

## Early Modern Migration and Market-Dominant Minorities in Southeast Asia: A Foundation for Chinese Economic Colonization?

ABSTRACT: This essay analyzes the early modern influence of ethnic Chinese in the region of SE Asia, concluding that they came to dominate the regional economy by a process of “economic colonization”. As this dominance only expanded as the Chinese state of the late Qing declined, such a process must be distinguished from the state-sponsored colonialism and imperialism practiced by Europeans. Ultimately, a strong Chinese presence in the economy is one of the few commonalities shared by all countries in the region. While examining how ethnic Chinese became a “market-dominant minority”, historical, economic, and political concepts such as periodization, capitalism, and empire will be used to interpret empirical evidence provided by scholars who had treated international migration from China to SE Asia only tangentially.

It is relatively well-accepted that Zheng He’s sea voyages in the early Ming Dynasty came to be seen as too costly, yielding too few benefits to the empire and thus discontinued abruptly and with their legacy disavowed. The Chinese empire has thus been portrayed as a peculiar one in that it sought not to colonize but rather to have suzerain neighbors who acknowledged its centrality. Domestic concerns came to be far greater, and the extent of tributaries on southern borders were deemed to be sufficient—facing real threats from the north, the empire had more pressing priorities than garnering appreciation in distant lands. Yet while the Ming, and later Qing, came to be seen by some historians as nearly autarkic, secure in its domestic, economic preponderance and constrained by Confucian values which disparaged “scheming merchants”, a diaspora had been formed in the tentative region of Southeast Asia, one

which still dominates the economy today. Andre Gunder-Frank's *Re-Orient* must be seen equally as an affirmation that China was first and foremost an economic power in the early modern world as a prequel to the current state of Chinese diasporic dominance of the Southeast Asian economy. In the more contemporary terms of Amy Chua's *World on Fire*, Chinese in the region are a conflict-causing "market-dominant minority". Yet questions remain as to how much the Chinese empire was actually involved in SE Asian trade, as well the extent of identification of ethnic Chinese MDM's with their empire of origin.

This paper seeks to assess the extent to which China and the "overseas Chinese", over the past several centuries, actually *did* colonize this buffer region of Asia, through less overt means than military conquest: migration facilitated by trade and late imperial decline (as well as very late approval). In terms central to global history, it asserts that colonization need not be explicit, tied to imperialism or even a supportive state, to be effective. Tracing the historical roots of the Chinese contemporary status as market-dominant minorities in the region, this essay seeks to evaluate Southeast Asia's status as a distinct and cohesive world region, threats to this status, and the interwoven trends which have defined modernity. It will argue, with the support of scholars, that the process of human migration *became* modern when it was linked with capitalism, which also drove ethnic Chinese relations with native SE Asian populations and the European colonialists. It will also be noted that global immigration policies themselves entered the modern era with an explicit connection to late Qing Chinese emigration, itself a global phenomenon of great importance.

As Kui Hui Kian's recent article notes, the Chinese Empire presents historians with several puzzling paradoxes: 1) Unlike European empires which used military conquest to establish political colonies, China under the Ming and Qing frequently banned its residents from leaving the country<sup>1</sup>. 2) While European empires sent large numbers of their own elites and fortune seekers to the colonies during periods of their greatest strength, overseas Chinese not only tended to lack state support, as criminals, but also received it—along with a flood of migrant workers—only as the empire began an irreversible decline, and most strongly while the Qing was in its death throes at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The solution to these puzzles lies in the nature of global trade, empire, and migration--all of which changed with the rise of capitalism.

**Notes on Periodization.** Before launching into comparative theory and analysis, some historiography is warranted, especially given that some of the foremost scholars of Southeast Asia have concurred on the inapplicability of "early modern" to the region<sup>2</sup>. The literature selected for this essay is surprisingly close to consistent on the matter of periodization, with most texts performing scholarly dances of division in or around the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>3</sup>. This is problematic for my topic, Chinese migration in Southeast Asia, as its constant presence through history defies categorization, and the renowned Anthony Reid notes that no migratory trend or policy ever lasted more than a century. Events from the 15<sup>th</sup> through 19<sup>th</sup> centuries are critical, and the trend itself is inextricable from

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<sup>1</sup> This is not to deny that both were expansive, as both did make military attempts, sometimes successful, to expand China's borders. Colonization, by contrast, is almost inseparable from ocean expansion for exploitation. Kian, pg. 617, asserts that the Chinese were "merchants without empire", which I extend to being "colonizers without a state".

<sup>2</sup> Parmer, pg. 22, calls Anthony Reid's earlier uses of the term, as well as the "Age of Commerce" application Eurocentric and notes that Reid admits as much without seeing the need for different terms.

<sup>3</sup> Somewhat chronologically: the *Cambridge History* divides its two volumes at 1800, the beginning of "systematic colonialism" for Tarling, pg. 10, Reid's *Early Modern Era* stops on a dime at 1700, Reid also edits *The Last Stand of Asian Autonomies* to 1750-1900, and Brown's *Economic Change* begins at 1830, the ending point for Lieberman's first *Strange Parallels*. Two Sino-SE Asia narratives divide into three periods (Parmer's pre-1500, 15-1800, and 1800-1940) or, dubiously, give the Mongols and early Ming their own chapters, while the "Enter the Europeans" chapter lumps the late Ming and entire Qing together, extending well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Stuart-Fox). Finally, Owen begins *The Emergence of Modern SE Asia* at 1700 and extends nearly to the present.

the rise of capitalism associated with modernity, the fortunes of individual Southeast Asian states and the mercurial final dynasties.

The only book so far encountered which is devoted entirely to Chinese migration to and from Southeast Asia, Anthony Reid's *Sojourners and Settlers*, offers a partial solution which does not seem to have been fully adopted in other, later texts' treatments. In it, Jamie Mackie proposes five phases: 1) 900-1600AD, 2) 1567-1800, 3) 1800-60, 4) 1860-1930, and 5) 1931-81. This essay primarily addresses phases 2-4, though it advocates an extension of the second to at least the first opium war and then a merger of the third and fourth<sup>4</sup>. While semantically awkward, it could be said that this paper will focus on the *late* early modern period, and a spillover into modernity cannot be averted.

As will be discussed, the nature and volume of the migration does seem to change within a window of time related to Kenneth Pomeranz's *Great Divergence* between China and "The West", almost certainly extending into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. From the perspective of market-dominant minorities in SE Asia, it could even be argued somewhat defensibly that no economic divergence actually occurred. And returning to population transfers, modern restrictions on international migration didn't really emerge until the late 1800's, and in a manner directly related to the Chinese case.

