worthwhile to quote at length Tan Cheng Lock’s<sup>93</sup> protest against this Ordinance at the second reading of the Aliens Bill:

The principles underlying the Bill are said to be the regulation of the immigration of aliens into the Colony and the control of their residence therein. In the Objects and

Reasons it is stated as follows: 'The main object of the Bill is to regulate the admission of aliens in accordance with the political, social, and economic needs for the moment of the various administrations of Malaya. Similar Bills will in due course be introduced in the Federated and Unfederated Malay States and it is primarily for the proper development of these States that this legislation is necessary'. These explanatory words, particularly the last 2 sentences, supply a clue to enable one to discover the true policy of the Government that is at the basis of the Bill. That policy . . . seems to be distinctly associated with definite political motives and designs.<sup>94</sup>

Tan furthers his arguments by stating that the 1928 Immigration Restriction Ordinance would already suffice in regulating immigrant labourers. He contends that at most, amendments could be made to the 1928 Ordinance in order to recalibrate control measures. Tan continues:

The question that arises in one's mind is whether this rather ruthless system of control over Chinese aliens contemplated by this Bill is justifiable or necessary in the interests of Malaya? The Immigration Restriction Ordinance can be made effectively to limit the number of Chinese aliens admitted to Malaya as and when necessary and enable their quality to be scrutinised before such admission, while the Banishment Ordinance gives the Governor in Council full powers to order the instant removal from the Colony of any alien whenever it appears to him after enquiry that the removal of such alien is conducive to public good . . . Perhaps a little discrimination may even be made in favour of Chinese aliens here, many of whom have come to settle down permanently in Malaya to be of great use to the Government and to the progress of the country as a whole and who therefore fall under a somewhat different category from the ordinary alien sojourners in other lands . . . My hon. Friend opposite, in moving the 1<sup>st</sup> reading of the Bill, used such vague expressions as the 'political unrest of recent years' and 'the spread of subversive political ideas' as a justification for the substitution of this rather oppressive measure against aliens, which may be warranted in terms of emergency but certainly not required in normal ones . . . The 'spread of subversive political ideas' apparently refer to the puny, casual and unsuccessful efforts, which can be easily dealt with by the machinery of the existing law . . .<sup>95</sup>

Tan then sums up by claiming the Bill as an "anti-Chinese policy" arising from "distrust and fear" which did not take into account, the contributions of the Chinese community in Malaya and their "consistently good behaviour and continuous devotion to the British Government".<sup>96</sup>

Tan's points are predicated on two main factors. First, he argues that any perceived political threat facing British Malaya during this time could easily be resolved. On top of that, extant Ordinances such as the Immigration Restriction Ordinance and the Banishment Ordinance were sufficient in handling any undesirable migrants that the British wished to control or deny entry. Second, Tan notes the various contributions Chinese immigrants played in the development of Malaya. He insists that without this group of "hardworking, capable, and law-abiding aliens",<sup>97</sup> the interests of

Malaya would be threatened, and that the problem of labour shortage would follow. Tan's remarks were met head-on with those who were in favour of the Bill. For instance, the Secretary for Chinese Affairs declares the objective of the Bill as follows:

Its object is the control of alien immigration into the Colony and the control of the residence of aliens in the Colony and nothing else . . . In conclusion, I am sorry that the hon. Chinese member for Malacca considers that this Bill discriminates against Chinese. I think the expression he used was 'part of an anti-Chinese policy'. I should be the last to deny the great part the Chinese have played in the development of Malaya. That, however, is the work of the Chinese whose descendants are the Straits-born Chinese of today and not of immigrant alien Chinese who may come to Malaya in future. This Bill, Sir, does not in any way discriminate against Chinese. It draws a sharp line between the British subject and the alien, and it treats alike all aliens whatever may be their nationality.<sup>98</sup>

The dismissal of anti-Chinese discriminatory attitudes in the implementation of the 1933 Ordinance is also purported by Purcell:

The restriction of immigrants applied to *all* aliens, but since the Chinese were most affected the measure was represented in interested quarters in China as discrimination against the Chinese race. This was not the case, and the considerations were purely economic, but it is the habit of politicians to interpret facts in the way that suits their own purposes.<sup>99</sup>

The tussle between interpreting the Aliens Bill as a discriminatory move against the Chinese, and the resolute stand of those in favour of the Bill who argued that it was directed not only at the Chinese migrants but all aliens who were not protected British subjects, evince different perceptions and reasoning for its implementation. I have also raised the preceding Ordinances prior to the Aliens Bill which therefore offer a diachronic assessment of how the Bill was passed in relation to managing migrant labour, being intertwined with different historical processes, previous legislatures and other social relations. Comprising Sino-British political propinquity, global economic downturn, and the formation of the Chinese community in British Malaya, these dynamics need to be explored concurrently in order to appraise how the Aliens Ordinance influenced Chinese migration. Having established the two different camps which interpret the Bill as discriminatory or otherwise, I now provide a brief interlude with regard to Png's evaluation that British concerns over the KMT were unfounded. This will illustrate another version that stands as a historiographical interpretation of this KMT episode in the history of Chinese migration.<sup>100</sup>

