Transnational Social Practice from Below: The Experiences of a Chinese Leneage

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Chapter 4
Xingzhong Zheng and Jujing Hall

Since the 1980s, historians, anthropologists and sociologists who have studied Chinese social history noticed the spectacular revival in rural areas of clan associations, which had been on the wane since the late 1950s. Their explanations of the phenomenon can be summed up in two main viewpoints (Siu, 1989:121-137; Potter, Salamith and Jack, 1990:169-251; Cohen, Myron 1993: 151-170; Huang 1992).

Modern state power aimed to reform society by bringing in development. Although the reform programme was designed to bring about the transformation of traditional and social primary organizations, in order to maintain stability, the state simultaneously had to make use of old and well-tried patterns of primary social organization. In this contradictory way, this allowed space for the persistence of clan organization and even for its further development.

Second, clan organization itself has great vitality which stems from the positive functions it performs: such as promotion of mutual help, emphasizing service for the public good and co-ordinating and channeling the energy of the human resources within the community to achieve a common goal. These functions are what have enabled clan associations to survive in rural areas. More often than not, rural communities will flourish once the circumstances provides favourable conditions for their development.

However, both these explanations have tended to focus on the mainland factors and what is neglected is the influence from Chinese overseas. In fact, Chinese overseas
have devoted highly visible efforts to restoring lineage organizations in their hometowns since China opened its doors. Consequently, the transnational ties facilitated by these kinds of institutions are forged. It is remarkable that in the process of constituting these transnational connections, the clan identity plays an important role as the Zheng lineage case has shown.

In April 1997 in an unbroken spell of wet weather, I went to Yongchun to do further research. When talking to the Zhengs, the first thing the local people mentioned to me was the Yiding Zheng Foundation Building, whose original name was Jujing Hall. I was aware that it could be the headquarters of the lineage. At the same time, I was fortunate enough to get to know Xingzhong Zheng, the son of Yiding Zheng after whom the foundation building was named. It so happened that Xingzhong Zheng was visiting Yongchun. In the company of the secretary general of UROC (Union of Returned Overseas Chinese) of Yongchun County, I went to visit him.

Jujing Hall was built in 1930 by Yiding Zheng. In 1990s Xingzhong Zheng rebuilt the hall and named it the Yiding Zheng Foundation Building. From the interior arrangement of the building, one can see a distinctive style introduced by Southeast Asian Chinese. The completed five-storey Foundation Building covers about 1,462 square meters. It contains twenty-nine rooms and is located on one of the central streets in the town seat. Outside the building, two big eye-catching plaques hang from the top beam to the floor. On one is written, “Yiding Zheng Foundation” while on the other is the name of a hotel. The building has been adapted to manifold uses. The first floor have been rented out to some shops and a restaurant while the second and the third floors serve as a hotel. Then the fourth floor is used by the administrative centre of the Foundation. In it, there is a meeting hall and several rooms made into guestrooms for visiting clansmen from Malaysia or other places. The top floor is arranged as the Yiding Zheng Memorial Hall where the family and visitors can worship. The reason why I want to describe the functions of various parts of the Foundation Building is to show a common strategy of Chinese overseas associations – how they raise funds for public
causes. The Yiding Zheng Foundation grosses an annual income of RMB140,000 from rent and the net profit is expended on scholarships for worthy offspring of the Zheng lineage. The Yiding Zheng Foundation and its civic conscious deeds are still very much in evidence at the time of writing this thesis.

I was invited up to the Foundation Office on the fourth floor where Xingzhong Zheng and the Board of Trustees of the Foundation were waiting for us in the meeting hall which is decorated and arranged in a formal style like any meeting hall of a medium-size company. A large painting hanging on the central wall caught my eyes, it was the portrait of a heavy-browed man smiling, watching and seemingly sharing his contentment with every visitor. When I was presented to the Board, I realized that the person in the portrait was standing in front of me in the flesh; Xingzhong Zheng, a man already in his eighties. He is a good talker and very knowledgeable. From him, I received rich bits of information about Yiding Zheng Foundation and his family.

