Transnational Social Practice from Below: The Experiences of a Chinese Leneage
Song, P.

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Chapter 1
Landscape, History and Moving: the Peng Siong Zheng Lineage in Yongchun County

There is a common Chinese saying, literally translated, “One mountain, one sea, one people; different mountain, different sea, different people” that vividly reveals the inner relations between human beings and their natural and social environment. When going through the history of Chinese migration, a noticeable phenomenon is that most migrants came from two southeast coastal provinces, namely Fujian and Guandong. As far as Fujian migrants are concerned, the majority is of south Fujian origin. The 1957 statistical report indicated that 75 % of all migrants from Fujian province emigrated from south Fujian (Lin and Zhuang, 1985: 26-27). It is necessary, therefore, for us to start our story in context with the living environment and social changes in southern Fujian province.

In this chapter, I will set the scene with an introduction to southern Fujian social environment and history. Migrants from this area are known as the Hokkien group and the Zheng lineage which is central to this study, hails from there. Moving from the general to the particular, I turn to Yongchun where the Zheng ancestors and lineages have lived from generation to generation. The various vicissitudes and activities of this lineage, including the evolution of relationships between the overseas members and those who have remained behind, are unfolded here. With these accounts as backdrop, we become better acquainted with the Zheng lineage, which roots us in a position to
trace and understand how this line of the Zheng family originally migrated from the Central Plains to Yongchun, and how their basic beliefs and the distinctive features of their heritage were shaped by the local social environment. In a manner of speaking, the Zheng ancestors were migrants too in another period of Chinese history. More important is how some of the members of this lineage migrated again in yet another era of migration and in a fashion different to that of their ancestors, by crossing the vast oceans to Southeast Asia, particularly to Malaysia.

1. A trip to the Quanzhou area

In the spring of 1997, I started my primary fieldwork for this research project. At that time, I was still teaching in the History Department of the Xiamen University. It was around the end of 1997 that I was informed by the Amsterdam School for Social Science Research that my research proposal had been accepted. While I was engaging in the patience-testing process of applying for a Dutch visa, I decided to take a trip to Quanzhou district to acquaint myself with the relevant background and to source out possible cases for this study.

The Quanzhou area is situated in the southern part of Fujian province along the southeastern coastline of China; (see map 2).
Map 2: Fujian Province, Quanzhou district and Yongchun County
(Southern Fujian includes Quanzhou, Zhangzhou and Xiamen.)
Fujian province is generally referred to as the “mountainous region of the southeast” for mountains and hills cover 80% of the whole province. The two key mountain ranges are the Wuyi and the Daiyun. They run from the north to the south parallel to the coastline. Consequently, the height of the terrain tapers off from northwest to southeast in a ladder-like formation. Generally speaking, there are three regions; distinguished on the basis of their average height above sea level: 1. the high mountainous district of northwest Fujian; 2. the high mountainous district of mid or central Fujian; 3. the region with medium-sized mountains, hills and plains in southeast Fujian.

Southern Fujian, the target area of my study extends over the last level of these three regions. Although there are no high mountain ridges, hills of 500 metres above sea level cover a major part of this area. Moving from the coast inland, the terrain gradually rises up to as high as 1000 metres. The only two plains along the coast are not extensive. One is the Quanzhou plain of 345 square kilometers and another one is the Zhangzhou plain occupying 567 square kilometres. With Quanzhou city as its centre on the Quanzhou plain, Quanzhou district comprises of seven counties, four along the coast and three in the mountainous area. Yongchun County, the springboard of the Zheng lineage in this study, is one among its three mountainous counties.

Quanzhou city (about 100 km. north of Xiamen) was the first destination of my trip as it is the central administrative and executive center for all government bodies. This city was claimed by Marco Polo to have been the greatest port in the world in the thirteenth century. It is one of the most famous ancient cities on the southeast coast area of China. As it had been a free port city as early as the period of the Song and the Yuan
dynasties, from the beginning of the eleventh to the fourteenth century, it formed a fruitful cradle for a distinctive regional culture. The tendency towards sea trading and immigration was cultivated early among its people.

At the time of my visit in 1997, the coastal high way connecting Xiamen and Fuzhou, the capital of Fujian province, had not been completed yet. So the journey took me three and a quarter hours on a narrow two-lane road.

Actually, I am quite familiar with this area. Several years ago, when I was engaged in two research programmes: viz. ‘The contemporary functions of Philippine Chinese associations’ and ‘The local schools funded and supported by Southeast Asian Chinese’. this area came to my notice as it is a well-known hometown of many Southeast Asian Chinese. In the course of my research, I had visited this area several times to search for and collect relevant data. As a matter of fact, this experience of mine has been one of the key reasons why I chose the current research topic. But that was several years ago.

When I arrived in Quanzhou, I was in for a surprise. The city is crowded with various types of motorized vehicle: motorcycles, tricycles, mini-buses, buses and taxis. The youthful conductors of the mini-buses vie with each other for passengers by crying out the names of their destination and are very warm and helpful in their efforts to solicit more customers. As soon as they get the passengers into the bus, their attention shifts without any hesitation onto the next potential customer. The bus can keep you waiting as there is no fixed departure time – it will not start the journey until the touts have recruited enough passengers in spite of the renewed promises by the conductor and the driver that they will set out in five more minutes. This and the surrounding
atmosphere is one of perpetual action and movement where everybody is seen to be busy earning money and the principle of gaining higher and ever higher income seems to be the top priority. This impression was strengthened as I travelled all the way along the coastal area of this district. Hyper-trading activities, vigorous entrepreneurship, bolstered by the noisy and exciting atmosphere gave the impression that the economy at the grassroots level is a mixture of dynamism and confusion.