Png contends that the British worry in subversive activities of the KMT requires qualification. He notes that in historical accounts of the KMT in Malaya, it is mainly "Western" historians who have

referred to the KMT as “a subversive organisation whose aim was to help China colonise Malaya or to establish an *imperium in imperio*”.<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, Png opines, there is a “need to distinguish between purely Kuomintang activities and activities or propaganda carried out by extremists who claimed to be Kuomintang members but who were actually Communists”. Communists were members of the KMT until they were purged by Chiang Kai-shek in 1927.<sup>102</sup> Even so, the KMT was still “penetrated by leftist members who did not hesitate to spread their subversive doctrines wherever they went”.<sup>103</sup> Hence, Png arrives at the conclusion that these leftist members who preached subversion could have been Communists who entered Malaya through the KMT organisations. It is therefore necessary to distinguish between the KMT and the Communists, as the latter closely followed the former’s activities.<sup>104</sup> In sum, Png suggests that

the Kuomintang was interested in Malaya because of the wealth which the overseas Chinese commanded; its interest in the people was partly a corollary of its interest in their wealth, for by protecting the Chinese in Malaya and keeping the flame of patriotism burning, the Chinese in Malaya would continue to be a source of material support. Further as indicated earlier, the Chinese Government would like the Chinese abroad to remain Chinese, to look back to their country of origin. Thus the work of the Kuomintang in Malaya was in general China-centred, and not Malaya-centred. As such, to say that the Kuomintang regarded Malaya as the *terra irredenta* which China would claim at the earliest possible is inaccurate to say the least.<sup>105</sup>

My deliberation on the KMT–Aliens Ordinance episode in relation to immigration has shed light on a number of pertinent points. First, the intercrossings of varying socio-political factors, explained through attention paid to different terrains of historical processes and how they work together, attest to the assessment of Chinese immigration through my notion of synchronic situatedness – the meeting points of different historical trajectories. These converging points also culminate from a concurrent discussion of both the historiographies of British Malaya and China. Interpolating factors which transcend national boundaries therefore eventuated in the passing of the Aliens Ordinance. Second, the contestation of whether the Ordinance was legislated as an anti-Chinese policy has also brought forth interesting insights into the historiographies that surround this particular episode in the histories of both British Malaya and China.<sup>106</sup> In this respect, I have advanced from the earlier perspective of synchronic situatedness and incorporated attendant diachronic circumstances. This is evident from my deliberations earlier where I explained the shift in British attitudes towards Chinese migration from minimal control to more active management in reaction to political vicissitudes taking place in China and Malaya.

Third, similar or contrasting accounts of this historical episode demonstrate the politics involved in the production of historical knowledge, elucidating upon different ideological viewpoints in the process. This thereby resonates the “inherent *debatability* of the past”.<sup>107</sup> Triangulating a plurality of perspectives thus facilitates a comprehension of history and historiography through different lenses of analysis and interpretation. Fourth, the ways by which the historiography of the Ordinance and the KMT has been presented require further analysis in order to determine why and how these parts of China’s and Malaya’s histories have been recorded as such. These considerations also relate to Fulbrook’s argument that “historical writing is inevitably theoretical . . . [given that] . . . conflicting interpretations of the past are closely linked to political and moral positions”.<sup>108</sup> Where Parmer puts forward the idea that “civil disturbances in Singapore by Chinese were the immediate cause of the Ordinance enactment”<sup>109</sup>, others, however, have identified the enactment of the Ordinance as a means of controlling the migrant demography.<sup>110</sup> By appraising these different sources of historiography, one can then critically apprehend the vast historiographical canvas that highlights and/or downplays certain factors which account for how history is being reconstructed.

### Entangled Histories III – Samsui Women and Historiography

The third entangled episode focuses on *samsui* women, as earlier introduced. *Samsui* women’s migration was in part facilitated by the implementation of the Aliens Ordinance of January 1933. The Ordinance imposed on Singapore (then part of British Malaya) by the British saw many Chinese women migrating to Singapore in the nineteen-thirties. This Ordinance was preceded by the Immigration Restriction Ordinance of 1928. Under this 1928 Ordinance, quotas were imposed on male migrants. In the last free year of immigration in 1929, the number of Chinese male migrants amounted to 195,613. A year later, when the quota was imposed, the number fell to 151,693, and in 1931, to 49,723. Between January and September 1931, the quota imposed on male immigrants was 5,238, and between October and December, 2,500 per month. However, no restrictions were enforced on the immigration of women and children.<sup>111</sup>

The Immigration Restriction Ordinance was administered for almost four years before it was replaced by the Aliens Ordinance on 1 April 1933. The quota governing the entry of Chinese male migrants stood at 2,500 between January and July 1932, and was later reduced to 1,000 per month from August to December. Given that women were outside the quota, fees for the women’s passages

to migrate were reduced. Many thus took advantage of this to leave China.<sup>112</sup> This legislation consequently alleviated the uneven sex ratio in Malaya. Shiploads of Cantonese women arrived in Malaya between 1933 and 1938, with the migrational gain estimated at around 190,000 Chinese female deck passengers.<sup>113</sup> Female exemption from the Aliens Ordinance was, however, short-lived. This was because the authorities were compelled to impose restrictions on female immigration, given the large numbers of entry shortly before the outbreak of World War II. As a result, the quota system was amended in 1938 whereby the monthly quota restriction was also extended to female immigrants. The quota placed on both male and female immigrants in January 1938 stood at 3,000 per month. Five months later in May, the number was drastically reduced to only 500 men and 500 women per month. Female emigration was also affected due to the Sino-Japanese War of 1937 which restricted movement in South China. In all, the apogee of female immigration has been identified as taking place mainly in the early nineteen-thirties.