The establishing of the Yiding Foundation in 1990s for the express purpose of re-investing in and re-building the Jujing Hall built in 1930s indicates the restoring of transnational clan ties, of the fundamental ties in constructing Chinese border-crossing social space.

1. The Founder of the Family Business

Like many other Chinese overseas businesses, XingZhong's business is a family business. Therefore the recounting of this case should start with his father, the founder of the family business. Yiding Zheng was born in 1895 in Yongchun town. He had received a few years of primary education from the old-style school before he left China. He migrated to the Malay Peninsula, following a by now well-trodden path taken earlier by his clansmen. His patron on arrival in the Malay Peninsula was Yiyu Zheng, one of
his clan uncles (refer to Chapter 2). Yiyu Zheng recommended Yiding to one of his relatives in Ipoh. As a result, Yiding was given work as an apprentice in Ban Seng Teik, an import company set up in 1878 that ran its own store in textile wholesaling. Young as he was, Yiding gradually won the trust of the owner of Ban Seng Teik through his patent diligence and honesty. Within a few years, he was appointed financial manager of the store. However, he was not satisfied with the static state of his career as his income was limited and fixed.

In search of a new opportunity, Yiding Zheng resigned and went to work in Xing Deshun in Tanjong Malim, the successful grocery store owned by Yiyu Zheng. While working there, Yiding found a chance to develop a business. There were natural resources in the neighbourhood jungle, namely, a kind of raw material used in the manufacturing of chewing gum. He decided to go into the jungle to look for a supply source. It turned out that his little sideline business flourished. When his savings had reached a substantial sum a few years later, Yiding and his cousin pooled their savings to buy over Kwong Seng Leong grocery store in Sungei Siput, Perak. This was how Yiding started his own enterprise.

From its beginning, the case of Yiding Zheng’s family business shows how this ordinary Chinese family business was influenced by the business relationship with the British colonial economy. Sungei Siput is a town half way between Penang, where the main port for the northern region is located, and Taiping, the old capital of Perak state in what was formerly referred to as the Kinta Valley region. When rich tin ore was found in the Kinta Valley, many British companies had flocked in to open up tin mines. Nor was this the only economic opportunity beckoning. The jungle near Sungei Siput when cleared and developed had the potential to become prime rubber plantations. When tin was also discovered in nearby areas, Sungei Siput was in a favourable position to
blossom into a key supplier of human and natural resources to the British exploiters. At the time, tin-mining and rubber plantations occupied 60% of all land opened for development.

A combination of all these elements formed the basis for Yiding Zheng to branch out on his own. When their grocery business grew, Yiding Zheng dissolved his partnership with his cousin and started to run his own shop. His principal customers were British. From this time on, Yiding cultivated an excellent relationship with the British and this greatly speeded up the expansion of his family business.

However, as highlighted by his son, Xingzhong, the family could not get rich from running a grocery store alone, even though it was one of the more successful ones in the town. Income from his stores allowed Yiding to ride the wave of opportunity and diversify his business activities in two other fields. One was tin mining. He set up a tin-mining company named Tai Lee Limited jointly with two other local Chinese businessmen. Within twenty years, returns from his tin-mine had rewarded him with a secure financial footing and social stature: Yiding had come to be ranked among the social elite of the Chinese community of Perak. Apart from the tin-ore business, he also started a joint venture with a Chinese-Baba from Penang to cultivate 600 acres of sugar cane in Lintang, located along the trunk road 8 miles out of Sungai Siput. A few years later, Yiding further borrowed capital from another Chinese-Baba merchant in Penang to convert a piece of sugar cane land into a tapioca plantation and processing plant that needed 180 workers to run.