2. Migration Southwards

The people of southern Fujian origin, who are called ‘Hokkien’ in most literature, are always regarded as a distinctive group among overseas Chinese. Most of their early ancestors were themselves migrants hailing from the Central Plains (comprising the middle and lower reaches of the Huang-ho River); in particular from two provinces - Shanxi and Henan. The main period of migration took place between the fifth and the eleventh century, triggered off by the turmoil and chaos of the civil wars that erupted periodically in the northern region as emperors fought to establish or maintain their dynasties. The major part of these migration waves from the Central Plains were absorbed into the Quanzhou area. The first wave started in the period often referred to as the “South and North Dynasty” and saw the arrival of eight distinguished clans in Fujian escaping from the perils of war. As the main form of transport was the river, many settled down in the Quanzhou area along the only river that flows through this region from the western mountains to the eastern sea. Therefore, both the river and the
region in its lower reaches were called Jingjiang, with Jing being derived from the Jing dynasty of that period and 'jiang' meaning river (He, 1994: 182).

Later, at the beginning of Tang dynasty, A.D. 713-741, written statistics were reported for the first time in the historical records and these showed that there were about 37,054 households with an approximate population of 240,950 people living in this area (Huai, 1870). However, during this period, Quanzhou was just at the stage of opening up and the population was sparse.

The second big immigrant wave lasted almost one hundred years from the mid-ninth century to the mid-tenth century, the period from the end of the Tang dynasty to the period referred to as 'Five Generations and Ten Countries'.

One century later, in the year of Yuanfeng during the Song Dynasty, A.D. 1078-1085, it was estimated that the number of households stood at around 201,469 and the population was 1,067,845. According to the historical record of that time, there were eight prefectures in Fujian, where the total number of households was more than 200,000; Quanzhou was among the key prefectures.

However, from the late fourteenth century, an meaningful change appeared. The movement of the population started changing direction from domestic to overseas migration. This alteration is related to another feature of the Hokkien group, which I will dwell on in more detail.

Hokkiens have long enjoyed the reputation of being skilled merchants. This categorization can be traced back to the very early political history of China and their primary choice of profession is strongly related to the local eco-environment and living
conditions of the place in which the migrants finally settled. As mentioned before, mountains and hills cover a major part of Fujian, and farmland occupies only 20% of the area. Moreover, the soil is poor because sand prevails over clay. Hence a striking issue in both the Song and Yuan dynasties was the sharp contrast between population increase and the shortage of arable land. But there was a compensation, the long coastline and deep waters have throughout the ages provided the local people with the prerequisite conditions for engaging in maritime trading activities.

The central part of the Chinese empire, the seat of the central government, was experiencing a time of turmoil which lasted a period stretching from the middle of the Tang Dynasty to the early Song Dynasty (around the eighth century A.D.). Clark considered this to be the time the local authorities in Southern China took advantage of the lapse in power between the central and provincial levels to seize control. One of these areas taken over was Quanzhou. In order to find space and a means for survival during these years of upheaval, the leaders of Southern China adopted a flexible socio-economic policy. Encouraged by the more liberal stance taken by the local authorities, non-governmental commerce in Quanzhou began to flourish and set the stage for great development (Clark, 1989). In the eighth and the ninth century, an outward projection of the economy gradually evolved - centering on Quanzhou’s deepwater harbour where a close trading connection with other countries in Asia, particularly with Southeast Asia, gradually took root. Sea trading reached its height during the fourteenth century and gave an impetus to the sugar, tea, textile, ceramics, ironware and ship-building industries to flourish and prosper. It was this conjunction of
circumstances that led to frequent maritime trading activities which launched the Hokkien people on their overseas migration flow to Southeast Asia.

In the middle of the fourteenth century, central government began to implement the policy of banning maritime trade in order to guard against disturbances by Japanese pirates who were operating in Chinese coastal waters and also to prevent the political opposition from making deals with the former. This policy resulted in the decline of maritime trading, but at the same time, it stimulated another move of popular emigration because many people lost their means of livelihood.

In conclusion, two distinctive local characteristics can be identified that are far removed from the generally accepted traditions and practices common to the majority of Chinese that are well expressed in two sayings: "being attached to one's native land and unwilling to leave it" and "agriculture superior to mercantilism". In contradiction to these, two tendencies held sway among Hokkien people: one was the long-held inclination towards migration and the other was the commercialization of local economic activity.

3. A Sketch of Yongchun County

Having finished the first step of collecting general information in the Quanzhou area, I proceeded to the second step. That was to look for a specific place and more precisely; to focus on a lineage family for my case study. I consulted with the senior staff members of Union of Returned Overseas Chinese (UROC) of Quanzhou 3 about my
intentions since they are very familiar with the seven counties under their administration. Inspired by their suggestions, I started paying attention to Yongchun County.

This county is listed as one of the key hometowns of many Hokkien migrants. According to the official statistics of 1997, the number of Chinese people of Yongchun descent living overseas has reached 977,119 while the population in Yongchun stands currently at around 520,000. Many migrants of Yongchun origin have maintained connections with their native county. In the 1980s, the annual average remittance from abroad coming into Yongchun reached almost 5 million yuan RMB (YCD 1990). Moreover, in the decade 1978-1987, the migrants from this county and their offspring living overseas had donated to the costs of buildings and assembly halls for eleven middle schools as well as more than twenty primary schools and kindergartens in Yongchun County. All these structures make up the main body of buildings in local schools (YCD 1990). Nor was the help purely material. Various trust funds and scholarships have been set up to encourage excellent students to pursue further studies. Looking at such fields as local culture, public health, as well as at public infrastructure such as roads, bridges and buildings, it is no secret that major funding came from the donations of its emigrant communities. The statistics show that the total amount of donations from overseas to this county between 1987 to 1997 has amounted to 230 million yuan RMB.

What is also specific about Yongchun County is that a majority of the early migrants and their descendents are now residing in Malaysia. Statistics also issued by Yongchun
Oversea Chinese Affairs Office in 1997 showed that there are 580,993 Malaysian Chinese of Yongchun origin. This figure represents 59% of the total Chinese overseas population of Yongchun origin. It is generally assumed by the Chinese people that, among Southeast Asian countries, Malaysian Chinese as a whole have kept the strongest Chinese identity by continuing to observe many Chinese traditions and maintaining Chinese culture. It would be meaningful, therefore, to choose Malaysian Chinese of Yongchun County origin as a case through which to study the linkage between Southeast Asian Chinese and their native place.