Female migration was not so much a case of dependency on male migrants. Rather, it was a series of female labour migration which typified the cycles of immigration in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – what Leeds terms as the shift of resources which include human labour capacity.<sup>114</sup> As Chiang also contends, it is timely and pertinent to analyse further the economic roles undertaken by the female immigrants as opposed to the traditional or stereotypical views of them as dependants, wives, daughters, or slaves.<sup>115</sup> Social changes, framed within global capitalism in historical times, need to be appraised through the dynamic interplay of varying social relations and forces. In this context, then, gender relations and women's positions are to be brought to the fore.<sup>116</sup>

My third and final historical juncture concerns the interconnection between the slump in the silk industry in nineteen-twenties-China, together with the anti-marriage movement which characterised not only female immigration per se, but also reconfigured gender relations in patriarchal households that witnessed a gender-role reversal. Additionally, *samsui* women have often been recorded as having taken the vow of celibacy, similar to *ma cheh*. This has resulted in the production of historical knowledge which celebrates *samsui* women's independence (drawn from their supposed celibacy), and have also brought forth an epithet of them being Asia's "first feminists". These forms of knowledge production concerning *samsui* women thereby establish a trope of independence which becomes a useful tool in pioneer appropriation of the women in Singapore and China. In this respect, narratives of the women's singlehood are often highlighted.



Two vectors of entanglement are forwarded here. First, the slump in the silk industry took place in concurrence with the Great Depression on a global scale as well as the implementation of the Aliens Ordinance which all culminate in facilitating the immigration of Chinese females to Southeast Asia. Second, the trope of female independence, drawn from the anti-marriage movement in certain parts of Southern China, has trickled into local (read: Singapore) historiographies of *samsui* women who have usually been homogenised with other groups such as *ma cheh*. I expound upon the historiographical entanglements among three related social actors and phenomenon in this third example, namely: (1) *ma cheh* who are the ones who have taken the vow of celibacy, thereby forming sworn singlehood; (2) *samsui* women who have been problematically recorded in different historiographical accounts, both official and popular, as having taken the vow of celibacy as well; and (3) the marriage resistance phenomenon in parts of Guangdong not including *Samsui*.

The Pearl River Delta area of Southern China – mainly parts of Guangdong including Shunde, Nanhai, and Panyu – was one of the great silk producing (“sericultural”) regions of China,<sup>117</sup> given its favourable geographical conditions. Moreover, the advent of industrialisation taking place in the mid-nineteenth century saw the establishment of factories and the introduction of mechanisation, where filatures were also set up. This resulted in the employment of mainly single women who were hired in cash-earning occupations in these silk factories since they had already been working with cocoons and the reeling and spinning of silk.<sup>118</sup> Unmarried women formed the majority of those who were hired, given their “fewer family commitments”.<sup>119</sup> What followed was that thousands of peasant households depended primarily on the earnings of a wife or daughter for their livelihood. The decline of the domestic economy, alongside the industrialisation of the silk industry, brought about a shift in the *local* breadwinner dynamics. There was thus an economic basis from which the anti-marriage position was taken up by these single females. They were able to form a part of the labour force of sericulture since they were accorded a means of supporting themselves and thereby attained a “high status”.<sup>120</sup> This is an interesting shift in comparison to how female immigrants also took up the breadwinner position *after* migration, which was a result of immigratory restrictions imposed upon the male migrants through the Aliens Ordinance.

While anti-marriage practices prevailed among most Cantonese women who migrated to *Nanyang* in the nineteen hundreds, *samsui* women formed a minority who have not been documented by scholars as having been a part of this marriage resistance.<sup>121</sup> Lay

reasons: “Whereas, in places such as Sanshui (*Samsui*) county where there was little or no silk reeling and filature work, the practice of marriage resistance was almost unheard of, and conventional marriage prevailed”.<sup>122</sup> Moreover, *Samsui* was “never a locality specifically identified with the Guangdong anti-marriage movement and very few villages were receptive to the marriage resistance customs”.<sup>123</sup>

I want now to establish the entanglement of the notion of avowed singlehood which has been tied in with *samsui* women’s life experiences. Historiographical accounts of these women have more often than not described them as having chosen singlehood and thereby form convenient figures of female independence, regarded by some writers as one of Asia’s “first feminists”.<sup>124</sup> This direction has been undertaken in both official and popular depictions of *samsui* women:

Among the different dialect groups, Cantonese women were the most liberated. An anti-marriage movement originated in the last century in Shunde, right in the heart of the Cantonese emigrant areas in Guangdong province. As a result a great number of Cantonese females entered pacts and sisterhoods directed against marriage, and left home for different pastures. Many ended up as earth-carriers and labourers in Singapore’s construction industry. Known popularly as *Samsui* women, having originated from Sanshui district, they were a common sight in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>125</sup>

**SAMSUI WOMEN.** Cantonese female construction workers. In the nineteenth and twentieth century Guangdong, substantial numbers of women (q.v.) took vows to abstain from marriage and formed sisterhoods. The vows were often made in a *sor hei* ceremony (Cantonese, meaning to comb up the hair in the fashion of married women), which was a declaration of independence from one’s family. Many women from these sisterhoods migrated to Southeast Asia. A good portion sought employment as amahs (domestic servants). In Singapore, those desiring work in road and other construction industries were known as *Samsui* women (after their origin in Sanshui district).<sup>126</sup>

The above point to an equation of *samsui* women with celibacy and singlehood without providing further explanation concerning their marital status. Additionally, some accounts thread together the celibate practices of *ma cheh* with *samsui* women, homogenising them as a collective group of Cantonese women who were known for their steadfastness against marriage.<sup>127</sup> Although there are works – both official and popular – which rightly mention *samsui* women as having married prior to migration, or were married thereafter,<sup>128</sup> the general perception of *samsui* women remains with them being taken as synonymous with anti-marriage sentiments; a notion plausibly drawn from marriage resistance practices in Guangdong. One need therefore be apprised of the distinction between those Cantonese women such as *ma cheh* who did take up the vow of

celibacy and chose singlehood, in opposition to other Cantonese women such as *samsui* women who were not part of this group.<sup>129</sup>