**Southeast Asia.** While noted by most world historians as a region unto itself, Southeast Asia, whether viewed historically or especially through a contemporary lens<sup>5</sup>, has precious little linking it together. By Lewis and Wigen's account, there is a raging

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<sup>4</sup> Such advocacy is based on events listed in the APPENDIX's timeline of the nature and scale of the migration.

<sup>5</sup> Other than its flagship international organization, ASEAN, a recent history of being carved up by world powers, islamicization and missionary work compromising Buddhist solidarity, and the Mainland/Oceania divide all give the impression of the region as a convenient metageographic construct.

metageographic debate as to how it should be defined and even whether it can be considered a region in the same sense as Europe, Latin America, East and South Asia, and so on<sup>6</sup>. Ironically, one of its few shared characteristics is the presence of a Chinese business class, and some contemporary observers have suggested that this may ultimately be the region's undoing, undermining its very existence. Rather ahistorically, U.S. conservatives have explicitly pointed out that strengthened—renewed, really—economic ties between Southeast Asia and China pose a threat to U.S. interests in the region and should be taken as *the* tipping point for the abandonment of China's official "Peaceful Rise" in favor of a more aggressive strategy<sup>7</sup>. In the extreme, actions in such a regard might be interpreted by paranoid speculators as a long-awaited realization of its colonial ambitions in the region.

From the perspective of political theory, however, warnings of regional disintegration are less outlandish. Just as this essay seeks to concentrate Amy Chua's global argument in a regional, historical framework, so too can Tanisha Fazal's study of "state death in the international system" be blown up to the regional level. Fazal's conclusion that "buffer states" are historically most likely to "die" by absorption into the strongest of its bordering states, recent establishment of Burma as a Chinese "client state" fits disconcertingly in to a purported Chinese strategy of reassembling its imperial world order<sup>8</sup>. With two rising giants on its permeable regional borders, the conclusions of this and other essays point to a decided advantage for the East, should a long-term absorption of the South Asia/East Asia buffer region be in progress.

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<sup>6</sup> See Lewis and Wigen's section "The Coherence of Southeast Asia", pg. 173-6, for their problematic conclusions.

<sup>7</sup> See Vaughn and Morrison, Dillon and Tcacik. As this is a history paper, we promise a moratorium on further contemporary references, much like Chinese imperial bans on trade. Promise!

<sup>8</sup> If these seem implausible, one need only sample the texts of contemporary realist scholars and (neo-) conservative think tanks. As a long term trend, growing Chinese influence in Southeast Asia is undeniable; the keys to keep in mind are their intentions and the extent of connections to the Chinese state.

In taking a regional and global approach, this paper will inevitably make generalizations which do not hold across this difficult region, and specialists will bemoan the lack of attention given to individual countries. Such are the costs of attempting to show a trend which spans multiple eras, namely the capitalist might of the overseas Chinese which was both cause and self-sustaining effect of economic colonization and market-dominant minorities.

**Defining Key Terms.** Status as a “market-dominant minority” in an entire region is not something which can be gained by either trade or migration in isolation, and it does not happen overnight. Amy Chua’s book skips too lightly over history, as provocative bestsellers are wont to do, and her flagship case of the Chinese in Southeast Asia is built on spotty anecdotes which vary greatly from country to country<sup>9</sup>. Her 1998 academic paper does no better, also trading global breadth for historical depth and failing to articulate the process by which one actually *becomes* a market-dominant minority<sup>10</sup>. This may be understandable given that her focus in both pieces is on the contemporary, globalized world, and the sensational consequence of “global instability”. Yet comparative history (and the social sciences in general) demand that the process for a globally-applicable, new term be specified in a generalizable way. This paper seeks to fill that gap using the case of the Chinese in Southeast Asia, and the process it seeks to illuminate is *economic colonization*.

The long-suffering reader should interject that yet another new term is not likely to be useful, but rather a pedantic attempt to justify another academic paper. Why

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<sup>9</sup> In setting up her primary case, the section “Chinese Market-Dominance in Historical Context” occupies only four pages (31-34), in which Zheng He is mentioned briefly, followed by the establishment of the Philippine colony and Chinese massacre of 1603, then it’s off to Vietnam in 208 B.C. for a paragraph, the early modern age in another, and before the reader realizes what has happened (i.e. naming the process), the text reaches the 1930’s.

<sup>10</sup> In Chua’s defense, as she wrote for a law journal and then the general public, history was never a priority.

does colonization need to be modified, and how does it help the study of history to do so? This is precisely the problem with current terminology: the terms colonialism and colonization, as similar and related terms, are too often used interchangeably by mass media and even scholars not versed in specialized historical terminology<sup>11</sup>. Yet they differ in a key regard: colonization implies settlement, establishment of trading posts and plantations in a foreign land, to which colonialism adds the intent to rule over the foreign land and its people, often incorporating them into an empire. This distinction is likely to elude both non-scholars and, of equal or greater importance, the populations of the lands being colonized. Wherever military force is involved or the choice to start a colony is not consensual, the distinction all but evaporates.

The phrase “economic colonization” is already widely in use, often as a diatribe against the U.S. occupation of Iraq and globalization in general<sup>12</sup>. As I will define it here, it refers only to the process by which ethnic nationals of a state or a non-colonial empire (as China was generally throughout its history) become a market-dominant minority. Economic colonization, for my purposes, is a process which can be characterized by 1) dominance of an economy by controlling capital and trade, 2) Favours and special privileges granted to the colonizers by the political rulers of a territory, and 3) some degree of insularity if not full autonomy. The third condition implies that the original residents of a territory, the political rulers of the territory, and crucially, the state or empire from which the colonizers originated can be excluded from the socio-economic activities of the colony.

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<sup>11</sup> Not to mention “neo-colonialism”, which this paper is deliberately avoiding as would be appropriate in the colonial period. The reader may suggest that my definition of “economic colonization” is too close to that of neo-colonialism, yet neo- can hardly be applied to the Chinese case because it both preceded and occurred simultaneously with the European colonialism historians know and love. If requiring the state *not* be involved to attain economic colonization is too onerous a restriction to apply in many other cases, so be it.

<sup>12</sup> For polemic examples online, see Juhasz and Norris de Montaigne. Their use of the term is actually involves the state quite explicitly and should, in my opinion, use the term neo-colonialism.

A few more clarifications of the definition are necessary. It is assumed that if the state or empire were the driving force behind any of the above conditions, or if the intent were consistently to establish political rule over the state (or region) whose economy is colonized, defining the process would not be an issue—the process would be colonialism. It will be argued that the very term “overseas Chinese” implies that such a group is no longer part of China, although several authors have noted the attractiveness of settling in Southeast Asia because of the low requirements for assimilation in the early modern era, and later the existence of nearly autonomous Chinese networks throughout the region. Both the Ming and Qing empires help my case considerably with their frequent bans on both foreign trade and emigration--indeed Jonathon Moses’ book on international migration makes only one historical reference to the Chinese, the infamous example known by undergraduates nationwide, that “under the Manchus (1644-1912), any Chinese found abroad was subject to beheading”<sup>13</sup>.