Before making this final decision, I decided to go to Yongchun to have a look. "What you see is true", a Chinese idiom says. The UROC sent a young man to accompany me to the county. The UROC of this area is very forward looking – by sending along their junior staff members to assist me, these juniors would be given the experience which would make them eligible to play key roles in future research.

Yongchun is more than 100 kilometers from Quanzhou city. The journey took almost two hours on an inadequate road. As it is a hilly country, Yongchun is indeed surrounded by mountains and hills. From the bus going along the undulating road, passengers can see green mountain slopes planted with tea, orange and tangerine trees, embellished with houses made of granite decked with gray tile roofs with upturned eaves, the typical scenery of southern Fujian. The area looks like a piece of a horizontal belt: the overall length from east to west is 84 km., and the width from the north to the south is 29 km. The terrain slopes from northwest to southeast. The northwestern sector is a high mountain ridge with an elevation of 500-1000 meters and the southeastern part
is a chain of undulating hills about 100-400 meters above sea level.

As we drew close to the county, the bus went over a wide bridge to take us through a mountain valley. The end of the bridge brought us into an open space marked by the gateway of Yongchun County. A five-storeyed building belonging to the local UROC, accommodating returned overseas Chinese, is located on the road very near the bridge exit - like a station house of old, welcoming returning spouses, siblings or relatives from the outside world. From the design, I immediately got the feeling that the local government has strategically placed this building to emphasize the priority they accord to ties with migrants who have gone overseas.

Needless to say, the bus terminal is also located near the bridge exit. We got out of the bus and I declined offers from eager straddling motorcycles who were waiting at the gate of the bus terminal to solicit passengers to take a ride into the county proper. A broad cement-paved street leading to two roads greeted us outside the bus terminal. We were told that these are the main streets of Yongchun County. It dawned on me that this is a county that has kept a distinctive, orderly, open-spaced, mountain-style ambience compared to the counties on the coast. Before coming, I had made a two-week trip along the coastal area in order to get a feel of the region and to collect general information. On this two-week trip, I had traveled southwards through the city of Quanzhou and the five towns of Qingtian, Shishi, Longhu, Jinjiang and Yingling that make up Quanzhou District. All along the way, what struck me most were the crowded population, the dusty dry streets, the disorderly and unsystematic location of buildings, and the unceasing attempts to seek a profit. This is a picture that reflects a booming
economy developing unplanned as new enterprises start up to meet growing demands.

This coastal area had been geared up to engage in free market capitalism earlier than the rest of Fujian, starting from the late 1970s, since the local authorities and ordinary people were more eager to restore and to make use of the connection with their immigrant resource. As a result, in the late 1990s, the landscape of the coastal area was full of distinct colors, bustling with noise and excitement of rushing along the road of free market. And this has been greatly assisted by the emigrant communities overseas.

In contrast, like the other hilly agriculture-based areas of South Fujian, Yongchun only started pursuing the free market economy about ten years later. Therefore it still displays a simpler character. This is a county with a population of 520,000 within 1,447 square kilometers. There are about 359 people to one square kilometer. Even though the population is quite dense when compared with the average density in Fujian province (289 persons per square kilometer), as the majority of the people of Yongchun are engaged in agriculture, the hard-driving, intensive commercial activities that are prevalent in the coastal areas are not present here. Consequently, no crowds can be seen on the streets. This comparatively placid atmosphere is intensified by the broad well-laid-out streets which give the town a leisurely air. Most buildings lining both sides of the streets are three-storeys high, constructed of cement plastered bricks walls; with the ground floor serving as shops. Owners of these buildings often let out the ground floors to shopkeepers and they themselves live in the two upper storeys. An impressive scene on the streets is one where people buzz about on their motorcycles – the most popular form of transport. The landscape certainly indicates that the local
economy has improved and people do possess a certain amount of purchasing power. The economy, however, has shown no evidence of mobilizing its population into full scale commercialization. The general comments often made by Yongchun people revealed that in terms of economic development, Yongchun has lagged ten years behind the coastal area. That may explain why the local government and society are now so eager and determined to mobilize their overseas resources.

As a matter of fact, later, when I got to understand the social and economic transformation of Yongchun in more detail, I was surprised to find that the economic progress I had witnessed in this hilly agricultural area has started only since 1978. Let us take a look at the table below:

Table 1  Annual growth rate of gross output value of industry and agriculture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>1967-76</th>
<th>1978-89</th>
<th>1990-95</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Annual growth rate</td>
<td>2.93%</td>
<td>6.76%</td>
<td>22.27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Resource: ZKDW, 1998

This shows that as an agriculture-based area, Yongchun started to make its economy take off only in the 1990s when the growth rate was more than three times higher than in the period of the 1980s.

Up to 1997, the GDP of the County reached 3222 million yuan RMB and the average GDP per person was 6,100 yuan. The annual net income of the town residents
went up from 590 yuan (1978) to 1194 yuan (1987) to 5,133 yuan (1997) and in the farming sector, the income of peasants from 130 yuan (1978) to 365 yuan (1987) to 2,937 yuan (1997). (FJN 1987:638; 1988:518) Yongchun claimed that in 1997, it could no longer be labeled a poor county, instead it is now categorized as one of the better-off counties in Fujian province (Lin, 1998).