My discussion has exemplified entangled connections and contestations at different levels through this third intersection. First, in order to better understand why and how Cantonese women are set apart from other Chinese women of their times, my exposition of the anti-marriage movement, in concordance with the sericulture of Guangdong, has been illustrative in accounting for how socio-economic structures have influenced gender relations in Southern China in the early twentieth century. Second, a comprehension of marriage resistance, together with some groups of Cantonese women having taken the vow of celibacy, aid in challenging historiographies of *samsui* women who have been misinterpreted as having also avouched their singlehood. This third and final historical juncture has additionally demonstrated the need to reconcile on one level, the imbrication of socio-economic history and gender relations, including migratory patterns which were all influenced by global processes in various degrees. On another level, the entanglement of historiographies, particularly the vow of celibacy, the anti-marriage movement, with local historiographies of *samsui* women, have also pointed towards a need to first disentangle these varying points of historical and historiographical complexes across national borders, before one can more comprehensively decipher the marital experiences of both *samsui* women and *ma cheh*.

## Conclusion

Each historical episode depicted herein illustrates its own nexus of complex entanglements. The first episode reflects both diplomatic and commercial motivations, and economic interdependency. In the second episode, themes such as political struggles, colonial governance, and economic downturn have been identified and analysed. Finally, the links between gender relations and socio-economic history formed the basis of discussion in the third episode. Together, these three episodes serve as useful examples that shed light on the entangled historical and historiographical character of Chinese migration, and in particular, female migration. It is therefore fruitful to study historical linkages through *histoire croisée* in assessments of migrant history and historiography, as such an approach accords a “multi-perspective and interactive way of reconstructing and representing the past”.<sup>130</sup> While each of the three historical episodes has illuminated its own set of themes related to migration, they should also be read as interconnected. The first historical intersection concerning British trade and

imperialist expansionism, together with the demand for Chinese labour, demonstrates the conjoinment of local, transnational, and global historical events which therefore shaped Chinese migration. The second historical episode furthers such conjugation with attention placed upon a different, political facet of China's and Malaya's history in relation to the KMT's various activities. Resultantly, an interconnection of demographic, economic, and political dimensions thereby account for how the Aliens Ordinance was passed and interpreted. This second interface also takes my analysis through the entangled histories approach a step further, as I have deliberated upon historiographical motifs – be it the perception that the Aliens Ordinance was interpreted as anti-Chinese or otherwise. In addition, the shifts in British policies surrounding Chinese immigration also bring to the fore a useful combination of both synchronic and diachronic assessments.

The third historical episode illustrates entanglements of a different kind, demonstrating the connection between the Aliens Ordinance and how that influenced female migration. In this instance, the constructed notions of female independence, derived from the practice of delayed marriage transfers, have been inherited in memory productions of *samsui* women. It is therefore imperative to note that such historical “baggage” as it were, coloured impressions of *samsui* women which therefore contributed to the social construction and promotion of their independence, furthered through their supposed anti-marriage attitudes. This episode thereby acts as an example which demonstrates the transnational entanglement of the history of China, intertwined with the history of *samsui* women in the context of Singapore.

Overall, my deliberations on these three historical episodes have furnished different global-comparative angles with which to approach a study of Chinese migration. Furthermore, different historiographical and ideological vantage points have also been considered.<sup>131</sup> In other words, whose point of view is brought to the fore in productions of historical knowledge? What ideological underpinnings do these productions come with? What are the consequences of employing specifically selected knowledge in the reproduction and dissemination of history? These problematics form the goals of further assessments on history and historiography. First, the need to appreciate and investigate different historiographical vantage points transcends mere identification of what constitutes a historical source. Rather, there is also an obligation to evaluate ideological motives in presentations of the past. Second, focusing on varied entanglements provides methodological relevance in evaluations of the production of historical knowledge through emphases on multiple layers and perspectives that form

the architecture of historiography. Third, and related to the second point, refers to a requisite to cumulatively analyse these various layers in their own permutations, as well as how they work together – either divisively or complementarily – through accounts of the past in order to comprehend historical contingencies. This relates to what Kocka means by the “processes of mutual influencing”.<sup>132</sup> How do these various layers operate in historiographical webs of entanglements,<sup>133</sup> or what Wolf terms as “bundles of relationships”?<sup>134</sup> How do researchers then further analyse these webs in terms of fields of study such as Chinese migration?

Finally, there is also a need to transcend methodological nationalism<sup>135</sup> or primordialist views of nations and to evaluate historiography in terms of crossing boundaries and borders.<sup>136</sup> In all, the entangled histories approach is both utilised in this study as a theoretical posture as well as a methodological device with which to interpret social memory and historiography. This would also have bearings on historical epistemology<sup>137</sup> where the epistemic structure of looking at the social world now needs to take into further consideration, a comparison of different geographic scales of inter-relationships or overlapping social spaces<sup>138</sup> in the study of social phenomena. The *histoire croisée* approach is therefore useful towards explaining multi-causality, the connections between the histories of China and British Malaya, and the historiographies of Chinese migration vis-à-vis synchronic and diachronic viewpoints. The interest herein lies in interpreting historiography not in its mono-versions, but draws attention to the underpinnings of choirs of historiographies.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> A. McKeown, “Chinese emigration in global context, 1850–1940”, *Jour. of Global Hist.*, v (2010), 95–124.

<sup>2</sup> A. McKeown, “Global migration, 1846–1940”, *Jour. Of World Hist.*, xv (2004), 155–89; McKeown, *Chinese emigration*.

<sup>3</sup> P. Manning, *Migration in World History* (New York & London, 2005); L.P. Moch, “Connecting migration and world history”, *Int. Review of Social Hist.*, lii (2007), 97–104.

<sup>4</sup> U. Bosma, “Beyond the atlantic: connecting migration and world history in the age of imperialism, 1840–1940”, *Int. Review of Social Hist.*, lii (2007), 116–23.

