Introduction

1. Introductory remarks

One day in January 2002, when I was at my home, on the Xiamen University Campus in southern China, I received a phone call from an acquaintance, a retired Malaysia Chinese historian, saying that he had joined a group of Malaysian Chinese coming to Fujian for a ten-day tourist trip and that they also would like to visit Xiamen University. I was asked whether I could guide them around the campus. “I would like to” was my promise.

Some days later, the group arrived. The visitors were businessmen, lawyers, journalists and young students. They told me that this time they were not going to follow the well-worn route for tourists; they wanted to see a more complete picture of Fujian since their forefathers had come from the province. I took them for a tour around the campus, showing them the style of buildings constructed by Tan Kah Kee in the 1930s: white stone walls inlaid with vertical lines in red brick and window frames, red tile roof edged with upturned eaves, which is a combination of Southern European style and the traditional Chinese one; finally a group of high buildings completed just last year, which integrates Tan Kah Kee’s style with modern design. I am proud of working and living at this campus, which faces the sea, is backed by mountains, and has green trees, lawns, lakes, white walls, red tiles and up-to-date teaching facilities. When we were about to complete the tour, the visitors started making general remarks. A man in his seventies commented in a determined tone: “eh. this campus is not bad, but it is a replica of Nanyang University (of Singapore), my
Alma Mater, from lay-out of campus to style of buildings. My Alma Mater is really beautiful and excellent”.

As I see it, this comment delivers information at two levels. First of all, like many Chinese emigrants foster a cultural chauvinistic view towards other Southeast Asian groups. When they return to visit China, the land from where their forefathers came, however, they are also experiencing a sense of superiority in at least two respects. They are financially more powerful and technologically more advanced. It is hard to judge whether this kind of superiority complex is blind or not in general, but if the comparison is made between Singapore and Xiamen, or between the city of residence in Malaysia and the ancestral native village in China, then one can understand such a sense of superiority.

Secondly, the comment indeed reveals that there is a trans-territorial social space around the South China Sea with two ends, one on China’s south-eastern coastal area and another in the Southeast Asian region. This space has been historically constructed and developed and the interaction between Chinese migrants and the native places is meaningful. The comparison of Nanyang University and Xiamen University is a typical example in the sense that it reflects a changing process of interaction. For a long time Chinese emigrants regarded China as culturally superior and before World War II it was popular among Chinese communities in the Southeast Asian region to send their children back to China to receive their education. However, when Chinese communities like those in Singapore and Malaysia made their mark in the world, they recognized it as their mission to transfer modern ideology and technology back to China. Nor does the interaction end here. Otherwise it is difficult to explain why today so many ethnic Chinese of Southeast Asia desire to visit and re-
visit China, even though what China means to many of them is maybe merely that it is the country their ancestors came from.

1.1 Object of Study

I was born in Fuzhou - the capital city of Fujian province. Fujian and its neighbouring province, Guandong, form the southeastern coastal region that has produced the majority of Chinese emigrants to South-East Asia. This is why this region is called Qiaoxiang 

I studied at Xiamen university which is located in Xiamen City, the economic and cultural centre of Southern Fujian. This university was founded in the 1930s by Tan Kah Kee, an epitome of the Southeast Asian successful Chinese. I have been teaching and living there since I graduated.

Since the 1980s, a tremendously dynamic transformation can be witnessed in the coastal region of China. This is not only because the Four Special Economic Zones, specifically to attract foreign investment, have been established in Fujian and Guandong since the 1980s, but also because of the resurgence of the wide-ranging overseas connections of this region. These two factors together have brought out the distinctive features of this area. Economically, South Fujian has been developing from having been the most backward and poorest region among coastal provinces in China - being for thirty years, under the shadow of the Cold War, the frontline confronting Taiwan - into a region with an economic growth rate of 13.6% per annum from 1979 to 1998. Since the 1990s, its economic growth rate has been ranked as number one in the country. Culturally, particular features, marking some places in South Fujian as nodes in transnational networks, have been intensified in the past three decades. The colourful and stately style of the popular three-or-four storey houses announces the comfortable economic circumstances of the residents as well as an influence of
emigrant’s taste, which may be described as a mixture of a display of current wealth and of the historical origins of the resident family. Besides, the emigrant hometown areas are recognizable because one invariably sees a series of grand buildings such as ancestral halls, local schools, and temples distributed over the landscape. The entrance gates of villages are often meticulously constructed in a style which bears resemblance to a Chinatown gate in New York or in Manila. The distinctive features of Qiaoxiang culture is betrayed not only in the way the area looks, it is also expressed in people’s ideology and their way of life. When one chats with people in a Qiaoxiang area, one finds that the overseas connections of the person or family are a ready topic of conversation. Although many emigrants had already brought their direct family members to Southeast Asia before the 1960s, since the opening of China, many affairs or events that happen in the households in the Qiaoxiang village involve overseas family members or relatives. One can think of such activities as house-building and marriage and the issue of the graves of the older generation. If one continues the conversation one is likely to find out that the person one is talking to is not engaged in agricultural work as one might have supposed. Instead he may earn his family bread by activities involving money exchange everyday in the nearby town centre.

My curiosity about the societies and culture of Nanyang Ke (Chinese migrants and their offspring living in Southeast Asia) and the nature of the linkage with their native places in South Fujian stimulated my desire to study and investigate it. I started my first research on it in 1992. After I spent a visiting year in the Centre of Asian Studies Amsterdam, the predecessor of Amsterdam School for Social Science Research, I chose Chinese communities in Manila, the Philippines, as my first study objective. When I was taking Chinese associations as the focal point of my fieldwork, I gained

My early hypothesis was that the main driving force spurring overseas Chinese to re-build their relations with the native region in China was a rational choice for profit-seeking, as the emergent new China has been supposed to provide a promising perspective for entrepreneurial activity. My second investigation in 1995 was aimed at understanding and comparing different models of schools (entrepreneurship versus non-entrepreneurship) operated by different generations of Overseas Chinese in South Fujian. In the process of carrying out this project, I witnessed, by and large, a collective phenomenon with two basic features.

Firstly, many Southeast Asian Chinese engage in visiting and revisiting the hometown. They pursue activities like rebuilding ancestral halls, graves and local temples; they make contributions to the local communities for various local public utilities and provide financial support for education, and for infrastructural projects to boost the local economy. However, their activities seem purely altruistic divorced from profit-seeking motivation.

Secondly, recognizable differences exist among different groups of overseas Chinese. For instance, the new migrants residing in Hong Kong are more likely to relate their donation behaviour directly to entrepreneurial activities. In contrast, this cannot be taken for granted to apply to the groups from Southeast Asia. Age, generation, personal experience of migrants, and geographical distance, as well as the degree of the economic development of the native place, are all decisive elements for judging and understanding the nature of migrant’s transnational activities and the
motivation behind the actions. Therefore, using the explanation of rational economic choice only is unsatisfactory.

Then how should we read and explain the logic behind this social phenomenon? Furthermore, how has the logic been forged historically, socially and culturally, how did it develop and how does it function at the present time? Those were the questions I began to explore.

1.2 Choosing my case

I chose to make a case study to examine my questions because few studies of this kind have been made combining a historical perspective and an in depth contemporary description. After a general investigation in the Quanzhou area, I selected a lineage family from Yongchun County that was deemed one of the most generous contributors from among those published in local newsletters. The surname of this lineage family is Zheng (according to standard Romanized Chinese pronunciation). In the dialect of South Fujian (Mingnan Hua), it is pronounced Tee or Teh. In order to differentiate themselves from other lineages of which the surname is also Zheng, this family entitles itself Peng Siong Zheng.