Too often it is also assumed that since market-dominant minorities have been a part of so many nations’ histories and for long periods of time, that they are a natural phenomenon predating history, an ethnicity predestined—by genetics even—for dominance of a market economy. Rather, this paper asserts that an intensive process is required to become an MDM, and no trait-based explanations of them are defensible. Nor does the process need to be a teleological one, with every transaction made with the goal of economic colonization. Short of suggesting that such a status can be obtained without conscious effort—i.e. a group of traders going about their everyday business over a period of time and one day waking up as MDM’s—the evidence will

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<sup>13</sup> See Moses, pg. 40.



show that it is not that goal toward which economic colonizers strive. Rather, by operating under the capitalist principles of creative profit maximization (called exploitation by critics), MDM status is the natural but not inevitable or guaranteed end point of economic colonization.

As few would deny that the consecutive dynasties of the Ming and Qing were guided by Confucianism, state-sponsored colonialism was never really an option for the Chinese state. Bin Wong, Andre Gunder Frank, and other global historians have argued persuasively that imperial China was the largest and most vibrant market economy of the early modern world. Wong notes at length, however, that “late imperial ideology never completely accepted the profit motive”, and the state had genuine reservations about the virtue of its “scheming” merchants<sup>14</sup>. Such scheming is a virtual requirement of pure capitalism, and thus both the Ming and Qing had deep-seeded compatibility issues with colonialism. Again a fine distinction must be drawn between processes. Colonialism is at least partially driven by capitalism, and both have been used by scholars to denote a passing into modernity. Economic colonization also relies heavily on capitalist motivation, and this paper will argue that the overseas economic colonizers of SE Asia have been unfairly denied “modern” status simply because they lacked the sponsorship of a “modern” nation state.

In what remains of this paper, the history of ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia will be discussed to establish that the three conditions outlined in the beginning of this section apply to the case of overseas Chinese traders, settlers, and “sojourners”. It will be shown that the path to market-dominant minority status was the process of

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<sup>14</sup> Extending Wong’s quotation, pg. 205, “late imperial ideology [Confucianism] accepted markets and understood how they could promote economic welfare...”. It “argue[s] for the virtues of markets and yet do[es] not support capitalism.”

economic colonization, a sustained combination of trade, migration, and settlements. The concluding sections will discuss implications for bestowing the label of “modernity”, global history, and the study of international migration.

**Chinese Migration to Southeast Asia.** This regionally-defining trend has been treated in several books and articles, by a number of scholars, and it is not this paper’s purpose to summarize all that has been written. It is necessary, however, for an interpretation of the causes and consequences of it, that the reader have a grasp of its defining, and empirically proven, moments. Those in need of a refresher may refer to the appendix for a timeline of major events and data points in Chinese migration to the region, from the Yuan Dynasty through the end of the Qing.

The concept of colonization without imperialism is relatively new, having been espoused in a timely consideration of recent U.S. actions<sup>15</sup> as well as Kian’s article. In the context of Southeast Asia, heavy Chinese immigration made local populations unnecessary for inclusion except at the lowest, agrarian levels of the capitalist economy. While its empire, the Qing, was in decline, many colonies nonetheless thrived even under European rule. After all, the change of political rulers from native kings and heads of state to Europeans entailed little more than a re-culturation to new institutions such as religion and tax structures. Capitalistic trade is, after all, a universal language which needn’t be accompanied by a national flag—indeed its modern proponents continue to argue that private enterprises are far better practitioners than states. Migration and establishment of trade relationships, however, have historically been very much related to states, as an origin and considerable funding are required to begin.

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<sup>15</sup> See Ho, 2004.

Migration in its purest form is nothing more than the movement of people across political lines of territorial jurisdiction. It may be temporary, as in the case of Chinese sojourners who had every intention of returning to China, or permanent as in the case of settlers. Foreign relations consisting solely of trade require some degree of temporary migration, as someone must bring the goods to market, and thus the two processes are fundamentally inseparable<sup>16</sup>. Chinese prestige aside, Zheng He's missions into the Indian Ocean in the early Ming Dynasty were the most extreme extension of short-term migration in the name of trade<sup>17</sup>. Under state sponsorship, Zheng He could have established Chinese colonies and perhaps conquered most of the lands he and his fleet visited. Yet, as Dreyer notes, the same state which sent Zheng He into the seas to establish tributaries later derided such voyages—and any eunuch-related pursuits—as wasteful. The Ming called not only for their end, but also an end to all trade, which indeed led to a what Reid called a “virtual suspension” of official relations from 1450-1567<sup>18</sup>. By the time Europeans made their first arrivals, only Palembang remained as a Chinese port—explicitly not a colony--and its reputation as a pirates' lair inhabited by the dreaded Zhang Lian suggests that official ties had been all but severed<sup>19</sup>.

A well-functioning global marketplace virtually requires that traders be permanently settled, or have a permanent trading post in the foreign location; thus trade also facilitates immigration. Settlements, whether or not carrying colonialist intent, provide traders with permanent markets for goods, allowing the traders to do what they

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<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the index to Lieberman's book on SE Asian history, under the Chinese heading, lists “trade and migration” together as one entry, implying a singular process.

<sup>17</sup> Mei, pg. 495, claims that the expeditions “were politically motivated and did not lead to any significant emigration,” where this term denotes the intent to settle, as opposed to simple crossing of borders.

<sup>18</sup> See Reid's (1999) chapter on Sino-Javanese relations.

<sup>19</sup> See Dreyer, pg. 184. This was around the time that Chinese returned to the area, after the ban on trade was lifted. Zhang Lian of the “Old Harbor” is described in 1566 as being accompanied by an illegal entourage of emigrants from Fujian, self-appointed “chief of foreign shippers” in Palembang.

do best—transporting goods—and letting the settlers sell them in the domestic market. These patterns are evident in the “Chinese Century” of Southeast Asia, spanning from 1740-1840 by Anthony Reid’s (1996) account. European colonists in this era did not approach the size and efficiency of Chinese settlements, and they were very much dependent on the economic acumen and connections of the Chinese<sup>20</sup>.

Interestingly, a regional parallel can be built upon Kenneth Pomeranz’s concept of “everyday luxuries”<sup>21</sup>. Not only did Chinese of this era consume more of these, such as sugar, than Europeans; Owen also notes that Chinese traders and settlers in Southeast Asia were adept at “creating desires and turning them into necessities”<sup>22</sup>. Indigenous entrepreneurs, lacking credit, were simply unable to compete, whereas Europeans continued to lack the local connections needed to dominate trade.