<sup>5</sup> A. McKeown, *Melancholy Order: Asian Migration and the Globalization of Borders* (New York, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> P. Duara, “Transnationalism and the challenge to national histories”, in *Rethinking American History in a Global Age*, ed. T. Bender (Berkeley & Los Angeles, 2002), pp. 25–46; D. Hoerder, “Migration and cultural interaction across the centuries: German history in a European perspective”, *German Politics & Soc.*, xxvi (2008), 1–23; A. Wimmer & N. Glick Schiller,

"Methodological nationalism, the social sciences, and the study of migration: an essay in historical epistemology", *Int. Migration Review*, xxxvii (2003), 576–610.

<sup>7</sup> See Bosma; L. Lucassen, "Migration and world history: reaching a new frontier", *Int. Review of Social Hist.*, lii (2007), 89–96.

<sup>8</sup> See S.E. Kimberlin, "Synthesising social science theories of immigration", *Jour. Of Human Behaviour in the Social Environment*, xix (2009), 759–71; G. Rystad, "Immigration history and the future of international migration", *Int. Migration Review*, xxvi (1992), 1168–99; E. Wickberg, "The Chinese as overseas migrants", in *Migration: The Asian Experience*, ed. J.M. Brown & R. Foot (New York, 1994), pp. 12–37.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Moch.

<sup>10</sup> P. Levitt & N. Glick Schiller, "Conceptualising simultaneity: a transnational social field perspective on society", *Int. Migration Review*, xxxviii (2004), 1002–39; C.G. Pooley & I.D. Whyte, "Introduction: approaches to the study of migration and social change", in *Migrants, Emigrants and Immigrants: A Social History of Migration*, eds. C.G. Pooley & I.D. Whyte (London & New York, 1991), pp. 1–15.

<sup>11</sup> McKeown, (2004), p. 181.

<sup>12</sup> McKeown, (2010), p. 98.

<sup>13</sup> S. Conrad, "Circulation, 'National Work', and identity: debates about the mobility of work in Germany and Japan, 1890–1914", in *Entangled Histories and Negotiated Universals: Centers and Peripheries in a Changing World*, ed. W. Lepenies (Frankfurt & New York, 2003), pp. 260–80; S. Randeria, "Entangled Histories: civil society, caste solidarities and legal pluralism in post-colonial India", in *Civil Society: Berlin Perspectives*, ed. J. Keane (New York & Oxford, 2006), pp. 213–42; M. Werner & B. Zimmermann, "Beyond comparison: *histoire croisée* and the challenge of reflexivity", *Hist. and Theory*, xlv (2006), 30–50.

<sup>14</sup> Conrad, p. 260; see also, P. Ther, "Beyond the nation: the relational basis of a comparative history of Germany and Europe", *Central European Hist.*, xxxvi (2003), 45–73.

<sup>15</sup> J. Kocka, "Losses, gains and opportunities: social history today", *Jour. of Social Hist.*, xxxvii (2003b), 21–8; S. Subrahmanyam, "Connected histories: notes towards a reconfiguration of early modern Eurasia", *Mod. Asian Studies*, xxxi (1997), 735–62.

<sup>16</sup> Ther.

<sup>17</sup> H. Siegrist, "Comparative history of cultures and societies: from cross-societal analysis to the study of intercultural interdependencies", *Comparative Education*, xlii (2006), 377–404.

<sup>18</sup> Werner & Zimmermann.

<sup>19</sup> J. Carlier, "Forgotten transnational connections and national contexts: an 'entangled history' of the political transfers that shaped Belgian feminism, 1890–1914", *Women's Hist. Review*, xix (2010), 503–22.

<sup>20</sup> D. Cohen & M. O'Connor, "Introduction: comparative history, cross-national history, transnational history – definitions", in *Comparison and History: Europe in Cross-National Perspective*, eds. D. Cohen & M. O'Connor (New York, 2004), ix–xxiv; J. Kocka, "Comparison and beyond", *Hist. and Theory*, xlii (2003a), 39–44.

<sup>21</sup> P. Jonsson & S. Neunsinger, "Comparison and transfer – a fruitful approach to national history?", *Scandinavian Jour. of Hist.*, xxxii (2007), 258–80.

<sup>22</sup> Werner & Zimmermann., p.35.

<sup>23</sup> McKeown, (2004).

<sup>24</sup> G. Gozzini, "The global system of international migrations, 1900 and 2000: a comparative approach", *Jour. of Global Hist.*, i (2006), 321–41, in 325.

<sup>25</sup> S. Castles, "Twenty-first century migration as a challenge to Sociology", *Jour. of Ethnic & Migration Studies*, xxxiii (2007), 351–71; R. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (Glencoe, 1957).

<sup>26</sup> A. Portes, "The Hidden abode: Sociology as analysis of the unexpected: 1999 Presidential Address", *Amer. Sociological Review*, lxxv (1999), 1–13, in 13.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. McKeown, (2004).

<sup>28</sup> Low, Kelvin E.Y. *Remembering the Samsui Women: Migration and Social Memory in Singapore and China* (Vancouver, forthcoming 2014).

<sup>29</sup> L.C. Lim, "Samsui women: women with a will stronger than iron", in *Down Memory Lane in Clogs: Growing up in Chinatown*, ed. J. Si (Singapore, 2002), pp. 225–37.

<sup>30</sup> C.H. Tang, "The Cantonese women building labourers: a study of a group of *sam-sui* women in the building trade" (unpublished University of Malaya in Singapore research paper, 1960).