The majority of residents in four villages (Dayu, Putou, Wulong, Daping) belong to the Zheng lineage and there are some others scattered over other villages. The Zheng members migrated to Southeast Asia as early as the first half of twentieth century and most of them have settled in Malaysia for half a century already, large numbers of them, however, have been quite active in social and public affairs in their erstwhile native place. Their activities seemed to present a good case to use to uncover the nature of the interconnections between two parties crossing territories:
immigrants and local people; overseas communities and local communities. I decided to work on this case.

By coincidence the first time I visited Yongchun County was in the season of Pure Brightness (the fifth solar term). Many overseas Chinese and their offspring had come back to their ancient native places to pay their respect at their parents’ or ancestors’ graveside with ritual prayers and ceremonies. Respecting one’s dead parents or ancestors has always been one of the most important practices in traditional Chinese culture. In Chinese communities overseas, this season and the mid-autumn Festival (15th day of the 8th lunar month) are often the two special occasions to which Chinese migrants attach great importance. When I visited members of the Zheng Clan in Yongchun, I met several Zheng members from Malaysia. Among them, the person who attracted my attention most was a man in his eighties, a second-generation immigrant, born in Malaysia and English-educated on top of that! Despite being born outside his native village, he has shown great interest in Yongchun, the hometown of his father in the past two decades. He has personally contributed funds and mobilized more from his relatives in Malaysia and other South East Asian countries. I started asking myself the following questions: Can his case be said to be representative of others of his kind? Can his lineage be regarded as an example of other Hokkien migrant groups?

The reasons for choosing this Clan as a case for this research are the following:

1. This lineage has kept a fairly integrated written family record that traces their history back to 1360. It also records the migration of family members before the early 1940s. Therefore this lineage could be presented in a historic context.
The migration of this lineage reached quite a large scale. In Malaysia, the number of Zheng descendants is more than ten thousand. On the basis of this respectable number, they established a clan association in Malaysia in 1937. The scale and history of migration would provide my analysis a solid base.

As far as the transnational practices are concerned, two characteristics are noticeable in this case. One is that the trans-territorial space was built as early as the beginning of the twentieth century when immigrant pioneers in Malaya began to construct a coherent foundation on which to build their enterprises and to accumulate capital. The second one is that the Zheng contemporary border crossing activities are rich and diversified. They therefore present a colourful and concrete picture allowing us to understand Chinese transnationism from below.

1.3 Methodology

Since I have been trained as a historian and there is extensive documentary evidence about the Zheng lineage one part of my study is historical. This is also the basis for my claim that there is a considerable historical depth to the long distance networks of this area. The other part of the study is anthropological, so I follow the trend of some major scholars in the field by combining history and anthropology. Let me start with the historical evidence.

Basically the documents I have used for this study can divided into two categories; lineage documents and local documents.

A. lineage documents.
This part consists of the Zheng genealogy, minutes of meetings, membership registration forms, property lists, annual income reports of the Zheng clan association of Malaysia. Furthermore, there are documents about the lineage school, the house property deed and the lawsuit documents about Jujing Hall. Finally there is correspondence between lineage members, between members and the clan association, between lineage and the government and so forth. These original records yield valuable data.

The genealogy is a record of the common descent group or lineage (zu) which is defined as a group descended from a common ancestor. Among the Chinese, descent is patrilineal and kin relationships are often called agnatic relationships (Lim 1998; Hu 1964: 18). The compilation of the Zheng lineage started from 1503. What I have consulted is the latest version compiled in 1937, entitled “Peng Siong Zheng Genealogy” which consists of twenty-five volumes. It is preserved in the Yiding Zheng Foundation in Yongchun. A conspicuous feature is that the compilation of this version was launched and actively used by the Malaysia members of the lineage. Hence the historical data contained in these volumes is relevant to our understanding of the migration history of the lineage. It not only provides general information about the evolution and transformation of the Zheng lineage over a period of 1600 years: migrating south, settling in Yongchun, and emigrating to Southeast Asia. It also reveals the organizational formation, inner structure, social network, and social economic activities as well as information about principal early members.

The genealogy provides an important source for Part One. In particular, it preserves the early firsthand document of the lineage institution, a trans-territorial organization, comprising the table of organization, the staff lists of the Zheng clan, papers of an earlier Zheng sojourn agency, the list of donors for re-compiling the
Zheng genealogy, the examining committee of the re-compiling, the rules of the examining committee, records of the Malaysia pioneers and others. These sources provide material for our understanding of the border-crossing social space as it was constructed in the past.

The Zheng clan association, established in 1939, has gone through the turmoil of World War II, and experienced the rapid transformation of social and political circumstances. It has only been since 1973 that it has been able to enter a comparatively stable period after it had established its association building in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. As a consequence, the documents such as the membership registration form, the minutes of meetings, the correspondence and financial reports, have only been preserved since the 1970s. These firsthand documents help us to construct an outline of the Malaysia Zhengs’ collective life and networks over the past three decades. On the basis of this general picture, I have been able to get a better grasp and understanding of the details of information which I acquired in communications with Zheng members. These documents also contribute to our examination of the association’s role in its members’ border-crossing activities, as shown in the narratives around the distribution of power in this trans-territories organization, and around the conflict caused by the dispute about property rights to the Jujing Hall. With regard to the latter, namely the disturbance of Jujing Hall, privately preserved documents such as the title deed, papers relating to the lawsuit, not only provide details but more importantly, give a chronological sequence in which the events happened.

However, what should be pointed out is that the records in the Zheng genealogy are somewhat sketchy and scattered. They can only be used in combination with fieldwork.
B. local archives

Local archives are those archives preserved by the local governments and related institutions at various levels, as well as various local newsletters and published documents. As this study places the process of the transnational social practice in the context of local development in the era of globalization and discusses how a Chinese local government has actively participated in the border-crossing practice and the interaction between the government and migrants, the local documents are significant to the study.

When consulting government-kept archives I have been most concerned with policy texts and statistics referring to the local social and economic development. However, as the accuracy of the statistics provided by Chinese local governments has been questioned, I use them only in a comparative sense, i.e., while describing the local changes.

Among the many local newsletters and published documents, there are two kinds I would like to discuss here: overseas Chinese newsletters and “literature and historical material”. The former is a sort of small-size newsletter edited and published by overseas Chinese affair offices and unions of returned overseas Chinese at various levels, directed at migrants overseas. Since the 1950s, there have been more than twenty newsletters continuously issued in Fujian province. The contents of these newsletters can be summarized into two categories. One is a report on the local polity, economy and culture, as well as traditional and current stories which are full of the local conditions and customs. The other category is news about the actions of overseas Chinese of local origin in their place of residence, as well as news referring to their investment and donations to their native place. Both kinds of report serve the same goal: to mobilize and utilize to the maximum the overseas resources and
promote local development. Consequently, directed by the ideology of “love one’s motherland and hometown”, the information reported by these newsletters is often highly coloured by propaganda. Keeping this in mind, we still can sift useful information from the news reported by these newsletters.

The local “literature and historical material” is a sort of non-periodic publication compiled by the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (C.P.P.C.C.) at various local levels. The original motivation of starting them in the 1950s was to publish reminiscences with regard to various social activities in local histories. Not long after, however, the scope expanded to encompass all sorts of documents referring to the local society. Almost all the counties in south Fujian publish their literature and historical material under the name of the locality. The “Yongchun Wenshi Zilao” (Yongchun literature and historical material) started publication in 1980; twenty issues had been published up to 2000. With regard to the part of migrants overseas, however, its ideology needs to be carefully examined.