Yiding Zheng’s experience of and teaching about developing an enterprise has deeply influenced Xingzhong Zheng. The rise in fortune of Yiding Zheng is typical of many from rags to riches stories related by people when they talk about Chinese immigrants in Southeast Asia. The virtue of hard work and thriftiness are recognized as the most important qualities for success in a period of incipient accumulation. Although it is true
in many cases, one outstanding common feature these prosperous businessmen also seem to possess should not be neglected, viz. their dynamic thirst to battle for survival and to pursue development motivating them to persevere in seeking any new opportunities and their capacity to grasp them solidly when they come along.

Xingzhong Zheng emphasized that his father never believed in God and blind worship. Instead, Yiding often told his son that if one did not stretch out to look for opportunity and then to make the required effort, money would not come. He stressed to his son that if one wanted to start a new business, it did not matter if one did not have enough capital in the beginning. One could start his enterprise by joining and co-operating with others. His point was that one should devote oneself fully to a new venture, then he will have a fighting chance of being successful. Yiding did not receive much formal education as he started working at the age of thirteen, but he kept reading newspapers because he felt one should be well informed of current affairs and be knowledgeable so as to spot where opportunities might lie.

During most of his life time in the Malay Peninsula, Yiding made hardly any visits to his hometown mainly due to circumstances beyond his control, namely the political development in both countries. However, on the first trip home after he had accumulated a small sum of money, he got married to a girl from the same hometown.

The style of Yiding’s combination of clan identity with his business interest is similar with that of Yiyu Zheng, a public figure presented in part one. Yiding Zheng also helped and supported his peers by bringing them over to Malaysia to work at his store. By doing so, his enterprise also benefited from the relationship. If the apprentice concerned was found to have two virtues; namely being diligent in his work and responsible towards his family in China, he would later be given the chance to procure
financial support by being able to borrow capital from Yiding (for instance one or two thousand dollars) to start out on his own. From such common practices, it can be deduced that people like Yiding Zheng were seen to be more than an employer. The established migrant became the combination of a father figure, patron and mentor. The newly established business of an apprentice/ex-worker often turns out to be a branch of the wholesale store owned by his former boss. Through this connection, he could procure goods on credit from the wholesale store and only have to settle accounts once a month. Besides the ‘moral and social’ issues, this type of economic development proved to be cost-effective, efficient and self-serving. It helped Yiding Zheng expand his grocery business without running a risk and yet secure a ‘captive’ outlet for his goods.

It seems a common practice in Southeast Asian Chinese communities that once someone has achieved success in business, he then desires to be involved in the affairs and activities of local Chinese communities. This trend, on one hand, embodies the seeking of successful Chinese migrants for acknowledged social status; on the other hand, it also reflects the need of a migrant to rely on one’s original identity resource.

After Yiding Zheng had set up his enterprise, from the 1930s, he channeled a lot of his energy into the affairs of his lineage and of local Chinese communities in the state of Perak. He was one of the founding members of the Zheng Clan Association and became the first office-bearer to be placed in charge of the general affairs of the agency of Peng Siong Zheng Sojourning Aboard. Over the years, Yiding took on, concurrently or separately the posts of Chairman of the Peng Siong Zheng Lineage Association, chairman of the Board of Trustees of the lineage school, President of the Yongchun Association of Perak, Vice-Chairman of the Perak Chinese Assembly Hall and
It was during this period that Yiding conceived his plan to build Jujing Hall in his hometown.

Yiding Zheng intended to bring his entire family of eleven adult children back to his ancestral hometown to settle down after he retired although all his children had been born in Malaysia and he himself had left China more than thirty years ago. Like some contemporary successful Chinese, he still regarded the ancient doctrine of “falling leaves settle on their roots” as his guiding principle in life.

Yiding also figures as a respectable figure in the lineage. In the lineage genealogy, he is described as a sincere, benevolent, enthusiastic and warm-hearted man. He was educated, compared with the majority of Chinese migrants who were illiterate because they came from a peasant background. His manner of talking and acting was highly respected in the community within and outside China. When Yiding Zheng died in November 1940 from cerebral haemorrhage at the young age of forty-five, the elders of the Zheng lineage in Yongchun called for a memorial service to be held to lament the loss of one of its prominent sons.