<sup>31</sup> Other bodies of data for the larger study comprise media reports, artistic works (portraits, documentaries, and exhibitions among others), ministerial speeches, magazines, and anecdotal sources. I have also interviewed *samsui* women, their kin, and individuals including volunteers, artists, local popular history writers, and others who have spent time interacting with *samsui* women. Additionally, I carried out volunteer work over a span of one year where I interacted with *samsui* women and other elderly living in a housing estate in the central part of Singapore. I have discussed elsewhere (Low, Kelvin E.Y., "Researcher Positionalities, Moral Gatekeeping and Knowledge Production: Some Thoughts on Doing Research on the Samsui Women in Singapore", in *The Makers and Keepers of Singapore History*, eds. K.S. Loh and K.K. Liew (Singapore, 2010), pp. 232–241.) issues revolving researcher positionalities and moral gatekeeping.

<sup>32</sup> The term "global history" is subscribed in this context in order to elucidate upon the interconnectedness of varying historical junctures vis-à-vis different geographical scales given that the actors involved are from Chinese, British, and British Malaya backgrounds; see also, D. Sachsenmaier, "Global history and critiques of western perspectives", *Comparative Education*, xlii (2006), 451–470; and D. Sachsenmaier, "World history as ecumenical history?", *Jour. of World Hist.*, xviii (2007), 465–89.

<sup>33</sup> Sachsenmaier, (2006), 451.

<sup>34</sup> Wimmer & Glick Schiller.

<sup>35</sup> While the adoption of synchronic situatedness is necessary to unfold the layers that culminate in a historical phenomenon at a specific point in time, it is also pertinent to consider the diachronic consequences which follow. I incorporate such brief analyses in my examination of the three historical episodes. The combination of both synchronic and diachronic inquiries is therefore a feature of the entangled histories approach as discussed earlier.

<sup>36</sup> A.C. Milner, "Colonial records history: British Malaya", *Mod. Asian Studies*, xxi (1987), 773–92; M. Shennan, *Out in the Midday Sun: The British in Malaya 1880–1960* (London, 2000); and N. Tarling, "British policy

in Malayan waters in the nineteenth century”, in *Papers on Malayan History*, ed. K.G. Tregonning (Singapore, 1962), pp. 73–88 for debates on different historiographies of the British in Malaya.

<sup>37</sup> P.C. Campbell, *Chinese Coolie Emigration to Countries within the British Empire* (Taipei, 1970); C.H. Yen, *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya, 1800–1911* (Singapore, 1986).

<sup>38</sup> See W.L. Blythe, “Historical sketch of Chinese labour in Malaya”, *Jour. of the Royal Asiatic Soc. Malayan Branch*, xx (1947), 64–114; S.M. Lee, “Female immigrants and labour in colonial Malaya: 1860–1947”, *Int. Migration Review*, xxiii (1989), 309–31; and D.R. Sardesai, “British expansion in Southeast Asia: the imperialism of trade in the nineteenth century”, in *The Man on the Spot: Essays on British Empire History*, ed. R.D. Long (Connecticut, 1995), pp. 7–20.

<sup>39</sup> See for example, M.Y. Ip, “Chinese immigrants and transnationals in New Zealand: a fortress opened”, in *The Chinese Overseas: Volume III Communities across the Globe*, ed. H. Liu (London & New York, 2006), pp. 302–21; and P.S. Li, “A historical approach to ethnic stratification: the case of the Chinese in Canada, 1858–1930”, *Can. Review of Sociology & Anth.*, xvi (1979), 320–32.

<sup>40</sup> P. Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others: Emigration in Modern Times* (Singapore, 2008).

<sup>41</sup> I. C.Y. Hsü, *The Rise of Modern China* (New York & Oxford, 1995), p.184; see also, C.A. Trocki, *Opium, Empire and the Global Political Economy: A study of the Asian Opium Trade* (London & New York, 1999).

<sup>42</sup> Trocki, *Opium, Empire and the Global Political Economy*.

<sup>43</sup> Hsü, *The Rise of Modern China*; Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others*.

<sup>44</sup> C.A. Trocki, “Opium and the Beginnings of Chinese Capitalism in Southeast Asia.” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, xxxiii (2002), 297–314.

<sup>45</sup> Y.T. Yip, *The Development of the Tin Mining Industry of Malaya* (Kuala Lumpur, 1969).

<sup>46</sup> Yip, *The Development of the Tin Mining Industry*; L.K. Wong, *The Malayan Tin Industry to 1914* (Tucson, 1965).

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> L.K. Wong, *The Malayan Tin Industry to 1914*.

<sup>49</sup> S.H. Saw & S.H. Cheng, “Migration policies in Malaya and Singapore”, *Nanyang Quarterly: A Review of Southeast Asian Studies*, i (1971), 45–61, in 45.

<sup>50</sup> T. Chen, *Chinese Migrations, with special reference to Labour Conditions* (Washington, 1923); R.N. Jackson, *Immigrant Labour and the Development of Malaya, 1786–1920* (Kuala Lumpur, 1961); and J. Kennedy, *A History of Malaya – A.D. 1400–1959* (Kuala Lumpur, 1965).

<sup>51</sup> Wong, *The Malayan Tin Industry*.

<sup>52</sup> X.A. Wu, “China Meets Southeast Asia: A Long-term Historical Review.” in *Connecting and Distancing: Southeast Asia and China*, ed. K.L. Ho (Singapore, 2009), pp. 3–30.

<sup>53</sup> Blythe, *Historical Sketch*.

<sup>54</sup> Wong, *The Malayan Tin Industry*.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*; A. Reid, “Chinese on the Mining Frontier in Southeast Asia.” in *Chinese Circulations: Capital, Commodities, and Networks in Southeast Asia*, eds. E. Tagliacozzo and W.C. Chang (Durham & London, 2011), pp. 21–36.