The other part of my study is anthropological. It is based on fieldwork during the period from February 1999 to May 2000, which was started in China and more particularly in Yongchun County, the Quanzhou region and Fuzhou. This was followed by work in Malaysia, especially in Malacca, Segamat, Tanjung Malim, Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh and the Perak region. Further work was undertaken in Hong Kong and Macao. In these areas the principal actors under study have been living, acting, moving and conducting their transnational practices. The macro-triangle region around the South China Sea forms the geographic space which is the context of this study, thus a corresponding fieldwork needs to be carried out in a way itself with a border-crossing characteristic.
With regard to the methodology of fieldwork, I want to refer to reflexive concepts, such as "insider" and "outsider", "emic" and "etic" (Marcus and Fisher 1986), "experience-near", "experience-far" and "juxtaposition" as discussed by Geertz, the promoter of Interpretive Anthropology (Geertz 1983: 72-73). In fact, these concepts refer more to a researcher who is an outsider to the culture in which he/she conducts fieldwork than to my situation.

Generally speaking, I used participant observation and life story as my major methods which link two disciplines of history and anthropology. As I am also of Fujian origin, I could also apply the principle of "the native’s point of view" suggested by Malinowski when practising participant observation. As a matter of fact, wherever I stayed with Zheng members: in Yongchun, Kuala Lumpur, Malacca, Ipoh, or in Hong Kong, I was regarded by them as "Ranrang" (in Hokkien dialect, this means one of us) and could share trust and friendship with them. This seems similar to what Cognitive Anthropology called the position of the insider (Tyler 1969). Two elements have contributed to the degree of acceptance. One is that I approached my contacts, especially those in Malaysia, through their social and personal networks, via the Union of Returned Overseas Chinese, via the Zheng lineage association, and via officials whom principal Zheng figures have trusted. The second is that of my position as a staff member of Xiamen University.

One of the major purposes of this study is to understand the cultural logic behind Southeast Asian transnational practice. My research needs to do more than to investigate the practice as a social process, more importantly it is essential to find out the cultural logic that is framing the practice. In other words, although I want to know what Southeast Asian Chinese have been doing in this regard, it is more important to me to understand why they desire to do so, why they apply one sort of practice instead
of alternatives, as well as how they view their deeds and how they reflect on the
comments on their social behaviour from others clansmen, hometown fellows, friends
or government officials. In raising all these questions, my position as a “Ranrang” has
been helpful. As I could stay close to them in daily life, or followed their working
routine, basically my fieldwork could stay close to the way people experience life.

The most pertinent problem about my position is that if I belong to the same
culture, in which I have immersed myself, and this frames my observation and
thinking, there is a very real danger that my study might lose its objectiveness.
Moreover, as pointed out by Geertz, confining oneself to experience pure and simple,
one runs the risk of being flooded by trifling phenomena and hence overlooking the
essence (Geertz 1983: 73). This peril has been constantly my mind when I engaged in
the fieldwork. However, there are two factors which helped me overcome, or at least
decrease, the possible negative outcome of my position.

First of all, by acquiring the position of “Ranrang”, I was able to communicate
widely with Zheng lineage members. This enabled me to situate my contacts in a
rather complete context, by comparing and analysing various sources of information
and hence I could decrease the danger of subjectivity in the process of cognition. My
approach to the “disturbance of Jujing Hall” (Chapter 4) is an example.

I was in the field in Yongchun and Malaysia exactly when the conflict about
Jujing Hall broke out, developed and reached a climax. Each side involved in the
conflict informed me about their cause. In the process, I obtained a wealth of
information containing various views, understandings, and interests with regard to the
affair. This helped me to see the multiple perspectives in context and the logic behind
the event.
Secondly, I averted some of the risks I ran by using the method of "re-conversation" with the objectives under study when working on the records on tape and in notebooks. Re-examining and analysing the data, I tried to place myself in an intermediate position between different categories and cultural concepts. I re-examined my initial direct experience in order to come to an interpretative framework.

Undoubtedly, nobody can understand more than the person concerned himself. In the process in which a researcher tries to unfold the cultural meaning of an actor’s behaviour, there is no better way than interacting with the person under study to comprehend the culture holder’s self-explanation. As pointed out much earlier by founders of hermeneutics like Wilhelm Dilthey, a nineteenth century German philosopher, this kind of understanding can enable one to know and re-frame cultural manifestations of subjective experience, and to find the concepts in the other’s subjective world and the motive force of his behaviour. (Hodges 1974:149). Hence, when I tried to discover the cultural logic of Zheng’s transnational social practice, I was keen to have as much communication as possible with my contacts in order to obtain a richer and closer understanding of them.

2. Review of Research on Southeast Asian Chinese Migrants

Compared with other examples of transnational migration, such as Mexican or Philippine labour migration, one distinctive feature of Chinese migration is that it has a very long history. Researches show that Chinese migration from south China to Southeast Asia started in the Tang Dynasty (618-907). From the sixteenth century at least, Chinese communities emerged in the major ports of Champa, Cambodia, Siam,
Sumatra (Palembang), Java, the Malay Peninsula and the Sulu Archipelago (Wang, 1992: 79-87). A census suggested that about 150,000 to 200,000 immigrants resided in various parts of Southeast Asia in the period prior to the sixteenth century. (Wu, 1993: 216). From the sixteenth to the mid-nineteenth century, the population of Chinese communities rose to about one and a half million, in the wake of the rapidly growing Chinese trade with Southeast Asia and the early establishment of Western commercial powers in this region (Wu 1993: 259). The most important period with regard to Chinese migration, however, was that from the mid-nineteenth century to the 1930s when a large number of Chinese, mostly contract labourers, poured into this region to feed the demand for labour triggered off by the rapid expansion of the colonial economies. As a result, the Chinese population of the region reached 4.07 million by the early 1930s (Purcell, 1965: 3). Since the 1930s, the average annual rate of increase in the Chinese population in most Southeast Asian countries appears to have been higher than it had been over the previous seventy years, despite the fact that large-scale immigration from China had virtually ceased after 1931 and many contract labourers returned to China at the conclusion of their contracts. The total number was 12.22 million by 1955 (Simoniya 1959:18), 15.83 million by 1974 (Wu and Wu, 1980:133), and 20.17 million by 1990s (Suryadinata 1997).

Numerous studies on Southeast Asian Chinese immigrants have appeared. Since this study focuses on the contemporary transnational social practice of Southeast Asian Chinese, the review of the academic history will be narrowed down to work done in the twentieth century in this respect, referring to other researches only when it is necessary.

Early Western studies on Southeast Asian Chinese immigrants were basically produced by two categories of scholars: Sinologists and Southeast Asian specialists.
The former can be represented by the Dutch Sinologist J.J.M. de Groot’s study on the Chinese Gongsi system in Borneo (De Groot 1896). The basic interest of this group lay in Chinese social organization, people’s life, religion, belief and customs. The attention paid to Chinese immigrant communities was merely an extension of the interest. Consequently, such scholars showed a tendency to relate various phenomena in Chinese immigrant communities to Chinese motherland societies, to seek for the social and cultural roots. De Groot for example, used Chinese traditional village organization, the lineage system, the mutual aid mechanism and ethics to explain the immigrants’ gongsi system.

The latter group of Western Southeast Asia specialists referred to Chinese immigrants only when it was relevant to their study of Southeast Asian societies, ethnic groups, culture, political and economic life. Monographs focusing on Chinese immigrants began to appear in the late nineteenth century. These works followed with interest the immigrants’ economic and political activities, at the same time partly referring to the culture, institutions and life of Chinese immigrant communities. (Day 1904; Hoi 1913; MacNair 1925; Vlemin 1926; Cator 1936; Kwee 1969/1937).

Two interesting features can be drawn from the early study of Western scholars on Southeast Asian Chinese immigrants. First of all, researches were almost entirely started for the purpose of serving the colonial domination. We can therefore expect a colonial point of view in their reports. When referring to Chinese immigrant’s social organization and culture issues, the second group of Southeast Asian specialists virtually adopted the views of Sinologists without further elaboration (See De Groot 1896; Cator 1936). This way of taking the subject lasted for quite a long time among Westerners in the Southeast Asian immigrant research field. Even after the War World II and independence, when this field developed into a second phase, the
features still remained largely unaltered. Pertinently, in these early studies is that no serious attention is devoted to Chinese migrants' border-crossing activities. This contrasts sharply with Chinese works on such matters.