We visited the local UROC office as planned. Before leaving Quanzhou, the vice-president of UROC of Quanzhou District had volunteered to contact the relevant people of his branch in Yongchun. I hoped that this connection could help me to gain wider and deeper access to contacts and information for my field trip. In the UROC office building, somebody was already waiting for us when we arrived. This was the Secretary General of the local UROC. When we sat down to have a chat, I noticed that all the offices on the same floor were quite empty. People were coming in and out. “What are they busy doing?” I could not contain my curiosity. I was told that the UROC was in the process of building a great hotel to accommodate visiting overseas Chinese. The expenditure on this project is expected to be more than 6 million yuan RMB. However, the UROC had only been granted 3 million yuan as financial support from the government. It had to make up for the big difference in the costing. The UROC has called on their reliable source of funding - they could mobilize migrant communities scattered throughout Southeast Asia, especially Malaysia. The offices were practically empty because the heads of the UROC had gone abroad in full force to raise the necessary funds. This is not a new and novel kind of behaviour since the tendency to go out to seek financial assistance from Southeast Asian Chinese communities was fully
demonstrated in the initial stage of the China national project of modernization led by Sun Yat-Sen.

I make a specific mention here of what I heard and saw within the first hour of my arrival because I think it has symbolic significance. Evidence produced through more thorough investigations and study showed that the building up and strengthening of the tie between migrants living overseas and their homeland is greatly enhanced by the local government’s key role as a facilitator, so much so that I will spend more effort on elaborating it in Chapter 6.

Gazing after the departing figures, I started to speak to the Secretary General of the UROC of the aim of my research project, and asked for some basic information referring to this issue. A certain degree of satisfaction and pride gleamed on his face as he showed me several copies of a newsletter he edited. He claimed that it was not necessary for me to do further investigation myself because there was enough information in the newsletters to cover this issue. I knew then that I had met a self-conscious person. I explained to him that what I was going to study would be on a different tack from writing propaganda articles and that I would like to remain for a while. That night I carefully studied those newsletters and local publications referring to the issue of migration overseas and tried to put the facts in order and sort out some leads. I was indeed thankful for the training I had received as a historian. This enabled me to place the subject studied within the context of local historical and social background.
4. Social History

Like other parts of Fujian province, almost all the inhabitants of Yongchun today are the descendants of Han emigrants from the Central Plains. In the long process, group after group of migrants moved into the Yongchun area. The original inhabitants became known as the ethnic group called “Min and Yue people” who were mainly engaged in hunting and gathering at that time. (YXZ 1990: 138-139) (Zhu 1985: 15-20, 60-64)

In Chinese history, the establishment of prefectures and counties was always closely related to the increase in local population and the development of the local economy. In AD 589, the Tang Dynasty imposed its jurisdiction on the Yongchun area for the first time and a new township named ‘Peach Forest Centre’ was designated for this area. This township was subordinate to Nan County, a coastal county of Quanzhou District. The jurisdiction marked the onset of a new historical period. In the following three hundred years, the number of immigrants grew very quickly. In AD 933, in order to tighten control and collect more taxes, the central government removed this town from the jurisdiction of Nan County and upgraded it to the level of a county named Taoyuan. Its name was inspired by a piece of land with blossoming peach trees and it was said that there were beautiful ridges and peaks, dense forest and lakes and encircling pools. In AD 938, the name was changed again, this time to Yongchun - meaning “eternal springtime” inspired by the warm temperature throughout the four seasons as well as the presence of evergreen foliage of the forests and grass which never became sere and died off. In 1734, the county was promoted to the level of a prefecture
that administered two other counties, Dehua and Datian to the north of Yongchun. In
the first year (1912) of the Republic of China, this prefecture system was abolished and
the two counties mentioned above were assigned to others. Yongchun returned to the
level of a county and has remained so until today. (YXZ: 65)

An old Chinese saying vividly depicts one of the traits of the people and their economic
activities in Yongchun: “those living on a mountain live off the mountain”. Local
history has recorded that running and maintaining mountain plantations are activities
that have always been the root source of income for the people of Yongchun. (YZZ
1994) Along lofty mountains and brook-laden valleys, the Han migrants and their
descendants unceasingly reclaimed uncultivated land and built terraced fields upon
fields. They planted grain crops like rice and wheat, as well as a root crop like sweet
potatoes and later industrial crops like tea, ramie, peanut, sugarcane and tobacco. This
pioneering effort to get multi-usage out of mountainous land has not only turned the
people of Yongchun into a hard working lot blessed with endurance, the ingenuity
needed to achieve what they have has laid the groundwork essential for them to become
successful future migrants to distant lands.

The rich resources of the forests also prompted the development of handicraft and
spawned a cottage industry that widely supported households with an additional side
income. As early as in the Song Dynasty - from the tenth century onwards, the skills of
the locals in tea-processing, weaving, pottery-making, papermaking and sugar-refining
were known far and wide. A very famous product was a special type of white cloth
made from ramie. It was so highly prized that it was among one of the articles sent as tribute to the emperor from Fujian province (YXZ 1990, 217).

From the fourteenth century, various sorts of family handicrafts developed including handloom weaving, pottery, paper, lacquer basketry, paper-woven painting and embroideries. These were not only traded within the coastal areas, but were also sold as far away as the southeastern region and Japan (Zheng, 1684). These cottage industries grew to provide a foundation for the expansion of commerce for Yongchun.

Because of its location, Yongchun acted as a link connecting the coastal to the mountain areas and vice versa in southern Fujian. It became a transfer station for goods exchange from the Song Dynasty (middle tenth century) until 1920 when the Quanzhou-Yongchun-Defa land traffic link was established. The water traffic connecting the county seat and the outside world was the east section of the Jing River that flowed from the county through Nanan to Quanzhou carrying wooden sailing boats for communication and trade. According to Skinner, as one of the key sub-regions in the southeast micro region of China, Quanzhou district came into its golden age between the tenth and the end of the fourteen century. This was a period of great development of international commercial and cultural exchanges (Skinner 1985, 44). As an integrated part of this region, both from the perspective of economy and that of culture, Yongchun played a fundamental role. Local products from the central Fujian mountain areas like Youxi. Yongan, Datian and Defa were trans-shipped from Yongchun by river to Quanzhou, one of the biggest port cities during Song and Yuan Dynasties. Precious sea produce, mainly salt, was carried on the return journey upriver
to Yongchun first, then redistributed inland to various parts of the mountainous sector.