The major change in these patterns, a divergence if one pleases, was caused by the introduction and rise of capitalism. This paper will not contend that European colonialists introduced it, or that overseas Chinese were inherently capitalist cast-offs from a constrained, Confucian civilization. This conjoined consequence suffices: capitalism, which commodifies labor, when practiced on a global scale, demands that it, like all goods, be traded internationally to maximize profits. Trade is then not only inseparable from migration; international migration in a global capitalist system *becomes* a type of trade, as migrants become the good which is transported and traded to meet demands in labor-scarce lands<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> Brown, pg. 43, notes this was still the case in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, well after European superiority had been established.

<sup>21</sup> See Pomeranz, pg. 116.

<sup>22</sup> See Owen, pg. 28.

<sup>23</sup> In so many words, Mei concurs on pg. 494: “[E]migration itself became a business, where the labor power of the emigrants was the commodity.”

As the migration scholar Aristide Zolberg notes, “[i]n the perspective of capitalist dynamics, immigrants of any kind—including refugees—are considered primarily as workers.”<sup>24</sup> Such considerations characterized the fourth stage of Chinese migration to SE Asia, dominated by the “coolie trade” from 1860-1930<sup>25</sup>. Such was the burgeoning extent of this trade that Chinese migrants reached lands as distant as Peru and Germany in large numbers, and countries such as the USA saw fit to enact laws restricting inflows of them. Anthony Reid called these flows a “colonial flood” into SE Asia, a case of colonization without imperialism<sup>26</sup>, as indeed the Qing was by then far too weak for imperial ambitions. By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a most unusual situation arose, as hitherto disconnected, unappreciated overseas Chinese were called upon by their teetering home state to return and rescue it from oblivion. It was, of course, too little, too late, and certainly there were few Chinese merchants interested in coming to the aid of an outmoded empire which had frequently banned their livelihood.

Yet it is a mistake to suggest that Chinese laborers were not a significant segment of Southeast Asian societies before the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In Carl Trocki’s chapter, entitled “Chinese Pioneering”, two distinct types of settlements are apparent by the 18<sup>th</sup> century: urban merchants and rural laborers. The latter laborers had always been necessary in Southeast Asia due to a uniquely high ratio between land and population<sup>27</sup>, and their difficult lives were reflections of facts stressed by Wang Gung-wu and Nicholas Tarling: that Chinese in SE Asia are universally rich is an enduring myth, and despite dominating local trade, the “vast majority” of Chinese were very unsuccessful, lucky to escape their

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<sup>24</sup> See Zolberg, pg. 270, in the chapter entitled “Matters of State: Theorizing Immigration Policy”

<sup>25</sup> See Mackie’s introduction, pg. xxii, in Reid (1996). Again, it is this paper’s contention that 1860 is too late a starting point for this phase, as similar practices were observed before the first opium war.

<sup>26</sup> See Reid (1996), pg. 49.

<sup>27</sup> See Brown, pg. 33

sojourn alive<sup>28</sup>. June Mei, however, draws an important technical and temporal distinction:

"The best known instances of Chinese emigration before the nineteenth century were the exoduses to Southeast Asia...during the collapse of the Ming Dynasty. Although these moves were prompted by political unrest and economic chaos at home (all "push" factors), they still represented an emigration of settlers and colonizers. They were not being employed by anyone, nor were they entering a structured economy...Once abroad, they generally controlled their own economies...[and] were able to become dominant economic forces in their communities." (Mei, pg. 495-6)

Mei then proceeds to quote an early 20<sup>th</sup> century source which claimed that "In 1904...seven million Chinese emigrants and colonists...[were] absorbing all profitable occupations and converting the lands of their new homes into commercial dependencies of the Chinese race."<sup>29</sup>

In stark contrast to such thriving private enterprises, Martin Stuart-Fox calls the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the nadir of two millennia of official relations between China and Southeast Asia, as all the countries in the region broke ranks, often by force, from the Sinocentric world. Such is another illustration of Chinese emigrants' disconnectedness from their state: after two dynasties of strict prohibition, the late Qing became utterly powerless to stem the growing exodus. In migratory terms, the "push factors" of China and the "pull factors" of SE Asian communities had become virtually unidirectional, yet Qing support for such emigration remained of a coerced and resigned nature.

The wording of its 1909 "nationality law" betrayed a desperate and deluded empire, clinging to memories of when the outside world truly had little to offer, and its subjects had no reason to venture into the barbaric lands beyond the sea. Had the "nationality law" subjecting all overseas Chinese to Qing rule been passed earlier—perhaps some time in the 18<sup>th</sup> or early 19<sup>th</sup> century--and backed up by state

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<sup>28</sup> See Tarling, pg. 174.

<sup>29</sup> See Mei, pg. 496. Her source is Hosea Morse's 1918 book, *The International Relations of the Chinese Empire*.

enforcement, the relationship between the SE Asian diaspora and the Qing would have been much closer. Closer relations might have informed the Qing of the danger they faced from the Europeans and drastically altered its strategy for combating the opium trade. Had hypothetical ties solidified particularly early and combined with colonialist ambitions, Thailand at least was pre-fitted with a population of colonial lords. Instead, it took not one but *two* opium wars for the Qing's central sense of security to be shaken. At the conclusion of the second in 1858, the ban on overseas movement was belatedly lifted, after the export of its subjects as "coolies" had been under way for twenty years. Rather than rising to meet foreign challenges, the leaders recoiled, and poor Southern subjects were driven to explore the grim opportunities offered by their kinsfolk in the *Nanyang* (South China Sea) and beyond. No doubt, counterfactuals for the Chinese case provide endless amusement for world historians, but this essay dispenses with them here, as they have served to show alternatives to the minimal relations between the overseas Chinese and their original, reluctant nation state.

Some enduring controversies among scholars of Southeast Asia deserve some attention. While there is little doubt that ethnic Chinese dominated regional trade for most of the early modern era, even well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as Frank notes, the extent of Chinese state involvement is nebulous. It seems that during the long stretches of trade bans, overseas merchants and communities were at their most autonomous and disconnected from the empire, though this paper and others have suggested a nearly continuous independence from both the Ming and Qing. Legalized periods, as well as the decision to reverse a ban, appear to come as a result of excessive piracy which had deleterious effects on the empire, or after the empire was able to exert considerable control over the system as a whole—that is, when almost all trade was in

official rather than private hands. It is difficult to avoid the tautology that when the empire was able to regulate trade, they did and it was legalized; when they couldn't, they didn't and it was banned.