In the Chinese world, the real research has only really begun since the beginning of the twentieth century, although written documents and data with regard to Southeast Asian Chinese migrants emerged much earlier. This was stimulated by the fact that Chinese migration reached a high tide at that time and also because Chinese overseas gave great financial support to Sun Yat Sen's revolution. It was as if overseas Chinese really appeared on the horizon and began to arouse widespread attention. Sun addressed them as "the mother of the revolution".

The early study on Southeast Asian Chinese on the Chinese side also can be basically catalogued into two kinds\(^\text{11}\). One was based on the description of the Chinese migrants' political, economic and cultural activities in the place of residence. Most of them are brief and sketchy. (Li 1927, 1929, 1936; Wen 1929) Another type paid attention to the relationship of migrants with their native places. This kind is the most influential and it is also the most relevant to this study. A representative of this kind of study is the work of Chen Da.

In 1933, in order to study people's living standards in various countries, the International Research Committee of the Institute of Pacific Relations launched a programme on migrant studies, as migration was a crucial element influencing living standards. At the invitation of the institute, Chen Da, who was trained in sociology in the US, conducted an investigation in emigrants' sending areas in Guandong and Fujian in 1934-1935. Based on his fieldwork, he wrote a Chinese monograph entitle "Southeast Asian Chinese and the societies of Fujian and Guangdong"\(^\text{12}\). Chen Da was the first to go into a thorough discussion of the linkage between Chinese migrants
and their places of origin and the social transformation of the latter. He made a comparison between the emigrating communities and non-emigrating ones, as well as Chinese migrant communities in Southeast Asia. On this basis, he described and discussed various kinds of trans-territories activities emigrants had conducted in their hometown region and the impacts on the transformation of the sending place. His conclusion was that Southeast Asian Chinese immigrants were the major force in the transformation of modes of living in the sending place (Chen 1938).

Other noticeable achievements in this period are Wu Jingxi and Zheng Lingkuan’s researches on the issue of remittances. Wu discussed the impact of the remittances on the local financial institutes and financial market as well as on the foreign trade of Xiamen which received remittances from Chinese migrants in Southeast Asia (Wu 1937 A; 1937B; 1938). Zheng on his part took Fujian province as a whole, and studied the amount and use as well as the impact of remittances on the social economy and living pattern of the hometown area (Zheng 1940).

What all of them, Chen, Wu and Zheng, followed with interest was the sending place and the impact of migrant’s activities, such as remittances, donations and investment, on this hometown region. Their emphases lay on the sending place and they took the social transformation as influenced by emigrants as their study object. Therefore this angle can justifiably be regarded as a China-centred point of view. No attention was paid to the migrants themselves who conducted those border-crossing social practices in the hometown region. As a result the process of the practice, and circumstances which conditioned the process, the driving force behind the practice as well as migrant’s identity remained outside the field of vision.

After War World II, the situation in Southeast Asia and Eastern Asia changed fundamentally. The ending of the European colonial period in Southeast Asia, the
establishing of national states one after the other in the region, the founding of Communist power in mainland China, the deteriorating relations between China and Southeast Asian countries, and American geopolitical domination in the region as part of its world hegemony, all these have not only exerted deep impact on Chinese migrant societies and migrants’ border-crossing activities, but also have influenced the vision and assessment of studies. The study on Southeast Asian Chinese migrants hence moved into the second phase.

In this period, although the number of scholars in this field increased and their vision expanded, one can still see the shadow of the early study pattern, especially in the first twenty years. Sinologists like Freedman, Skinner and others, whose real interest lay in Chinese traditional society but who could not go into China because of the Cold War, took Southeast Asian Chinese communities as “remains of China” (Freedman), a laboratory for studying Chinese traditional social organization, familism, Confucian culture and provincialism. Another group who originally started from Southeast Asian studies saw Chinese communities as a distinctive ethnic minority and paid attention to the history and current situation of these communities. This group expanded quickly and also attracted numbers of locally born Chinese scholars to join in. The transformation of the ethnic position of the Chinese in the adopting countries and of relations with the mainstream societies became focus of studies. A series of concepts drawn from real life such as conflict, accommodation, assimilation were put on the agenda. Chinese cultural identity in relation to native places as well as the ethics and values enshrined in Chinese culture were discussed intensively and interpreted. What lay behind the discourse was the concern about how to blend the Chinese minority into the local mainstream societies. They were distinct from the locals culturally and racially but held an economically dominant or at least
an economically important position, within these societies. The dominant feeling was that they should be subordinated to the construction of a modern nation. This line of thought was embodied in the so-called 'modernization theory' and was actively promoted by American scholars. It's success would be, to cast off the threat of Chinese communism.

There are a few scholars in this period who began to pay attention to Chinese migrants' border-crossing activities, and this blossomed into a novel field of research. These studies converged on two aspects. One examined the Chinese government's attitude and corresponding policy toward migrants, both historically and contemporary. For instance, Yen Qinghuang's study on the late Qing government's strategy of selling official titles in order to attract overseas capital from Southeast Asian Chinese communities and Fitzgerald's tracing of the transformation of the communist party's policy toward Chinese overseas (Yen 1970; Fitzgerald 1972).

Another aspect emphasized the investment and political activities pursued by the migrants in Mainland China, especially in the early twentieth century. The most outstanding are M.R. Godley's research on the interaction between Chinese border-crossing practice and the economic reform pursued by the late Qing government (Godley 1973, 1975, 1976), and Yen Qinghuang's discussion on the role of overseas Chinese in the 1911 Sun Yat Sen's revolution (Yen 1976).

Chinese academic interest at that time focused on the activities Southeast Asian Chinese had conducted in Mainland China before the communist party came to power. For instance, in the 1960s, a group of researchers from Xiamen university was engaged in a wide range of investigation in the emigrants' hometown area, the southeastern coast of China, and collected sizeable documentary and interview data with regard to Southeast Asian Chinese migrants' border-crossing activities in this coast.
area in the twentieth century (Lin and Zhuang 1985, 1989; Lin 1994). However, for a long time these materials were read in the framework of patriotism, influenced by the dominant ideology of China.

Since the late 1970s, the study on Southeast Asian Chinese has stepped into the third phase. Two important changes in the context are relevant. One is that since the 1970s, a group of newly developing industrial countries arose in the Southeast Asian and East Asian region. What they have achieved is often called an economic miracle because they managed to keep up a striking rate of economic growth for a long period. As ethnic Chinese contributed crucially to the growing prosperity and integration of the region, and partly because they have emerged as a significant and distinctive force in global capitalism, this phenomenon has attracted wide attention. The second was the revival of interest in China among overseas ethnic Chinese. This was stimulated almost at the same time, by the opening of China and the normalization of diplomatic relations between Southeast Asian countries and China, motivated by various interests, like visiting, touring and business development. The border-crossing activities interwoven with a series of socio-economic transformations of China caused by its opening up to foreign capital therefore attracted the attention of scholars from various disciplines. Three interrelated principal targets appear in their studies: to solve the puzzle of the economic success the Southeast Asian ethnic Chinese have achieved; to examine their changing identity; and to investigate their border-crossing activities.

Scholars have focused on what are assumed to be distinctive Chinese attributes like kin-based network, personal relations network, cultivated on trust and reciprocation, as well as flexible business means and strategy. All these elements have often been connected with the cultural tradition of the ethnic Chinese. (Wu and Wu
As Mario Rutten summarizes: "it is the family firm and business network as cultural artefacts-based on closeness, collectivism, paternalism, trust and intense managerial dedication-that have been instrumental in the recent accumulation of wealth by Chinese businessmen in Southeast Asia" (Rutten 2002:29). This led to the emerging of a New Confucianism and of an imagined Confucian culture circle theory as well as the Great China theory (Tu 1984; MacFarquhar 1980; Shambaugh 1993). These theories later were taken up by scholars from business and cultural studies (Clegg and Redding 1990; Redding 1990). All suffer from the cultural fallacy that everything can be explained by the essential characteristics of Chinese culture.