In the time from the sixteenth to the seventeenth century, keeping pace with the growing trade demands, several streets devoted to trading sprang up in the Yongchun county seat. For example, Dong Qian Street which became a collection and distribution centre for goods between the inland mountain areas and the county; Dian Kou Street, which had more than twenty stores and He Jei Street which was the distributing centre for coastal goods (Zheng, 1927).

In the late nineteenth century, along with the opening of coastal treaty ports, the commercial activities spurred on further speedy growth in Yongchun. The original sections of trading streets expanded and together formed a business centre. Among them, one of the most famous ones was Wuli (Chinese character for five ‘li’, a unit for measuring distance where one ‘li’ is equal to 2.5 kilometres) which expanded to occupy the space that leads to the western gate of the county. According to records in the local archive and a Japanese survey, at the end of the Qing Dynasty and the early years of the People’s Republic of China, 1906-1916, business activities here were flourishing and Yongchun was densely populated to be found here were more than 200 shops and stores. Among them, some stores earned a yearly turnover of 200-300 thousand taels of silver (silver dollars) from conducting wholesale business – a huge fortune back then (TDK, 1918).

As a collecting and distributing centre for the coastal and inland mountainous areas, the development of commerce in Yongchun that ranged from agricultural and forestry products to daily necessities enabled the people of Yongchun to gain two main
advantages. First, the development of close economic ties between the coastal and mountainous sectors allowed the people of Yongchun to participate in the maritime trading activities. Secondly, it also inspired Yongchun merchants to cultivate trading.

5. Migration Overseas

For a rather long time, "being attached to one's native land and unwilling to leave it" has been cited in Chinese academic circles as describing a basic feature of the typical peasant in the agricultural society in China. This point of view prevailed until recent years (Ge, 1997).

This rule, however, could not be applied to every part of China. Let us refer to the case study chosen as a point of reference. As pointed out earlier, Yongchun functioned both as a point receiving immigrants from the northern part of China from the fifth century AD for several centuries, and later as a place sending emigrants overseas. Though the migration to various places in Southeast Asia following the flowering of maritime trade at Quanzhou port started as early as the tenth century (Yan 1982), the emigration overseas from the county only emerged on a bigger scale in the late fourteenth. This was the result of the stern policy of abandoning maritime trading imposed by the central government of the early Ming Dynasty from 1371 to 1390 as applied to Quanzhou area. This policy then extended to the whole southeastern region of China in the fifteenth century and finally extinguished the development period of Quanzhou area (Skinner 1978, Wang 1999). The impact on Yongchun, one of the
regional core players in undertaking entrepot trading and an active supplier of cash 
crops and cottage industrial products, was immense. Having lost their main means of 
livelihood, local people moved overseas.

Besides the banning of maritime trade, the Ming government also imposed a strict 
tax system. This action acted as a further impetus impelling the people of Yongchun to 
flee from their homes, as many had grown prosperous from their involvement in the 
 lucrative maritime and entry river trade, cash cropping and cottage industries. With the 
passage of time, official detailed information on exact figures was lost. However, 
through the statistics gleaned from genealogy records kept by local families as they 
faithfully updated their family trees, what is hearsay can be transformed into fact. The 
genealogy records were provided by families Nanshan Chen (the first word refers to 
village, and second one to lineage), Dongshan Yan, Liuan Liu, Nanhu Zheng, as well as 
that used in our case study. In the Peng Siong Zheng’s family tree, the records of who in 
their family emigrated to Southeast Asia during this period can still be found.

Wang Gungwu suggests that the millennium of migration can be divided into two 
types of migration pattern: i.e. Chinese trader pattern and Chinese labour pattern. 
(Wang 1992: 4). The former, which has a long history, refers to merchants and artisans 
(including miners and other skilled workers) and the members of their extended families 
or related clan. They went to Southeast Asia in the context of the family migration chain 
and usually set up bases in ports or trading cities.

The other migrant pattern is that of the vast majority of Chinese who went as 
labourers in the years between the 1860s to the 1930s, normally men of peasant origin,
landless labourers and urban poor (Chen Ta 1940:50). In Southeast Asia the main countries and localities which received most of the labour immigrants were Malaysia, Singapore and the Outer Islands of Indonesia. The arrival of massive numbers of Chinese labourers was in response to the great demand for labour caused by the rising of British and Dutch colonial plantation and mining industries in the Southeast Asian region. This is generally recognized as the major pull factor of Chinese migration. Chinese labour immigrated to this region in the well-known pattern of coolie trade (Chen 1984: 146; Lin 1998: 14-20). According to Victor Purcell, there were about one million Chinese labourers entering Malaysia in the period 1911-1941, who were mainly engaged in planting and mining and, thereafter, formed labour immigrant communities which differed from those of the traders. (Purcell, 1966) The most successful immigrants among them were absorbed in established Sino-Southeast Asian or Creole populations from time to time (Freedman 1960).

When the wave of labour migration to foreign lands from the southeastern coastal area took place in the second half of nineteenth century, migration from Yongchun also rose to peak levels, particularly around the time of the Taiping Revolution, the largest peasant uprising in the history of China. As the sense of injustice and unrest spread, the people of Yongchun joined in. In 1853, under the leadership of a member of the landed gentry named Lin Jun, several thousands of peasants rebelled against the cruel, ferocious corrupt officials. When this revolt failed, the Qing government was unforgiving and vindictive. To escape the subsequent retribution and vendettas, migrating overseas became a means of escape for the rebels and this exodus saw group
after group of villagers migrating to Southeast Asia (YXZ, 1990).

According to the records of six genealogies of Yongchun county, from the seventeenth century to the 1820s, sixty-four family members died in Southeast Asia. From the 1830s to the beginning of the twentieth century, however, the numbers rapidly increased to 499. This indicates the expansion in the migrant population. Another piece of evidence was that in the 120 years between 1829-1949, the Yongchun population decreased by about 100,000 - a large part of this number had left for Southeast Asia.