<sup>56</sup> Blythe, *Historical Sketch*, p. 66.



<sup>57</sup> Wu, *China Meets Southeast Asia*.

<sup>58</sup> C.A. Trocki, "Opium as a Commodity in the Chinese Nanyang Trade." in *Chinese Circulations: Capital, Commodities, and Networks in Southeast Asia*, eds. E. Tagliacozzo and W.C. Chang (Durham & London, 2011), pp. 84–104.

<sup>59</sup> Yen.

<sup>60</sup> C.A. Trocki, "Boundaries and Transgressions: Chinese Enterprise in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth Century Southeast Asia." in *Ungrounded Empires: The Cultural Politics of Modern Chinese Transnationalism*, eds. A. Ong and D. M. Nonini (New York & London, 1997), pp. 61–85.

<sup>61</sup> Wong, *The Malayan Tin Industry*; Yip, *The Development of the Tin Mining Industry*.

<sup>62</sup> Chai, *Development of British Malaya*, p. 104.

<sup>63</sup> A. Vandenbosch, "The Chinese in Southeast Asia", *The Jour. of Politics*, ix (1947), 80–95, in 85.

<sup>64</sup> L.A. Mills, *British Rule in Eastern Asia: A Study of Contemporary Government and Economic Development in British Malaya and Hong Kong* (London, 1942), p. 204.

<sup>65</sup> J. Baker, *Crossroads: A Popular History of Malaysia and Singapore* (Singapore, 1999), p. 211.

<sup>66</sup> R. Cohen, "Diasporas, the Nation-State, and Globalisation." in *Global History and Migrations*, ed. G.W. Wang (Colorado, 1997), pp. 117–143.

<sup>67</sup> Sachsenmaier, (2007), p. 485.

<sup>68</sup> A. McKeown, *Chinese Migrant Networks and Cultural Change: Peru, Chicago, Hawaii, 1900–1936* (Chicago & London, 2001).

<sup>69</sup> See Hsü, *The Rise of Modern China*.

<sup>70</sup> S.C. Loh, "The Singapore Chinese community: from sojourners to citizens, 1900–1957" (unpublished National University of Singapore Honours thesis, 1989); and J.N. Parmer, "Colonial labour policy and administration: a history of labour in the rubber plantation industry in Malaya, 1910–1941" (unpublished Cornell University Ph.D. thesis, 1957).

<sup>71</sup> Blythe, *Historical Sketch*, p. 103.

<sup>72</sup> N. Ginsburg & C.F. Roberts, *Malaya* (Seattle, 1958), p. 251.

<sup>73</sup> See Parmer.

<sup>74</sup> C.F. Yong & R.B. McKenna, *The Kuomintang Movement in British Malaya 1912–1949* (Singapore, 1990), p. 67.

<sup>75</sup> P.L. Kok, "Aliens Ordinance 1933" (unpublished National University of Singapore Honours thesis, 1972).

<sup>76</sup> J.C. Lim, "British policy towards the Kuomintang in Malaya, 1912–1931" (unpublished National University of Singapore Honours thesis, 1981).

<sup>77</sup> Lim, (1981), i, emphases mine.

<sup>78</sup> G. Khoo & D. Lo, *Asian Transformation: A History of South-east, South and East Asia* (Singapore, 1992); and T.C. Woo, *The Kuomintang and the Future of the Chinese Revolution* (London, 1928).

<sup>79</sup> P.S. Png, "The Kuomintang in Malaya, 1912–1941", *Jour. of South-east Asian Hist.*, ii (1961), 1–32.

<sup>80</sup> Sun was born in 1866 in Guangdong and received his education in Honolulu and Hong Kong (see Khoo & Lo). He is renowned for his leadership of China's republican revolutionary movement in the early 1900s and has been described as the "father of the Chinese Revolution" (see I.C.Y. Hsü, *The Rise of Modern China* (New York & Oxford, 1995), p. 454).

<sup>81</sup> Yong & McKenna, p. 60.

<sup>82</sup> Yong & McKenna.

<sup>83</sup> V. Purcell, *The Chinese in Malaya* (Kuala Lumpur, 1967), p. 215.

<sup>84</sup> Mills.

<sup>85</sup> Mills; Saw & Cheng.

<sup>86</sup> Yong & McKenna, p. 56.

<sup>87</sup> Khoo & Lo.

<sup>88</sup> Yong & McKenna, pp. 56–57; see also, Loh, p. 24.

<sup>89</sup> S.H. Saw, *Trends and Differentials in International Migration in Malaya* (Kuala Lumpur, 1963).

<sup>90</sup> Yong & McKenna.

<sup>91</sup> Saw.

<sup>92</sup> Saw, p. 91.

<sup>93</sup> Tan Cheng Lock was a Malacca-born Chinese businessman known for championing the welfare of the Chinese community in Malaya. He was also the founder of the Malayan Chinese Association (see Purcell, 1967).

<sup>94</sup> *Proceedings of the Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements* (1932, B142).

<sup>95</sup> *Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements* (1932, B144).

<sup>96</sup> *Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements* (1932, B145).

<sup>97</sup> *Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements* (1932, B146).

<sup>98</sup> *Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements* (1932, B153). Straits-born Chinese refer to a community where intermarriages were formed between Chinese men and Malay women. Males were known as *Baba*, while females were named *Nyonya* (see M. Freedman, *The Study of Chinese Society* (Stanford, 1979), pp. 84–92).

<sup>99</sup> V. Purcell, *The Chinese in Southeast Asia* (London, 1965), p. 291, emphasis in original; see also, Kennedy, p. 222.

<sup>100</sup> Png.