In a book arguing for considerations of the Southeast Asians as self-guiding agents—as opposed to the playthings of foreign powers—it is somewhat odd to find Lieberman's claim that Siam's Chinese connection "saved the kingdom" in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, with local leaders "desperate" for help. It seems on more solid ground in counting the rising number of Chinese junks in Siamese ports, thereby challenging Anthony Reid's claim of a 10-fold increase in Chinese trade between 1720-1820, reducing it to a more "probable" doubling or tripling<sup>30</sup>. What is most shocking is that the junk count appears to *peak* in 1850, ten years after SE Asian tribute missions to China took a nosedive, and long after such missions were at their highest number in 1790<sup>31</sup>. This comparison strongly suggests that the number and prosperity of SE Asian merchants was in fact inverse to that of the Chinese empire, that they were independent enough to lead regional trade well beyond the Qing's decline, giving up primacy only temporarily in the high colonial period of European rule. Even during that time, they exerted a strong enough "pull" to lure their kinsmen away from the "sick man of Asia" and toward the rich men of the Southeast.

Kinship organizations, argues Kian, were the primary unit of Chinese settlements throughout Southeast Asia, and though many lineage bonds were completely

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<sup>30</sup> See Lieberman, pg. 304. Reid repeats the claim after Lieberman's book was published in his article "Chinese Trade and Southeast Asian Economic Expansion in the Later Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries: An Overview", found on pg. 28 of Cooke and Li's (2004) book.

<sup>31</sup> See Reid (1996), pg. 49.



imagined, the groups were the key to Chinese success<sup>32</sup>. As Trocki notes, such labor communities, or *kongsi*, allowed for organization across the entire region<sup>33</sup>, and while unable to secure full independence from the European colonies, they were better able to exercise trans-border regional influence<sup>34</sup>. All authors noted the power wielded by Chinese-owned opium farms throughout the region, providing the capital on which European colonial regimes relied, and even when the farms came under attack from 1890-1910, Chinese were able to move seamlessly into other, vital industries<sup>35</sup>.

In summary, while ethnic Chinese merchants may have been the first to “discover” and benefit from capitalism in SE Asia, late imperial migrants also played a crucial and likely less willing role. Poor peasants have obviously been much easier to force into a global capitalist system than the Chinese state, which appears only recently to have discovered its wealth-expanding, exploitative potential.

**Tying Chinese Migration into Global History and the History of International Migration.** Population movements have never ceased to be a major factor in the creation of nations and nation-states, and the late-early modern case of the Chinese in Southeast Asia offers a long bridge between eras. Being officially stateless, the ethnic Chinese diaspora in the region fits into global history as a link between colonialists and the local population in the region, deserving at very least a footnoted mention in texts claiming European dominance throughout early modernity. Recent efforts to write

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<sup>32</sup> Kian, pg. 631, summarizes their mutual functions: “they provided welfare for their members, exercised judicial authority over them, and also had the powers to mobilize them for the groups’ interests—whether through *military* or unarmed means.” Hiring Chinese in this way also proved to be cheaper than using local slaves.

<sup>33</sup> See Carl Trocki, pg. 89, “Chinese Pioneering in Eighteenth-Century Southeast Asia” in Reid (Ed.) (1997). On pg. 91 he also notes that such organizations were able to secure independence from Malay authorities.

<sup>34</sup> See Carl Trocki’s chapter, “The Internationalization of Chinese Revenue Farming Networks”, especially pg. 166-9, in Cooke & Li.

<sup>35</sup> See Mackie’s introduction to Reid (1996), pg. xxvi. References to more licit Chinese-dominated industries can be found in Brown’s excerpt of a writer in the era, pg. 42, claiming that “the Chinese are *everything*”, and Reid’s overview of Malaysian mining, pg. 24 in Cooke & Li’s book.

Southeast Asian history without giving the European colonialists centrality are also somewhat confounded by the near universal presence of ethnic Chinese in the regional economy.

The summary of events in the preceding section is one-dimensionally Sinocentric for the purpose of illustrating the natural consequences of Chinese traders and migrants practicing capitalism on a regional scale. It must again be emphasized that the process of economic colonization needn't be teleological in the sense that Chinese in SE Asia were single-minded or even consciously pursuing a status as a market-dominant minority. With greater trade and business competition from locals and Europeans, such a status would have been anything but inevitable. Yet it seems that both groups were dependent on ethnic Chinese for many economic functions during the majority of the early modern era, even despite frequent restrictions from the Ming and Qing. While native populations were starkly divided between ruling elites and subsistence farming masses, the closest many nascent states came to having a middle class were the Chinese traders and settlers. The arrival of European colonialists at first brought few substantive changes or restrictions on Chinese economic activities; in order to maintain political control and social stability within their conquered territories, a well-functioning economy was essential. While Europeans almost certainly were able, and locals at many points certainly tried, neither group dared make a sustained effort to kill or expel the flocks of Chinese geese and their golden eggs.

The Chinese were remarkably successful, and this *must* have been a conscious goal related to maximizing profits, in establishing "ethnic monopolies" in certain economic sectors. These effectively crowded out competition, allowing for deeper

embeddedness in SE Asian states, expansion of settlements, and ultimately a pull factor for emigrant laborers in the late Qing. An abundant and near constant supply of coolies allowed Chinese mine and plantation owners to remain largely autonomous from local governments, European colonial administrations, and native labor markets<sup>36</sup>, having the same effect on the local population as colonialism: very low upward mobility or ability to accumulate capital and compete in trade.

Claims that economic colonization was a natural consequence of ethnic groups practicing capitalism in an environment of stunted competition does not exclude the possibility that the Chinese at one point began striving consciously to dominate the entire economy. Turning points at which path dependency insured the irreversibility of such trends must also be pinpointed to make a stronger argument. Unfortunately, the very limited use of Chinese sources precludes any conclusive statements in these regards. That no texts yet encountered have utilized this framework extensively for interpreting Chinese actions in the region also makes scholars unlikely to be looking for such critical moments. Attempts by this study to do so can therefore only be speculative.

Certainly the point at which Chinese trading posts became permanent, year-round settlements on every major island and kingdom would be crucial to establish. Regional variability and the non-linear nature of economic colonization make such establishment nearly impossible without many more narratives focusing on the region in this context. On a basic level also, permanent settlements do not at all imply dominance. If pressed to name critical periods for permanent settlements and

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<sup>36</sup> All authors have noted that the native SE Asian population was far too small to sustain a capitalist economy without significant immigration.

economic dominance, this study will side with Anthony Reid in that the early 17<sup>th</sup> century accomplished the first, while dominance must have attained in the “Chinese Century” of SE Asia, ending for the Chinese state only with the opium wars. Emigration from the Chinese state, especially in the mid-to-late 19<sup>th</sup> century, allowed ethnic Chinese to maintain an essential presence, if not outright dominance in the midst of European political administrations.