Directly related to my study are researches referring to Chinese migrants' transnational practices. On this aspect, Mainland Chinese scholars have published a great number of articles since the 1980s. The main contribution they have made is that they provide early pictures of Chinese border-crossing activities (Lin 1980A 1980B; Zhang 1985; Liu, Cheng and Zheng 1989; Dai 1996). However, controlled by ideology and subordinated to the needs of local governments, for quite a long time, many Chinese scholars have been satisfied with the method of seeking an explanation for reality from earlier history. Hence the contemporary overseas Chinese transnational practices are interpreted simplistically as repeating those of the first half of the twentieth century (Wang 1983; Yan 1987; Cong 1990; Liu 1984; Lin 1989). Besides, various kinds of stories mixed with flights of fancy and unverified facts that have flooded into local written documents edited by local hired scribes have hampered real and thorough research.

At the same time, scholars outside China who had begun paying attention to Chinese migrants border-crossing activities carried the studies further. Apart from
continuing to concentrate on issues like Southeast Asian Chinese capital flowing into China and the effects this had in the late Qing period, from the end of nineteenth to the beginning of the twentieth century (Godley 1981; Yen 1982, 1984, 1991), they followed Chinese labour toward Southeast Asia as well as the Chinese government’s policy in this regard. Some of these studies gradually began to turn their interest to the contemporary border crossing activities-mainly to investment (Suryadinata 1995; Wang 1992, 1994). Wang Gunwu, representing this view, states that two kinds of model existed in the literature of overseas Chinese contributions to the development of China during the first half of the twentieth century. The first is called the Sincere-Wing On model: “The investment decisions were modern and rational. There was no sentimentality behind them” (Wang 1995: 21). Another called the Tan Kah Kee model is the opposite of the former. Tan Kah Kee contributed large and regular sums of money to “support family homes, local schools and territory institutions and other community amenities” (Wang 1995: 25) Wang claims that on the one hand, since 1980s, the Tan Kah Kee model no longer survives. Southeast Asian Chinese invest in China today purely in pursuit of profit. On the other hand, the crucial difference between the modern ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs’ investment and the Sincere-Wing One model is that the latter invested in China as a prelude to or as a preparation for their eventual return to China, while the former did not have this sort of intention at all. This view also simplifies the complex nature of Southeast Asian Chinese border-crossing activities. By presenting the Zheng members’ case, this study suggests a different view and conclusion.

Since the late 1990s, the study in this field has been developing from two perspectives. Under the name of “Qiaoxiang study”, one group of scholars has focused on enterprises in Mainland China invested in and established by overseas
Chinese, and tried to link the research with the discussion about Chinese capitalism (Dirlik 1996; Douw, Huang and Godley 1999). Other scholars who study transnational migrants, now look at the contemporary overseas Chinese transnational practice, which they call Chinese Diaspora, from a global point of view. By comparing it with other transnational migration groups, labour migration from Mexico, female labour migration from the Philippines and others, this group of scholars has begun to engage in a reflexive examination of Chinese culture and identity, using such conceptualization as alternative capitalism, multiple identities, transnationalism and late capitalism cultural logic. They regard Chinese cultural and family values and Chinese guangxi network as discursive tropes. “These tropes and the discourses underlying them do not merely explain Chinese identity, networks and economic activity, rather, such discourses and their connection to power in large part constitute Chinese identities and transnational practices, and are therefore in need of deconstruction and study” (Aihwa Ong and Donald M. Nonini 1997:9).

I have three comments on the state of current scholarship. Firstly, as far as Southeast Asian Chinese’s transnational practice is concerned, the trope of guangxi should be deconstructed by a historical examination of a long-term period consisting of colonial, post-colonial and late capitalism phases, instead of as many studies having been doing, limiting the investigation only to the time span of the past two or three decades. Secondly, if we pay close attention to the practice of individual border-crossing, and examine the visible or invisible factors influencing the process, instead of being content with a generalized explanation, we will understand the cultural logics which direct the border-crossing activities better. Thirdly, if we consider the flexible policy and accumulation strategy that the local governments in China’s southeast coast region of China have adopted in seeking local development in the wave of
globalization, we can acquire a better understanding of Southeast Chinese transnationalism. These policies and strategies have penetrated the process of migrant’ transnational practice, and framed and intensified the collective memory of migrants. Conversely, they are also influenced by the latter’s action. The result is a complex interaction, which forms the context of this study.

3. Theoretical Perspectives

The theoretical perspectives, used in this study, have three levels, namely: the lineage, transnationalism and entrepreneurs. First of all, this is the study of a Chinese lineage and, as such, it connects to a long tradition of Chinese lineage studies. As Maurice Freedman has pointed out, lineages form the basic unit in the structure of southern Chinese society (Freedman 1958:31-32). In the past, scholars focused mainly on the static dimension of lineages: a lineage was regarded as localized within an immediate sphere of influence and territory. Therefore, lineage and land control, lineage and class relationships, inter-lineage segmentation, inter-lineage feuds have become the core issues in this field (Freedman 1958, 1966, 1970; Baker 1979; Hsu 1967; Fu 1982). This line of thinking still continues as shown in a recent volume entitled “Down to Earth: the Territorial Bond in South China” (Faure and Siu 1995).

The perspective used here, is to see a lineage not as a static, fixed entity, based upon the natural phenomenon of kinship, but as a dynamic, historically embedded phenomenon, based as much on cultural imagination (fictive kinship) as on biological natural ties. Very important to the imagination of the lineage is regional and local identity that enables the formation of hometown associations. In the positive reception of Benedict Anderson’s (1993) idea that the nation is an imagined community, it is
often forgotten that lineage and locality are just as much ‘imagined communities’ as
the nation. The method used here to approach lineage, locality, and region is that of
network study. It is recognized that these categories of kinship and locality are basic
to the networks under study, but they are not assumed to determine the actions of the
principal actors. Often in the literature Chinese overseas networks and interpersonal
relations are referred to by the Chinese word guanxi, but the disadvantage of this is to
assume that a cultural essence is involved which in itself accounts for its specificity.
In my perspective, the specificities of these Chinese networks can be demonstrated by
analysing them in terms of general network analysis. Since the lineage here is
transnationally organized, my perspective is connected to a growing literature on
global networks as, for instance, represented by the new journal “Global Networks”.

Secondly, this is a study of transnationalism. Theories on globalization and
transnationalism have a tendency to focus on the novelty of these phenomena
(Appadurai 1996, Hirst and Thompson 1996). They are often perceived to be related
to the decline of the nation-state (Castells 1997). Here I want to be very cautious. The
history of the nation-state is different in the different parts of the world and the
decline of the capacity of the European welfare state should not be taken as a
universal phenomenon. In my view one can only speak of transnationalism when
there are nation states and one can only speak of this in the case of China and
Malaysia after World-War II. However, that is not to say that Chinese migration
outside of China (broadly defined) is a new phenomenon. This study will show that in
fact it is a deep historical phenomenon. Transnational migration is therefore a
transformation of a historical practice under the political and economic conditions of
the nation-state. There are no signs that the nation-state is declining in China or
Malaysia. On the contrary, nationalism is on the rise, but it is on the rise under
conditions of globalized capital and labour (Ong 1999). It is these conditions that this study sets out to illustrate through its case-studies.

In the studies of globalization and transnational migration there is a sharp distinction between economic studies and cultural studies. The perspective taken here is largely cultural, but it takes culture as a historical practice (Bourdieu 1977, Ortner 1994, Sahlins 1976), not as a traditional system of norms and values. The attention of this study also turns to the economic and political forces which condition the cultural practice.