<sup>101</sup> Png, p. 15. For example, Purcell notes that “the attempts of the KMT to form an *imperium in imperio* in each of the Southeast Asian countries not only provoked the Colonial Governments to repressive action but also aroused the abiding resentments of the indigenous peoples among whom the Chinese were living” (1965, xi).

<sup>102</sup> Khoo & Lo; Png.

<sup>103</sup> Png, p. 15.

<sup>104</sup> See Png, p. 19.

<sup>105</sup> Png, p. 16.

<sup>106</sup> Cf., among others, C.B. Tan, “Introduction: Chinese overseas, transnational networks, and China.” in *Chinese Transnational Networks*, ed. C.B. Tan (London & New York, 2007), pp. 1–19; Wu, *China Meets Southeast Asia*; W. Shen, “China in the global migration order – historical perspectives and new trends.”, *Asia Europe Journal* ix (2010), 25–43.

<sup>107</sup> A. Appadurai, “The past as a scarce resource”, *Man*, xvi (1981), 201–19, in 203, emphasis in original.

<sup>108</sup> M. Fulbrook, *Historical Theory* (London & New York, 2002), ix.

<sup>109</sup> Parmer, p. 144.

<sup>110</sup> See Blythe.

<sup>111</sup> Purcell, (1967).

<sup>112</sup> Blythe

<sup>113</sup> Blythe.

<sup>114</sup> A. Leeds, “ ‘Women in the migratory process’: a reductionist outlook”, *Anthropological Quarterly*, xlix (1976), 69–76, in 71.

<sup>115</sup> C. Chiang, "Female migrants in Singapore: towards a strategy of pragmatism and coping", in *Women and Chinese Patriarchy: Submission, Servitude and Escape*, eds. M. Jaschok & S. Miers (Hong Kong, 1994), pp. 238–63.

<sup>116</sup> A.E. Lai, *Peasants, Proletarians and Prostitutes: A Preliminary Investigation into the work of Chinese women in Colonial Malaya* (Singapore, 1986).

<sup>117</sup> A. Sankar, "Spinster sisterhoods: jing yih sifu, spinster-domestic-nun" in *Lives: Chinese Working Women*, eds. M. Sheridan & J.W. Salaff (Bloomington, 1984), pp. 51–70; and J.E. Stockard, *Daughters of the Canton Delta: Marriage Patterns and Economic Strategies in South China, 1860–1930* (Stanford, 1989).

<sup>118</sup> Lai; and M. Topley, "Marriage resistance in rural Guangdong", in *Women in Chinese Society*, eds. M. Wolf & R. Witke (Stanford, 1975), pp. 67–88.

<sup>119</sup> Topley, p. 72.

<sup>120</sup> M.H.A. Jaschok, "On the lives of women unwed by choice in pre-Communist China: research in progress", *Republican China*, x (1984), 42–55, in 43.

<sup>121</sup> C.O. Lay, "Sworn sisters and bridedaughters: Cantonese female emigrants to Malaya, 1934–1938" (unpublished Australian National University Masters thesis, 1995).

<sup>122</sup> Lay, p. 58.

<sup>123</sup> Lay, pp. 74–75.

<sup>124</sup> See for example, S. Lefanu, *In the Chinks of the World Machine: Feminism and Science Fiction* (London, 1988); Straits Times, "Samsui women's New Year treat", (2002), 5 February; and S.E. Tan, "We built this city", *Straits Times*, (2003), 14 December.

<sup>125</sup> T.T.W. Tan, *Your Chinese Roots: The Overseas Chinese Story* (Singapore, 1986), p. 46, emphasis mine. Tan's description clearly reveals an inherent contradiction, seen where the tracing of marriage defiance to *Shunde* sits incongruously with the latter account of *samsui* women originating from the *Sanshui* district.

<sup>126</sup> K. Mulliner & L.T. Mulliner, *Historical Dictionary of Singapore* (London, 1991), pp. 129–30.

<sup>127</sup> See for example, R. McKenzie, *Malaysia in Focus* (Sydney, 1963), pp. 34–6.

<sup>128</sup> R. Powell, "The axis of Singapore: South Bridge Road", in *Beyond Description: Singapore Space Historicity*, eds. R. Bishop, J. Philips, and W.W. Yeo (London & New York, 2004), pp. 125–34; and *Sunday Times*, "110 and a little lonely", 26 August.

<sup>129</sup> It is also important to note that sworn singlehood was not merely a status that was ascribed to women who remained single. It was accompanied by a special ritual of combing up or *sor hei* as discussed previously (see Stockard, p. 70). This further attests my contention that *samsui* women were not part of this sworn singlehood or marriage resistance given that it was the *ma cheh* who were known for having gone through the *sor hei* ceremony.

<sup>130</sup> Siegrist, p. 477.

<sup>131</sup> Cf. K. Blackburn, "History from above: the use of oral history in shaping collective memory in Singapore" in *Oral History and Public Memories*, eds. P. Hamilton & L. Shopes (Philadelphia, 2008), pp. 31–46; and Fulbrook.

<sup>132</sup> Kocka, (2003a), p. 42.

<sup>133</sup> See Kocka, (2003a).

<sup>134</sup> E.R. Wolf, *Europe and the People with History* (Berkeley, 1982), p. 3.

<sup>135</sup> D. Chernilo, *A Social Theory of the Nation-State: The Political Forms of Modernity beyond Methodological Nationalism* (London & New York, 2007).

<sup>136</sup> See Sachsenmaier, (2006); and Siegrist.

<sup>137</sup> See Wimmer & Glick Schiller.

<sup>138</sup> G. Lachenmann, "Researching translocal gendered spaces: methodological challenges" in *Negotiating Development in Muslim Societies: Gendered Spaces and Translocal Connections*, eds. G. Lachenmann & P. Dannecker (Lanham, 2008), pp. 13–34.