While states, European colonies, and sub-regions—especially unaffected pockets within them-- may have been exceptions to the rule of Chinese economic colonization, viewing the region as a whole allows exceptions to be reconciled with the general pattern. This is especially true in comparisons of areas such as Thailand, in which Chinese immigration was actively encouraged at a much earlier date, and Malaysia, whose Chinese population didn’t really take off until it was firmly under British control in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Being a market-dominant minority also precludes such a status in Singapore, where Chinese had become a majority by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

None of these phenomena could have occurred without pro-immigration colonial regimes, but the real attraction, the primary pull factor throughout the region, was the presence of so many well-established Chinese settlements. Many sojourning Chinese who had fully intended to return to China either found themselves unable to leave the region, due to the unforgiving coolie lifestyle, or actually integrated into the economy. While spiritual concerns among sojourners included fears that not returning to China would be disobedient to ancestors—a lonely Chinese ghost in the *Nanyang* was surely no happy soul<sup>37</sup>—staying in the region permanently surely offered material

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<sup>37</sup> See Owen, pg. 175, on these concerns.

advantages over a return to the Guangdong and Fujian countryside in a rapidly decaying empire.

Heavy reliance on European sources to compile histories of the region, as usual, results in a likely distorted view in which Chinese traders were constantly moving between ports, yet few appear to have had a voice beyond their numbers and the goods they carried. Most authors make reference to almost un-interrupted economic dominance by the Chinese from after the Europeans arrived to well into the colonial era, and more research is clearly needed to show how such a status was maintained, virtually independent of a nation state. Beyond economic colonization, it is important to note how China spread its philosophy and religion throughout the region, especially in the case of Confucianism in Vietnam and, dating to the legacy of Zheng He, the spread of Islam on Java in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries<sup>38</sup>. Should economic colonization become a well established historical process, the next new-fangled frontier of jargon could be a cultural version, though many have noted how resistant culture has been to ill-fitting attachments of concepts rooted in politics.

Again, it is worth emphasizing that Chinese emigration was a worldwide trend for much of both the early modern and modern era, with nearly the whole world receiving significant inflows by the mid-to-late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Tracing mass emigration to the abolition of slavery in British possessions<sup>39</sup> egregiously overlooks the fact that, in Southeast Asia at least and soon across the globe, a difficult life awaited emigrants in insular communities where at least the exploiter and exploited shared the same

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<sup>38</sup> Reid (1999), pg. 67, notes that 15<sup>th</sup> century Chinese were "dominant" in building *pasisir* Javan city-states, but claims of spreading Islam remain more "controversial". Despite not having a specific word for the Chinese in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, China also left a legacy of its weights and measures on the island, as Reid later notes on pg. 76.

<sup>39</sup> As Lynn Pan's book, *Sons of the Yellow Emperor*, is cited for in Wikipedia. One hopes that it mentions the exception of the hundreds of thousands in Siam who had little to do with the policy change.

ethnicity (and often language). Kian takes this one step further in claiming that the bonds which formed upon arrival in Chinese settlements resembled an imagined kinship, based on deity worship and recognition of common ancestors<sup>40</sup>. Wherever Chinese emigrated outside of Southeast Asia, they endured slave-like conditions and ethnic discrimination outside of their community. Whether on the mainland or in the islands, by contrast, even the exploited and downtrodden coolie could find racial pride in what his former countrymen had established and continued to dominate. Such was a very cold comfort, if any at all, but still worth mentioning in an era whose social Darwinism made race and ethnicity a ubiquitous issue.

The final arena which ties this essay's foci into the greater field is the history of population movements. International migration as a global process, whether for active colonization or "corrections" in the global labor market, is intimately tied to the movement of ethnic Chinese. The eminent migration scholar Aristide Zolberg makes no less a claim than that the anti-Chinese immigration law passed by California in 1882 was *the* watershed moment which ushered in the restrictive immigration policies which have characterized the modern era<sup>41</sup>. Perhaps atoning for the Eurocentrism of his previous consideration of early modern migration, Zolberg notes how important Chinese emigration was for establishing a "normative baseline" of *zero* immigration for powerful, nativist coalitions throughout the world. This was in direct contradiction to "the first law of migration", alluded to by Ravenstein in 1885, claiming that "people do not move farther than is necessary to make a living"<sup>42</sup>. Also troubling for such global, modern

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<sup>40</sup> See Kian, pg. 627-8.

<sup>41</sup> See Zolberg's 2005 article "The Great Wall Against China" in his 2008 book, and specifically pg. 120, 122, 226 for his extraordinary claims (which is also extraordinarily convenient for a global history essay on Chinese emigration). He asserts that the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was a "turning point" in the history of population movements.

<sup>42</sup> Zolberg, 280.

claims, was the high proportion of Chinese who did not migrate to such distant lands by their own volition. Whether forced by poverty or actually abducted, Chinese migration made the birth of the modern era a very painful one, and the world still struggles with the complexities of reconciling migration policies, economic pressures, individual rights and transnational justice.

The anti-Chinese law also effectively ended the only “liberal” era of international migration policies, stretching from 1815 to 1880<sup>43</sup>. Zolberg was clearly writing about immigration policies, rather than actual flows of people, as such a cut-off point would exclude the peak of the coolie trade originating in Southeastern China. Both he and Mei have a rather American-centric view of the phenomenon, in this sense, and I would argue that the greater and thereby more important flows were to Southeast Asia.

Zolberg offers one more quotation which is particularly worth expounding upon: “The involuntary migration of ethnic groups as a by-product of the tensions generated by economic modernization and nation-building has emerged in the past century as a worldwide political process.”<sup>44</sup> This makes a momentous and scholarly point of something quite mundane: that any migratory outflow must be matched by immigration elsewhere. Not only physical flows but also political policies and events are mutually influential. As such “economic tensions” may be brought about by outside forces, such as invasion, European abductions of Southeast Chinese residents had a wide range of choices for final destinations. That distant California enacted a restrictive law likely made Southeast Asia all the more attractive to Chinese emigrants, both

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<sup>43</sup> Mirroring economic terms which may be somewhat offensive for their reference to trade in material goods, he calls the “state-building” period of the 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries mercantilist, in which emigration was considered a loss to one’s country (rather like an early modern brain drain). Colonialism changed all this by establishing emigration to the colonies as an extension of state power. The post-world wars era is now said to be “neo-mercantilist”.