Finally, this is a study of entrepreneurs. Again, the perspective adopted here is a cultural one. The case-studies presented here are analysed not as success-stories of the *homo economicus*, the rational, maximizing actor of business studies, but as instances of a cultural logic that frames the actions of these entrepreneurs in terms of their own interpretations and their motivations. That is not to say that they are not rational actors, that they do not attempt to maximize their profit, and certainly not that they are driven by some kind of 'Asian logic'. On the contrary, it is argued here that their rationality has to be understood as historically produced within quite specific local, regional, and national conditions.

These three levels are interwoven. Migration is one of the most important mechanisms of transnationalism. It is organized in networks, partly based on (fictive) kinship, partly on local identity. Transnationalism itself can be viewed not as a 'thing', but as a process in which the global produces the local. My theoretical perspective on these interconnected levels is consistently a socio-cultural one. Anthropologists have developed a perspective on the cultural dimension of social processes that emphasizes the various ways in which actors give meaning to the world and their own practices in it. In Clifford Geertz’s (1973) terms, understanding culture
refers to a "way of life" and my interest lies in the way of life that is the result of transnational migration. My perspective therefore focuses on "what the actors think they are up to" (to use Geertz's expression) and thus on case-studies, without losing sight of the larger context which is "not entirely of their own making" (to refer to Marx). In the study of globalization and transnationalism many authors emphasize the instrumental (economic and political) dimension, but I want to stay closer to the actor who gives meaning to his life and actions. Human beings are 'reflexive', they are aware of themselves while they are acting and through this self-monitoring they transform social life in a dynamic way (see Beck, Giddens and Lash 1994). Their local life-styles reflect more and more a connectivity with other places and with global processes that are embedded in capitalism. The local and the global thus form a kind of dialectic. Culture is 'travelling', that is to say that in transnational migration culture is obviously mobile, but, just as importantly, it travels to localities and transforms those who stay behind. The entrepreneurs, discussed in this study, not only change themselves culturally, they also bring this transformed culture back to their home-towns. The opposition between 'home' and 'abroad' is thus not so stark and is transformed through travelling culture (Clifford 1997). Obviously, the new technologies of travel and of communication in general alter the possibilities for transnational connectivity and therefore also for the production of 'global' and 'local' and this study traces some of the changes for the people concerned. Again, however, I want to emphasize that the new conditions of transnationalism do not create entirely new situations, but that they enable the transformation of historically embedded attitudes, sensibilities, and meanings.

Let me elaborate this somewhat further by examining the following concepts: transnationalism, locality and cultural logic.
3.1 Transnationalism

Transnationalism is one of the most frequently used notions in the past decade. Following an old distinction in anthropology which at some point defined British anthropology from American anthropology: some scholars use a social approach; others a cultural one. Cultural anthropology, moreover, has been influenced by cultural studies. Cultural studies scholarship, as Smith and Guarnizo pointed out, “has imprinted the field with a peculiar cultural bent and a distinctive, postmodern discursive flavour”. (Smith and Guarnizo 1998:4) The cultural approach of transnationalism, has been developed recently by, for instance, Aihwa Ong who explicitly claims “I use transnationalism to refer to the cultural specificities of global processes, tracing the multiplicity of the uses and conceptions of culture”. (Ong 2000: 4) In her earlier book edited with Donald Nonini, she adopted the term “third culture”, suggested by Mike Featherstone and argued that “Modern Chinese transnationalism can be considered one such third culture, an emergent global form that moreover provides alternative visions in late capitalism to Western modernity and generates new and distinctive social arrangements, cultural discourses, practices, and subjectivities”(Ong and Nonini 1997: 11).

The social approach, on the other hand, offers a variety of visions of transnationalism. Obviously, this approach has been influenced more by structural-functionalist and economic sociology, paying attention to the transnational practice of migration that is socially structured and to the structure and function of various kinds of transnational institutions which constitute the process of globalization as well as
“the constitution and reproduction of transnational networks through material and symbolic exchange” (Smith and Guarnizo 1998: 4-6; Basch 1994:7).

The different understandings and applications of the notion of transnationalism do not only result from different concerns about and readings of the process of globalization, they are also produced because the process itself is rich and complex. Therefore as a theoretical framework I do connect social and cultural dimensions and take transnationalism to refer to the process of transnational social practice conducted by Southeast Asian Chinese, by which the immigrants forge and sustain a transnational social space which connects sending region and receiving region. This space has been constituted by various kinds of social ties and networks, as well as by, what I call, cultural logic. Accordingly this dissertation intends to discuss two aspects that have emerged in the study of transnationalism.

Until now, most of the literature studying transnational migration has merely focused on contemporary border-crossing practices, regarding them as a special product of the process of globalization that is associated with full mobility and with flexibility of accumulation. The disjuncture of the social phenomenon is emphasized (Appadurai 1990). This angle neglects considering various features of migrant groups. In particular, for some migrant groups, for instance, the Southeast Asian Chinese groups, the contemporary transnationalism is historically embedded. A few scholars like Ong and Nonini in the introduction of “Ungrounded Empires” recognize this and declare that they intend to “…take modern Chinese transnationalism to be a recent global phenomenon with historical roots in premodern trade systems, European colonialism, and more recent American geopolitical domination of the Pacific.” They “seek to identify for a range of sites the precursors and contemporary forms of a distinctively modern Chinese transnationalism, and the instrumentalities and
identification that constitute it” (Ong and Nonini 1997: 12.17). But because their book is a collection of papers produced from a conference about overseas Chinese capitalism, which embodies different concerns and reading, the intentions of the editors were not completely realized.

As far as Southeast Asian Chinese migration groups are concerned, if we do not understand the early form and the evolution of transnationalism, we will not understand the recent transnationalism. The historical development can be divided briefly into three periods. The first period covers a long period till the late nineteenth century. Chinese trans-region activities then were closely related to the expanding of Chinese overseas trading and commercial migration. However, before China started its modernization in the mid-nineteenth century, the government’s attitude and policy could be summarized in two points: first, it was strictly forbidden for ordinary people to go abroad, not to mention actually emigrating abroad. Secondly, the Qing government regarded those people who remained abroad as criminal, contemptible, wretched and abandoned subjects who were disloyal. Given this way of thinking two important results were produced: A: because no legal migration existed, overseas Chinese living in the Southeast Asia region were not able to travel freely between China and the Southeast Asian regions ruled by European colonial regimes. Consequently, in a strict sense, a trans-region social space which connected the native places and resided region did not exist. Chinese trans-regional behaviour was reflected more in border-crossing activities between the colonies in the Southeast Asian region. B: as groups abandoned by the Chinese empire, overseas Chinese could seek help only from the non-government social forces like associations based on clan, region and trade to protect their survival overseas and to maintain connections with
their hometown. This led to the emergence of various kinds of Chinese associations based on clan, region and trade ties. 17

The second period, from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century witnessed the construction and development of precursor Chinese transnationalism. After the Qing government signed the “Peking Treaty” with the British, French and other powers in 1860, Chinese emigration was legitimized. This was followed by a constant flow of Chinese labour to the Southeast Asian region, forming a migration wave lasting for seventy years till the 1930s. For economic and political purposes: to build up modern industry, and to stabilize politically the unstable situation caused by social transformation and confrontation among different interest groups, Chinese governments in the late Qing started to pay attention to Chinese communities in Southeast Asia, and to put into operation its overseas Chinese policy which was designed to control and utilize. This changed situation signalled a strengthening of the overseas Chinese people’s relations with China, the rise of nationalism, and strengthening of Chineseness. Consequently, the trans-territories social space connecting the hometowns and residence region based on clan and region ties was forged. Through this space, the trans-territories activities, with investments and donations as the major forms, became a frequent occurrence as showed in part one of this manuscript.