Another high tide in Yongchun emigration – by far the biggest exodus- emerged in 1920-1940. During this period, like all the rest of southern Fujian, Yongchun was facing extreme turbulence caused by civil war and social disorder. After the Qing Dynasty ended, in the 1910s, Fujian fell into the hands of warlords. Not only was there constant fighting among different factions, the warlords in power often tried to enlarge their territories and attempted to suppress separatism. So many young men were forcibly conscripted. In order to fund these wars, heavy taxes were levied and no judicial system existed to redress wrongs. Reminiscences written by a migrant who was known as an ex-native of Gushan in Yongchun County said: (YXZ 1990, 664)

Since 1918, bandit troops had risen in swarms, pillaging and extorting and committing all kinds of atrocities. Exorbitant taxes and levies came in a continuous stream. Local rascals also used the absence of law and order to extort protection money. Villages became ruins. People had no means of livelihood, and merchants stopped travelling for business. The trade in Wuli Street suffered a disastrous decline. When I went back to my hometown (Yongchun) in the winter of 1921, I witnessed one of my fellow villagers, Zheng Shuanhuo, being captured by bandits. He was cruelly tortured and received very brutal treatment. In the three months that I lived in my home village, I never had a day’s peace. I lived each day
in fear. Twice the bandits came to harass my family. So whenever I hear footsteps and the barking of dogs after sunset, my mouth goes dry and I cannot swallow or draw an easy breath.

Hence, I left home in a hurry again. Later, I got news from my family members saying that the social turbulence was growing more serious day by day. Young people scattered away and the elderly were oppressed savagely with no mercy shown. As the bandit troops were everywhere, most of us emigrants regarded our hometowns as horrible places. And more and more chose to bring their families out of this nightmare. In every corner of Southeast Asia, we, the people of Yongchun, thus left our footprints.

With regard to the total number of emigrants from southern Fujian during this period. Dai Yifeng estimates that according to statistics kept by the Customs Office, from the 1920s to 1940s, about 120,000 emigrants left these shores for Southeast Asia yearly (Dai, 1996). Among them, the number of people of Yongchun, as published by local newspapers was more than 6,000 in the second half of 1925. 5,000-6,000 in the first half of 1937, several thousands more in March of 1938. These numbers enable us to obtain a more complete picture of migration. It is no wonder that during that time, local newspapers often bewailed the fact that almost nine houses in ten were empty because more and more people of Yongchun were running away to Southeast Asia (YCA, 1940).

Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the local authority of Yongchun has run census surveys five times and carried out research in order to clarify how many of the native sons and daughters had left. The table below has been compiled on the basis of these censuses.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Number (A)</th>
<th>Southeast Asia (B)</th>
<th>B/A</th>
<th>Malaysia (C)</th>
<th>C/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>108152</td>
<td>107852</td>
<td>99.7%</td>
<td>63148*</td>
<td>58.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>201150</td>
<td>201000</td>
<td>99.9%</td>
<td>148000*</td>
<td>73.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>401020</td>
<td>393000</td>
<td>96.5%</td>
<td>325000</td>
<td>81.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>604500</td>
<td>593000</td>
<td>97.1%</td>
<td>470000</td>
<td>77.8%</td>
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<td>1997</td>
<td>977119</td>
<td>969336</td>
<td>99.2%</td>
<td>580993</td>
<td>59.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Malaya

(YCA, Chinese Overseas volume, 1954-1997)

These figures seem unreliable because no immigrants to Malaysia are supposed to have undertaken the voyage since 1954, and this is belied by the fact that the annual growth rates far surpass the birth surplus for Chinese in Malaysia. In my view, however, the scale of the perception of the local government of Yongchun migrant communities in Malaysia is interesting. It probably overestimates the number of Yongchun migrants and their offspring, who mainly emigrated during the period of the labour migration wave from the second half of nineteenth century to the first half of twentieth century, and who now for almost 99% reside in the Southeast Asian region, two-thirds of them in Malaysia.

In short, the Hokkiens of Yongchun have a long history of migration. The migration overseas can be seen as an extension of the movement of migration southwards in Mainland China. Although two migration types existed, namely trade and labour, the majority of Yongchun migrants belonged to the latter category. These migrants have
scattered over the world, many of them making Southeast Asia with Malaysia their main place of residence.

6. The settlement of Zheng Lineage in Southern Fujian

"Our ancestors immigrated from the Central Plains more than one thousand years ago." Almost every Zheng lineage member whom I have met started introducing the lineage history to me in a recital-like manner. The whole story accounting for the cause and course of migration southwards is recorded in "Peng Siong Zheng" genealogy, which can be regarded almost as a history textbook of the clan. As a matter of fact, in Chinese society, especially in rural regions, it is through the genealogy that the history of a family is handed down from generation to generation. In this way a collectively cherished cultural heritage is formed and it has certainly brought about a reality of common identity into the lives of lineage's members.

The genealogical record shows that this lineage appeared at the Yingyang area of Henan Province where there was a Zheng manor house in the 'Spring and Autumn Period' (770-476 BC). The family – here the family includes the immediate family members and extended family members- migrated to Gushi County in Guang Prefecture, Henan Province. At the end of the Tang Dynasty, after the eighth century, as the central government's power was declining, local ministers built up their own armies and expanded their sphere of influence. In the regions they governed, they gradually gained complete control. This laid the foundations for a disruptive period of feudal
separatist rule. This describes a situation in which separatist regimes held sway over outlying prefectures. The result was continual warfare either because of the fighting between themselves or joint actions against the central government.