<sup>44</sup> As he was writing in 1978, pg. 117, the “past century” began well within our period of interest.

voluntary and coerced. Much is made in the American context of the end of the African slave trade in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, yet such was offset in sheer numbers by a still largely unknown trade in commodified human labor of the opposite ocean. It may be best to end this section with the prescription that studies of world history make an explicit connection between these institutions, for just as in the enslavement and trade of Africans, the linking process and ideology in the SE Asian case were economic colonization driven by capitalism.

**Concluding Thoughts.** From the perspective of Chinese merchants in Southeast Asia, the consequences of the “Great Divergence” were not altogether so momentous. As Owens notes, overseas Chinese were so well established and autonomous in SE Asia that they hardly noticed the fall of the Qing or the continuing administrative rule of the Europeans: “by the early twentieth century the Chinese enjoyed a general ascendancy in business and commerce, from rice milling and marketing to urban-based wholesale trade and rural retailing, penetrating right into the heart of the countryside”<sup>45</sup>. Organization into nation states was hardly necessary when all the means of production had already been secured generations ago, by ruthless and often despised capitalist practices<sup>46</sup>, but certainly not by military conquest.

Several concluding distinctions must be drawn in the practices of Chinese compared to Europeans in Southeast Asia. Both were undoubtedly colonizers who set up their own colonies. Chinese merchants in the region, however, were only practicing *colonization*, whereas the fully state-sponsored Europeans were worldwide practitioners

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<sup>45</sup> See Owen, pg. 176.

<sup>46</sup> See Tarling, pg. 124 for Thai complaints against the “Jews of the East” who benefitted from unequal treaties (diametrically opposite of claims of the late-Qing and foreign powers); Owen, pg. 177, describes the harsh life of a Javanese working on a Chinese-run “tax farm”.



of *colonialism*. The latter term entails all of the first—the establishment of settlements, trading posts, and plantations—but with the addition of ruling the new territories' existing peoples<sup>47</sup>. While Chinese in Southeast Asia often operated outside the wishes of their state of origin, being fully independent of either the Ming or Qing might have resulted in the formation of explicit colonialist practices. Such a counterfactual is evident in that, despite official disapproval on Confucian and “mercantilist” migration mindsets, both dynasties did attempt to control commercial activities beyond their borders. Such attempts were, of course, futile and incompatible with frequent bans on private trade, but given the firm grasp of overseas Chinese on capitalist principles, a total *laissez-faire* policy might have achieved the same results as state-sponsored colonialism.

The picture becomes clouded further when considering the levels of autonomy under which Chinese settlements operated, including both by Ming loyalists in 17<sup>th</sup> century Vietnam and late 19<sup>th</sup> century settlements officially in the subaltern of European colonies. As Chua notes, the economic domination entailed by status as market dominant minorities can also reduce political rule by the ethnic majority to a mere formality. In the case of 19<sup>th</sup> century settlements, a pre-existing economic elite was increasingly supplied with laborers who, in turn, were provided many welfare benefits by Chinese communities, not least the potential for upward mobility<sup>48</sup>.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century migration of Chinese to SE Asia which laid the foundation for market dominance would not have been possible or have occurred to such a great scale if not for 1) well-established Chinese and Chinese enclaves as a “pull” factor,

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<sup>47</sup> Admittedly, this distinction is from Wikipedia's entry on colonization.

<sup>48</sup> Kian's preference for the term “enclave” adds to a sense of autonomy.

coupled with restrictions in alternative destinations as the USA, 2) capitalist principles such as labor commodification, 3) a globalization of the labor market, and 4) the internal displacement “push” factor of Southern Chinese rebellions and rural poverty, both symptoms of Qing decline.

Further, and relating back to the title, ethnic Chinese were practitioners of economic colonization of Southeast Asia in the early modern era, yet have been denied “modern” status by ethnic association with an outmoded, non-colonial empire in precipitous decline. The overseas Chinese did not conduct any invasions, and even the last proclamatory gasp of the Qing could not pretend state support of the Chinese colonies. Rather, by claiming all ethnic Chinese as subjects of the empire, it staked a desperate claim on their wealth, power, and even modernity itself.

An analysis such as this should not be taken as a failure of Mainland China, as many Eurocentric historians have implied. In the midst of actual colonialism by Europeans, under avowedly imperialist nation states, the often explicit non-strategy of China proved to be the far more effective assurance of long-term influence in the region. Indeed, while early modern Southeast Asia scholars have given special attention to the arrival of the Europeans—both for reliance on their documentary evidence and as a foundation for the study of modern colonialism—to understand the post-colonial and contemporary period, knowledge of the longstanding Chinese settlements and dominance of trade may be regionally more important.

Geographic proximity, sizable numbers within populations throughout the region, and perhaps most importantly, dominance of a truly global and capitalist regional economy have proven to be insurmountable advantages for the Chinese. The first

factor, owing to metageographic fact, is timeless; the latter two are inviolable tenets of the Early Modern Era, whether or not such periodization is appropriate to the region. Not only the modern, but the contemporary world order owes its foundation and future to these “robust processes”<sup>49</sup>.

Finally, while this essay has provided a missing mechanism for the phenomenon described by Amy Chua, it also deflates her argument somewhat. Had her book and article spent more effort in the historical record, it would be clear that “free market democracy” is not necessary for ethnic conflict to erupt between market-dominant minorities and the majority ethnicity of a nation. The consequence she proposes, of “global instability”, is belied by the fact that a Chinese MDM is one of rather few characteristics which has tied the region of Southeast Asia together. Should the current Chinese state declare a direct, capitalist interest in the region, an interest which is still prevented more by “official ideology” than practical difficulties, Chinese MDM’s might yet be viewed as colonialists, and SE Asia’s regional existence would truly be in danger. As the PRC rises again to become a strong state, with concomitant trade and economic dominance of its neighbors, so too may rise the temptation to outdo its dynastic past with a more credible effort (than the 1909 Qing) at extraterritorial imperialism.

#### APPENDIX: Timeline of Significant Events and Data Points in Chinese Migration to Southeast Asia (13<sup>th</sup> Century Yuan Dynasty to Fall of Qing Dynasty in 1911)

1253 – Founding of first Tai Kingdoms linked to Mongol Yuan conquest of Yunnan? “No sudden mass migration of population” (Stuart-Fox, pg. 64) but opened up a new migration route from Sichuan (Stuart-Fox, pg. 66).

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<sup>49</sup> To borrow a term, and nothing else, from Jack Goldstone.

1297 – “Prominent” Chinese community noted in Angkor Kingdom (Lieberman, pg. 222).

1368 – Ming Dynasty established. Restricted contact between Chinese and outsiders, including trade. Punishment on returning to China effectively increased Chinese merchant population in SE Asia (Stuart-Fox, pg. 77).