The period from the late 1940s to the 1970s witnessed the suspension of the connection between overseas Chinese and China as a result of political and diplomatic conditions. Since the 1970s, along with the greatly intensified rates of globalization, Southeast Asian Chinese transnational practice has turned to a new phase. In order to distinguish it from the early practice, some scholars address this phase as contemporary Chinese transnationalism. This transnationalism, on the one hand, is
imprinted with the brand of present-day late capitalism with characteristics of "a constellation of technical, financial, and institutional innovations" and "...associated with the enhanced and increased mobility of people, commodities, ideas, and capital on a global scale" (Ong and Nonini 1997: 9, 10). But despite such modern aspects, it continues to be historically embedded and to possess a cultural logic that has deep historical roots.

3.2 Locality

This study applies the notion of locality at two levels. It examines the dialectic of the local and the global in a cultural and social sense. That is to say that the local can only be understood through the global and vice versa. I do not use the term 'dialectics' to suggest that the two are each other's logical opposites and that the outcome would be synthesis, but to suggest dynamic interaction, as in Peter van der Veer's book on the interaction between the Indian colony and the British metropole (Van der Veer 2001). Furthermore, this study also looks at the governmental practices, both at the local and at the regional level in dealing with this dialectic of global and local. The effects of government projects at local, regional and national levels on migrants have been recently discussed by Ong (1999), who describes Chinese transnationality as "flexible citizenship". Ong focuses on the cultural logic of human action and on economic and social processes in the framework of national and local projects of identity formation. In her view migrants are not just subjected to these processes of government but are themselves creatively shaping them. As she puts it, "in Asia, transnational flows and networks have been the key dynamics in shaping cultural practices, the formation of identity, and shifts in state strategies" (Ong 1999: 17).
The classic modernization theory tried to apply the reading of modern social transformation induced by the experience of Western industrialization everywhere as a means to examine and understand development and transformation of all regions, and to make proposals for future development. In this vision, local is a negative word with connotations of backwardness and stalemate or it is romanticized and overly positive, like in Tönnies Gemeinschaft versus Gesellschaft (community versus society). It is seen "as the realm of idiosyncratic culture at odds with scientific rationality", or "as the obstacle to full realization of that political form of modernity, the nation-state" (Smith and Guarnizo 1998; Dirlik 1996:23). In the past decades, this view has been criticized, especially by post-modernist theory, in which local is redefined "as a dynamic source of multiple modernities and alternative contestation" (M.P. Smith 1992; Robbins 1993; Smith and Guarnizo 1998). Appadurai further discusses locality from the cultural angle of globalization. When he discusses the production of locality, which he calls neighbourhood, he points out that "as local subjects carry on the continuing task of reproducing their neighbourhood, the contingencies of history, environment, and imagination contain the potential for new contexts (material, social, and imaginative) to be produced. In this way, through the vagaries of social action by local subjects, neighbourhood as context produces the context of neighbourhood." (Appadurai 1996: 185) His point is that nothing is outside of history, that subjects of history are also historical subjects. The local is thus not static, but dynamic. For Appadurai and others (see Tomlinson 1999), it is precisely the imagination of the local and the global that is a productive part of processes of globalization. The desire of migrants who have never been to their home towns to 'return' there and spend their last days in them is a perfect example of such an imaginary homeland, but, as argued before, it is not only the migrants who have
imagination. The so-called ‘locals’ imagine the global through the narratives of successful migrants, one among other ways to nurture the locals’ imagination of the global. It is this dialectic that this dissertation tries to analyse.

This view about the dynamic nature of the local is also relevant to the study of government policy, when the dissertation tries to explain the role the Yongchun local government has played in the transnational practice conducted by Yongchun migrants, as well as the interaction between two sides, produced from the action of re-building local projects. For the Yongchun government, the greatly intensified rate of the globalization process provides it with opportunities to adjust their survival strategy to seek local development. As a matter of fact, since China opened its door, this has become a common purpose among local governments everywhere in China. “Seize opportunity, seek development” has been the most popular slogan among the local governments of China. As far as the Yongchun government is concerned, seeking for development is determined by how to mobilize and utilize local resources fully. In the eyes of the Yongchun government, the existence of a huge emigrant overseas population, which surpasses the local population in number, is the greatest local resource. This can explain why the local government has been so actively intervening in the migrants’ transnational practice.

When examining the relationship between migrant transnationalism and the state’s power and control, viewing from a dichotomous angle: from above and from below, some scholars overstress the antagonism and exclusiveness between the two by arguing that it is leading to a post-national culture and the economy of globalization, in which the authority and control of the state is weak. Smith and Guamizo argue that “in the present period of mass migration many nation-states that have experienced substantial out-migration are entering into a process of actively promoting
transnational reincorporation' of migrants into their state-centered projects” (Smith and Guarnizo 1998:7). This judgement is confirmed by this study. I would like to go even so far as to argue that the local government, under influence of economic globalization, carries forward a positive interaction with the migrant community in Southeast Asia in the sense of forming a reoriented local culture on which it bases its own policy. Hence the interaction reproduces the locality itself.

There is a saying in China: “the sky is high and the emperor is far away” which is a good illustration of the relations between the central state and local states in the traditional Chinese system of social control. As China has for many centuries been vast in territory, it has always been simply a matter of fact, that the central state had not enough power to control the locals completely, despite the centralization of authority was imposed as early as Qin dynasty. Instead, local governments always retain a certain space for themselves, to adjust the policy or law promulgated by the central government in accordance with local interest. Therefore divergences exist with regard to policy between the two levels. Since opening its door in the late 1970s, China faced by the pressure and motive force produced by the enhanced and increased mobility of people, commodities, ideas, and capital on a global scale. At the same time, the central state was prepared to allow the local level more room to manoeuvre, the local government has hence developed a strong desire to participate actively in the transnational practice of its migrants and makes a great effort to promote 'transnational reincorporation' of migrants into local-centered projects.
3.3 Cultural Logic

Social determinism was once a popular perspective among social scientists. For instance, Talcott Parsons stated that a subject’s behaviour is moulded by social structure-groups or social units related together in an organized way—which is authoritative and neglects individual enterprise (Popenoe 1988:182). This model was also applied to transnational migration. In this framework, the transnational migrants’ practices are socially structured, responding to a given structure, and the result satisfies the need of the structure. What is ignored here is agency. Giddens therefore raises his “structuration” theory to re-examine the dialectical relation between social structure and agent. In his view, social activities show a feature of routinization. “Routine is integral both to the continuity of the personality of the agent, as he or she moves along the paths of daily activities, and to the institutions of society, which are such only through their continued reproduction.” (Giddens 1984: 60) It is through this repeated route of conducting social practice that the social actor expresses himself. At the same time, by continuing these activities, the actor reproduces the precondition which leads to further activities. More importantly, he suggests that the continuity of practice takes reflexivity, which is produced by actor’s ability of recognition (Giddens 1984: 62). We may take Giddens theory as a starting point to elaborate what we call the cultural logic behind the transnational practice under study.

Ong also stresses the “practice theory” derived from Giddens. In her view, “...the cultural logics inform and structure border crossings as well as state strategies ... cultural logics also make those rational actions, such as family emigration and inviting foreign capital, thinkable, practicable and desirable, which are embedded in processes of capital accumulation.” (Ong 2000:5). This study would like to carry this analysis a step further. The logic, which is relevant to transnational activities, can be divided into four elements: government; market; social network and personal
experience. The government controls certain fundamental resources, including authoritative resources and allocative resources. By setting up institutions and policy, the government defines the actor’s possible action range. The market provides an area for rational economic operation, its mechanism of comparing and maximizing of interest is the decisive elements for transnational migrant’s practice. The social network includes the networks at two ends, respectively sending and receiving places, and also includes transnational networks built up in the process. They form the context of the social practices under study. Personal experience provides the possibility for the actor to form stocks of knowledge, which is the prerequisite for forming what Giddens calls “reflexive self-regulation”.