In AD 880, the governor of Cai Prefecture, Qing, turned against the central government. He imposed taxes only the imperial government had the right to ask for on the Guang Prefecture that was under his jurisdiction. Qing claimed that he would send his troops to attack Guang Prefecture if his demands were not met. Afraid of such an attack, Wang Xu, the governor of Guang Prefecture and Wang Cao, the magistrate of Gushi County, joined by his two brothers brought their army and coerced more than ten thousand inhabitants to cross the Changjiang (Yangtze River) with them to head south. Keyuann Gong, the ancestor of Zheng lineage, just in his thirties, a military official of the Sixth Rank, happened to be accompanying his father’s remains to Guang Prefecture with his subordinates at that time. He too joined in the march and brought almost a thousand of his private soldiers, subordinates and clansmen with him. According to the genealogy, on their march south, they carried with them the sacred sacrificial utensil of the Zheng family, a copper incense burner on which is carved “sacrificial utensil handed down from Gushi of Guang”.

Leaving Guang Prefecture, Wang Xu’s army passed through two provinces first: Jianxi and Guangdong. In 885, they reached western Fujian where they attacked and occupied Quanzhou. Along the way, some of the clansmen following Keyuang Gong regularly broke away from the column. The second year after the capture of Quanzhou, Keyuan Gong with his wife led some of his private soldiers settled down in Yongchun.
There the lineage began the initial acts of development. Keyuan Gong is therefore considered to be and revered as "the first ancestor who came to Fujian".

**Changes in the lineage**

For the 1,100 years, from AD 886 when Keyuan Gong and his family settled down in Yongchun up to the present, the lineage history can basically be divided into two periods by taking 1360 as a demarcation line.

In the early period of settlement, Keyuan Gong lived at a place called Wutian (today this belongs to Xidong village, Huyang town with about 100 inhabitants), which is located at the northeast corner of Yongchun. Surrounded by high mountains and covered by thick damp forest, it was regarded as a miasma area. Keyuan Gong only lived here for ten years or so. Later he moved to nearby lower ground at Jianlian Ken. A temple of the Zheng lineage crowned with the characters of Yingyang has been built on this site.

Around AD 1000, the number of members of the Zheng clan had increased to two hundred. When Mao Gong, the fourth generation from Keyuan, retired from his official military position under the Song dynasty, he felt that the mountainous region offered too few possibilities for expansion for the lineage. Spending forty-four tael of silver, he purchased a ratification from local authorities to expand the clan holding by 20 mu (one mu=0.0667 hectares) of uncultivated land just outside the eastern gate of the town. He moved his whole family to this new ground and later the "Peng Siong" Hall, the Zheng ancestral hall, was built here. Ever since, the area around the eastern gate of Yongchun
has been the main place for members of the Zheng lineage to reside.

From 886 to 1360, the lineage had multiplied by twenty generations. Eight members at different times succeeded in obtaining the highest accolade in the imperial examinations. With several members of the lineage holding high official positions in the government at times, the Zheng Clan enjoyed a prestigious standing among the local communities.

But after AD 1340, Yongchun came under several attacks by a troop of bandits headed by Cheng Zan and Hu Zhi. Besides targeting Yongchun, they looted at will throughout the region and the government officials were powerless to suppress them. In 1360, the bandit pretended to surrender to the local authorities and asked to make peace with the Zheng clan which was putting heavy pressure on them. They succeeded in luring the Zheng lineage members into their trap and almost the whole lineage of more than 300 members were massacred within a day. The family effects were stripped. This marked the moment the lineage began to decline in prosperity and marked the commencement of its second period.

When the bandit attacked the Zheng clan, only the wife of Zheng Kezhi, the fourth son of Xueshi Gong who was a twentieth descendent escaped. She happened to be visiting her mother with her two young children. Hearing the news of the family’s death, they escaped to nearby Anxi County to take refuge. Eight years after, in AD1368 the two sons, the elder now eighteen and the other seventeen, returned to their hometown. They laid claim to their ancestors’ property and won their case. With 400 mu of mountainous farming land as capital, they started to rebuild the family fortune.
This is why the lineage family regards the father of these two brothers, Xueshi Gong, as "the first ancestor for construction." Literally, this signifies that the lineage reconstructed itself.

In the next 620 years, till the 1990s, the lineage has added twenty-four more generations. As the population increased, more and more branches and sub-branches have divided off.

The result of these sub-divisions meant that the family members gradually had to scatter over the county. From the compact community taking the eastern gate of the town seat as a centre they spread out to neighbouring villages: Dayu, Putou, Wulong, Daping where they formed the majority of the residents. Some others dispersed over yet other villages. (See map 3)
Map 3: The distribution of residing of Zheng lineage in the early 20th century
Map 4: The present distribution of Zheng lineage in Yongchun County

Map 4 shows the current distribution of Zheng within Yongchun. Up to the 1990s, the population of the lineage still in Yongchun was more than ten thousand.

*Emigration overseas*

Zheng lineage emigration movements overseas can be traced back to the end of the sixteenth century. In the 1590s, Zheng Si, a clansman of the twenty-ninth generation, was engaged in trading with the Philippines. He remained in the Philippines until he died in 1612. According to the Zheng genealogy record, he was the first to migrate abroad. Thereafter, the record showed more evidence of lineage members leaving for various places in Southeast Asia. Many among them went to the Philippines and others to Indonesia. After the 1780s however, the migration direction of the lineage gradually turned to the Malay Peninsula, in particular in the 1850s and thereafter (See Table 3).
### TABLE 3: Number of Zheng lineage migrants overseas (1590s-1950s)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>II</th>
<th>III</th>
<th>IV</th>
<th>V</th>
<th>VI</th>
<th>VII</th>
<th>Total</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: I=Southeast Asia; II=Philippines; III=Indonesia; IV=Malay Peninsula; V=Thailand; VI=Viet Nam; VII=yet to be verified

This table covers a period of 350 years, from the end of the sixteenth century to the 1930s. More than a thousand people have migrated to the various places in Southeast Asia. Out of the 509 people with their migrating destination clearly recorded, 413 (or 81.1%) went to the Malay Peninsula. This proves that the majority of Zheng migrants have been living in Malaysia.