1402-1424 – Reign of Yongle Emperor oversaw six of Zheng He’s seven sea voyages, invasion of Vietnam attempted and repelled. Both attempt to establish Chinese control rather than facilitate migration.

Pre-1500 – “Many SE Asian ports lacked year-round Chinese residents” (Parmer, pg. 21). Chinese are only a “minor element” (Reid, 1996, pg. 33).

1500’s – Newly arrived Portuguese note Chinese are “everywhere established” in Siam (Lieberman, pg. 255), Chinese immigrants in Vietnam said to help constrained Confucian economy (Lieberman, pg. 389).

1567 – In response to growing numbers and sophistication of pirates and illegal traders, Ming legalizes private trade but limits licenses to 50-117 junks until 1597 (Reid, 1999, pg. 79).

1597 – Chinese colony of 3,000 in Banten, Java; Dutch became dependent on this “expanding community” which was peaceful and accepting of Dutch political control (Reid, 1999, pg. 80).

1600-PRESENT – Residents in SE Asia self-identifying as Chinese become permanent (Reid, 1996, pg. 40).

1604 – Spanish massacre 23,000 Chinese settlers (out of 27-30 thousand): shows Ming’s inability/unwillingness to protect SE Asian settlements. Realizing economic dependence on Chinese, Spanish forced to re-admit Chinese settlers. Similar Philippine pogroms occur in 1639, 1662, 1686, and 1762 (Parmer, pg. 28).

1644 – Manchu Qing Dynasty established.

1661 – Foreign trade banned by Qing.

1673 – Chinese coast depopulated to prevent foreign contact, minimizing trade in South China Sea.

1679 – 3,000 Ming loyalist asylum-seekers land in Vietnam, are assimilated within 20 years according to Stuart-Fox, though Reid (1997, pg. 41-2) claims autonomous, Chinese-led states made of Ming armies there through the 1700’s.

1684 – Trade restrictions lifted, as Chinese merchant settlers control “great majority” of trade (Stuart-Fox, pg. 110).

1717 – Emperor Kangxi bans southern trade again.

1739 – 15,000 Chinese in Batavia (Java) (Stuart-Fox, pg. 111); Parmer claims 80,000 and rising. Dutch attempt deportations and when met by armed Chinese uprisings, respond with “indiscriminate slaughter of thousands of Chinese”, yet “hundreds” return by 1743 to restart their businesses (Parmer, pg. 32).

1740 – “Chinese Century” of SE Asian history begins for Anthony Reid, citing “overwhelming dominance” of Vietnamese and Siamese trade (1996, pg. 44).

1755 – Expulsion of Chinese from Philippines leaves only 10,000 on the islands<sup>50</sup>.

1767 – Taksin, a half-Chinese, begins reign as king of Siam. Chinese population in Siam at 30,000 (tripled since 1680, Lieberman, pg. 290). Chinese immigration encouraged, economy ravaged by Burmese war (which toppled Ayutthaya) recovered “rapidly” (Parmer, pg. 25).

1780 – 40,000 Chinese in Nguyen Kingdom of Vietnam (Lieberman, pg. 409).

1825 – Chinese population in Siam at 230,000 (up from 30,000 in 1767) as an unstable Siam is “desperate to strengthen Chinese ties” (Lieberman, pg. 304).

1830 – Chinese constitute 3% of entire SE Asian population (Reid, 1997, pg. 12).

1839-42 – First Opium War. China’s “Century of Humiliation”, in the PRC’s terms, begins. Imperial commissioner Lin Zexu makes first known reference to Chinese accepting employment overseas due to poverty at home, well before the opium war began, work appears seasonal and voluntary (Mei, pg. 477).

1845 – First shipment into SE Asia of Chinese contract laborers from Xiamen (Amoy) by French, noted as the beginning of a rapidly expanding “coolie” trade (Stuart-Fox, 118). Parmer notes the immigration of “several million” Chinese laborers between 1840-1930 (pg. 34).

1850 – China’s population reaches 400 million (up from 150 million in 1700) (Cooke & Li, 2004, pg. 23).

1856-58 – Second Opium War. Ban on movement of Chinese overseas rescinded by Qing.

1859 – “[T]he provincial government of Guangdong was forced to officially sanction foreign recruitment of Chinese laborers” (Mei, pg. 472), and the “forcible abduction of ‘coolies’ had become so blatant and commonplace” that coastal Chinese residents feared venturing from their homes (Mei, pg. 478).

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<sup>50</sup> See Carl Trocki, pg. 95, “Chinese Pioneering in Eighteenth-Century Southeast Asia” in Reid (Ed.) (1997).

1860 – Major data point for Jamie Mackie’s regional Chinese population estimates<sup>51</sup>: 337K in Siam, >100K in Malaysia, 50K in Singapore, and 222K in Indonesia. “Sojourning” trend is said to begin (Reid, 1996). Treaty of Beijing signed, indicating “the central government’s acceptance of large-scale emigration” (Mei, pg. 472).

1870 – “Influx of Chinese into SE Asia became a flood, rising each decade to 1930” (Owen, pg. 175).

1877 – 23,000 Chinese and 290,000 mestizos in the Philippines (up from 120,000 and 7,000 in the “early 1800’s”)<sup>52</sup>.

1881 – 86,776 Chinese in Singapore (up from 40,000 in 1848) (Yen, pg. 275).

1886 – Qing commission visits SE Asian settlements to set up consulates, promotes investment in China (Stuart-Fox, pg. 124).

1893 – Qing imperial edict allows overseas Chinese and their families to re-enter and leave China freely.

1895 – Sino-Japanese War ends in defeat for China.

1898-1901 – Boxer Rebellion challenges Qing but is suppressed.

1900 – Major data point for Jamie Mackie’s regional Chinese population estimates<sup>53</sup>, to be compared to the 1860 figures: 608K in Siam (>2 times increase), 532K in Malaysia (>5 times increase), 165K in Singapore (note also the intermediate 1881 estimate suggesting the rate accelerated), 537K in Indonesia, 41K in the Philippines, 80K in Vietnam, and 40K in Cambodia.

1905 - 563,000 Chinese in Indonesia (up from 221,000 in 1860) (Stuart-Fox, pg. 125).

1909 – Qing declares anyone with a Chinese father to be Chinese, reclaiming overseas SE Asian Chinese for China (Stuart-Fox, pg. 124). Law made overseas Chinese “subjects” (Tarling, pg. 311).

1911 – End of Qing Dynasty. 370,000 Chinese in Singapore (up from 96,000 in 1860), 550,000 in other Malay states, 122,000 in Burma (All Stuart-Fox, pg. 126). 792,000 in Siam (10% of total population) (Tarling, pg. 123).

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

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