On the basis of these four elements, three hypotheses about the Zheng lineage’s transnational activities can be formulated as follows.

Firstly, as rational beings, migrants always direct transnational practice towards maximizing of resource utilization. But in practice, what the actor actually can do, and in fact whether or not he can reach the maximizing goals, depends on the conditions constituted by interactions of several elements: institutions and policies designed by the relevant governments; social networks; market operating space; as well as the reflexive self-regulation of the actor.

Secondly, aiming at maximizing resource utilization, the action revealed in the environment must follow a certain route. In other words, it is routine. The routine is forged in the practice or habitus (Bourdieu) of people, and by the repeating of practice, thus what Giddens calls “practical consciousness” to guide people’s behaviour is brought about.

Thirdly, transnational social practices are always conducted through networks and follow certain regulations. Networks, as a resource, together with regulations, can be
regarded as the content of “structure”. Middlemen are situated in the structure and on its basis they play their roles.

This study applies the above three hypotheses to examine the concrete process of transnational social practices since the late 1970s. The historical and cultural roots of this process have crossed Asian colonial and post-colonial periods. The focus is to unfold the cultural logic which conditions the border-crossing activities under study. Cultural logic reveals itself in the interactions of local government, market requirements, social networks and practical consciousness, and frames the manifestations and the content of transnational practices.

4. Narrative Structure

This study focuses on the contemporary transnational social practice conducted by Zheng lineage overseas members since the late 1970s in the hometown region in China. As pointed out earlier, if we do not fully understand the historical and cultural roots of the phenomenon, we will not be able to comprehend the recent practice. Therefore my narrative starts from the migration history of the Zheng lineage. The early migration period, the pioneering period in the Malay Peninsula and the construction of connections with the sending place constitute Part One which consists of two chapters. Chapter 1 presents an ecological and socio-environmental picture of the sending place as well as a general sketch of Zheng emigration. This sets the scene for the presentation of four historical cases: San Shan in Segamat (Malaya), Xingdeshun in Tanjung Malim (Malaya) and Xingde Tang in Yongchun (China), the Zheng Trans-Territories Association and the Peng Siong School in Yongchun.
(China), represent the formation and evolution of early Zheng border-crossing activities. This forms the content of Chapter 2.

Part Two comprises three principal contemporary cases, which are unfolded respectively in Chapter 3, Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. Although similarities could be observed among the transnational practices conducted by the three principal actors, the differences are also noticeable. If Wenyao Zheng’s behaviour narrated in Chapter 3 reveals recognizable features in terms of following and imitating the precursory model in border-crossing practice and proves a sort of historical extension; then Xingzhong Zheng’s case discussed in Chapter 4 delivers more information with regard to flexibility of negotiation and strategy of accumulation expressed in the subject’s pursuit of maximizing resource utilization. At the same time, it also shows how traditional familism is being subjected to transformation in the intensified mobility of the late capitalism; Jingxing Zheng’s operation of transnational enterprises described in Chapter 5 reflects explicitly how flows of capital, technology, information and goods on the global scale project onto the transnational subject’s action. The diversity of the three cases exactly indicates the complexity of the cultural logic which frames the practices under study. And the complexity is further embodied in the interactions of the four fundamental elements: local government; market requirements; social networks; and practical consciousness. For this, a further exposition from the angles of local government and of middlemen is given in Part Three, which comprises Chapters 6 and 7.

Chapter 6 delineates and discusses how the local governments—both the Yongchun district government of the sending place of Zheng migrants, as well as the provincial government in which Yongchun is embedded intervene in migrant border-crossing practices. Related to the local government’s behaviour is a group of middlemen who
have been actively involved in the transnational social networks. Although disparate
in position, status, and profession, these middlemen possess a common point in that
they are key players in the social networks under study. Their existence and function
in the transnational space have not yet aroused sufficient interest. This is the reason I
devote a separate chapter to discussing them.

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1 Proposed by Chen Liushi, a well-known leader in Singapore and Malaysia Chinese communities, in 1953, there were 297 organizations forming a preparatory committee for establishing Nanyang University. After three years preparation, on March 1956, the University was formally opened. In 1980, it was merged with Singapore University into the National University of Singapore (NUS).

2 Qiaoxiang in the Fujian and Guandong context means those counties and places, which have been native places of emigrants (Qiaoxiang literally means sojourner hometown). In recent discourse with regard to overseas Chinese and China, the term "Qiaoxiang tie" is invented referring to the linkage between overseas Chinese and their ancestral hometowns. See Rethinking Chinese Transnational Enterprises: Cultural Affinity and Business Strategies, edited by Leo Douw, Cen Huang and David Ip, Curzon Press, 2001

3 I use the term “lineage” to refer to 祖, which is defined as a group descended from a common ancestor. In a more general sense, the term clan can be used as an alternative term.

4 Generally speaking, a form of address for a lineage family is usually preceded by the name of place where the ancestor first moved in. Keyuan Gong (Keyuan is his assumed name, Gong is Chinese respectful address for a elder male), the ancestor of Zheng lineage who first migrated into Yongchun, lived at the apron of Jian Lian Ken (a valley in Yongchun). The lineage was labeled with Peng Siong, first because it sounds like “on apron” in pronunciation. Second, Peng Siong in Chinese means a cock’s fight. The implied meaning is that they wish lineage descendants could rouse themselves, like cock’s fight, earning themselves a bright future.

5 The genealogy is divided into fourteen parts. The document with regard to the clan association is placed in the twelfth part: miscellanies; the records about pioneers are collected in the ninth part: literature and the tenth part covers education.

6 With regard to details of my fieldwork, see appendix.
On this issue, scholars usually used Li Chang Fu's view, the dating from the middle of the thirteenth century, when the declining Sung dynasty was about to be replaced by Mongol rule and China's external contacts by sea were beginning to expand, making migration relatively easy (See Li, 1927:14). However, more scholars now turn to believe that the beginning of Chinese migration to Southeast Asia should be placed as early as before the 10th century (See Wu 1993).

However, others suggest a lower figure. See Purcell, 1965, pp 3, 43, 169-175, 232-234, 386.

Limited by author's language, the discussion here is basically constrained to works written in English, but she thinks that this wouldn't make much difference.

Before studying the Chinese Gongsi system of Borneo, Groot had done research on the folk beliefs and customs of Xiamen region and published his first Sinological monograph. After he left Southeast Asia in 1883, he soon went to China conducting fieldwork there for five years, subsided by Dutch government, and completed his pioneering study on Chinese religion. Since then he has been well-known in academic circles. (Groot 1996:147-149)

It is worth to point out that most of these early authors themselves had a migration background, like such influential ones as Li Changfu, Wen Xiongfei and Chen Da. (See Wen 1983:308-312; Chen and Li 1983:313-329; Li 1936: 1-13).

The English version was published in 1940 in the Unites States.


In Fujian and Guandong where Chinese migrants's native places are located, various kinds of local historical accounts of past events and newsletters have been periodically published, assisted and financed by local governments. Articles published are usually in the tone of propagating overseas Chinese deeds of “love motherland and love hometown”.

What should be mentioned especially here is “The Qiaoxiang Ties Project” led by Dutch scholar Leo Douw which started in 1995. The study focused on overseas Chinese’ investment activities in Southern China, in particular Fujian and Guandong. See Douw and Post 1995; Douw, Huang and Godley 1999.


In the past, the major part of research on the relation between central state and the locals in Chinese history focused on financial issues. In recent years, scholars pay attentions to the divergence of pushing functions with regard to economic development and point out that the dynamics of reform come from the locals. See Constance Lever-Tracy, David Ip and Noel Tracy: The Chinese Diaspora and Mainland China, New York: St.Martins, Inc, 1996.