The above statistics also clearly show that greatest exodus overseas in this lineage took place in the second half of the nineteenth century. In the ninety years from the 1860 to the 1930, the total number reached 840; making up 78.7 % of the total number of documented migrants.

The records in the genealogy, however, are not entirely correct about the 1920s to the 1930s when the number is said to have been far less than during the fifty years before, which is contradicted by the customs record. This might be attributed to a large quantity of documents being lost, as this was the period when the Zheng members were embroiled in endless civil wars brought about by various warlords. The customs record shows that from the 1920s to the 1930s emigrants to Southeast Asia from southern
Fujian reached their highest peak. As attested to by local newspapers, “nine houses out of ten were empty” because of people were migrating to the Malay Peninsula to seek refuge (Zheng, Part 9, 17). It is probable that migration overseas during this period was not less than it had been in the preceding fifty years. According to UROC, the lineage members overseas may have reached more than 30,000. About 20,000 of these live in Malaysia- as reckoned by the Malaysian Peng Siong Zheng Association.

7. Conclusion

The current literature on globalization tends to focus on the newness of the transnationalization process, but from the author’s point of view, the phenomena subsumed under this term should be understood in historical terms. Firstly, Southern Chinese (Fujian and Guangdong provinces) migration overseas can be seen as a continuing process of Chinese migration southwards within the mainland. This inference may be strengthened by the following further explanation.

A key feature in a traditional Chinese rural community is a lineage family settling to form a compact community, often making up the largest percentage of the population. This has been the reason why many scholars regarded the Chinese lineage as a basic institution that forms the social fabric of a given community. It also explains why Chinese are always said to be attached to their native land. (Freedman 1958, 1966, 1970, Baker, 1979, Fu, 1982, Faure and Siu, 1995) This point of view, however, has neglected to take note of the mobility and adaptability of a family, lineage or clan. As
the population of a lineage increases, more space is needed to house them and produce resources to feed them. When the multiplication of a lineage exceeds the capacity of the region, the lineage has to make a great effort to expand its territory. Hence emigration is often unavoidable for the lineage members. In the 1,100 years since the Zheng family immigrated to Yongchun, migration has constantly been a possibility to be followed. Hence the collective action of crossing the ocean and migrating to Southeast Asia has a historical logic to it.

Following up the issue of migration, another important question emerges. As a sending place of migrants, as a crucial point in the trans-territorial space for a quite long period how has Yongchun developed its particular regional characteristics and has it been influenced by its overseas connections? And how has this feature influenced the current situation in this region?

In the past two decades, a reform introduced by the ruling Communist Party is reviving a period of economic boom and development in China. The phenomenal steady growth record is being described by the Chinese government as a ‘soaring economy’ and this is most notable in the coastal regions of southern China, the area of this research. At one time in the 1990s, the local GRP growth rate exceeded that of China’s neighbours known as the ‘Four Small Dragons’ of Asia. This phenomenon has drawn the attention of Chinese scholars towards the southern region in their attempt to understand and, perhaps find, a pattern that can be emulated for the development of other parts of China. They turned to the historical, social and cultural background of this area in search of a connection between the dynamic character of local culture and
this mysterious economic phenomenon (Jiou 1995, Wei 1997). "Business-orientation and entrepreneurship" stimulated and supported by its strong connections with immigrant communities overseas, especially those in Southeast Asia, are two qualities often cited to account for this phenomenally fast economic development and expansion.

The connection carries two implications. Firstly, it implies that, historically speaking, the locality has interacted intensively with its emigrants and come under a long-term influence of its counterparts overseas in particular of their economic activities, namely engagement in trading. The direction of local economic development therefore has been stamped with a distinguished brand of a local nature designating it the region of the key hometowns of Hokkien migrants. Secondly, it also indicates that at the current time, the revived linkage between its migrants overseas and the local has coloured the local process of modernization. This has expressed itself fully in the phenomenon of massive engagement in commercial undertakings.

As far as the two provinces of Fujian and Guandong are concerned, the significance of connective ties with migrant communities overseas should not be underestimated with regard to the modernity issue. Sun Yat Sen, the founder of the Republic of China, once addressed overseas Chinese as "the mother of Chinese Revolution (of overthrowing the rule of feudal dynasty)". Maybe we can assert that without the contribution from migrants overseas, the distinctive modernity this region has assumed would not have appeared.

It should be pointed out that in most literature, the term “Hokkien” often only refers to South Fujianese. Other Fujianese are Hokchiu (Fuzhou), Henghua (Xinghua) and Hokchia (Fuqing), all in eastern Fujian. However, some scholars apply “Hokkien” to all Fujianese. See Purcell, 1965, pp224, 570-571.

Quanzhou Union of Returned Overseas Chinese is a non-government organization established in 1949. Its main function is to be the intermediary for making a connection between government and Chinese overseas.

The survey was conducted by the Survey Office of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of Yongchun Government in 1997.

The statistics come from "the General Survey Regarding Overseas Chinese Affairs of Yongchun Origin" conducted by Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of Yongchun government in October 1997.

They are the Penglai Huang family tree, the Liuan Liu family tree, the Guanlin Li family tree, the Shiyuan Jingdou Lin family tree, the Taoyuan Fengshan Kang family tree, the Taoyuan Kuidou Xie family tree.

Gushan is one of townships which was formerly under Yongchun County as a rural administrative unit.

The “Yongchun Peng Siong Zheng genealogy” was compiled several times during the Ming and Qing dynasties. In 1941, it was re-compiled by Zheng Qiaoshong, the last successful candidate of Yongchun County in the imperial examinations at the provincial level in the Qing dynasty. The genealogy is a woodcut edition of twenty-five volumes. It is divided into fifteen parts and records blood relationships, pedigree as well as various affairs of the lineage. The relevant narration about the lineage history in this text has drawn its material mainly from the genealogy.

Yingyang was the place of the origin of Zheng surname where the manor of Zheng County, one of the several small counties in Spring and Autumn Period (770-476BC) was to be found.