2. Xingzhong Zheng' s personal and business history

Xingzhong' s personal and business history reveals another type of Chinese overseas businessmen. He is Southeast Asia born, a second generation immigrant, English educated and deeply influenced by English ideology, both in his business culture and in other fields of life. This notwithstanding, as the eldest son he grew up in a traditional Chinese family. Therefore he has still cultivated a strong identification with the local
Chinese communities and his father's native place. His history may help our understanding how a multi-cultural identity has been forged and cultivated in the life of one person and how this factor influences his operation of transnational activities.

Xingzhong Zheng was born in Perak. When Yiding unexpectedly passed away, he left a big family behind: his wife, three sons and several daughters. Xingzhong, the heir, naturally stepped into his father's shoes to carry on the family business. From young age he had been groomed by his father for this very purpose. His basic education began in a locally run Chinese primary school. It is interesting to note that among most Chinese overseas who left China in the early twentieth century, their mother tongue is considered the key that would preserve their culture and traditions. So whenever possible, the children, especially the sons, were destined to receive their basic education with Chinese as the medium of instruction. Later, Xingzhong was transferred to an English secondary school because the most important customers of their family business were British, the largest rubber plantation owners, managers, landlords and masters over many of the successful companies in the neighbourhood. Xingzhong Zheng recalled how he was trained in childhood for the purpose of taking over his father's role in their family business.

I studied at school in the morning and in the afternoon I worked as an apprentice in the store. During school vacation, I was fully involved in helping my father in our family business. In the early mornings before I left for school, I usually went to the warehouse to deliver kerosene, after I had divided it into appropriate lots, to each of the branch grocery shops. In the late evenings, before our store closed its doors, I had to go to the sub-grocery shops to take down their orders, as there were no phone lines then. After closing, we still needed to work on packing the orders received, invoicing, checking over the goods which had been delivered to replenish our own stock and balancing our daily accounts.

When Yiding died, Xingzhong who was born in 1921 had just turned nineteen. He had to take the lead, not because he was naturally ambitious but out of sense of responsibility that has been ingrained into him ever since he could remember.
Indeed I wanted very much to go to university to complete my education, but what could I do? I had to shoulder my family's burden. My mother was afraid that I would leave home to go to university. She impelled me to get married immediately so that she could bind me to home. My father's dying words to me were to make sure that his siblings get an education, no matter where they want to go: England or Japan it is my duty to fulfil his will and carry on to develop the family's business.

Xingzhong ran the family grocery wholesale store in Sungei Siput until the Japanese occupation of the Malay Peninsula in 1941. In 1943, he was arrested by the Japanese Military Police Corps and imprisoned for forty days after he had been accused of being a member of the communist party. After he was freed, he moved the whole family to Ipoh as his store in Sungei Siput had been looted and he lost all his stock.

With savings wisely hoarded in pounds sterling from past trading relationships with British customers, Xingzhong and his cousin re-opened the branch of Kwong Seng Leong grocery store in Ipoh in 1945 directly after the Japanese surrendered.

The good relationship the family store had cultivated with British customers from the time they were in Sungei Siput carried over to Ipoh where it boosted the development of the business.

We kept those British expatriates as our long-term customers. They were our major one by one buyers of tinned and frozen food. Every year, in the Christmas season, I visited them with gifts. One time, a manager of one plantation asked me if I wanted to be an agent for Nestle products. He was willing to help me to get the right as he had a friend who was the branch manager supervising the Ipoh and Perak market for Nestle Company. I was very excited because this was a rare chance to develop our business. Compared to selling other ordinary items of grocery, being the agent of Nestle or some brands of beer, could make promising profit. In 1948, I was granted permission to be an agent for Nestle Company and up to the present we are one of their only two agents in Ipoh.

Xingzhong Zheng emphasized that there is a strong British management style in the success of his grocery wholesale business. In order to market Nestle's product better, the Chinese grocery wholesale stores were requested and encouraged by Nestle to upgrade and modernize their management system. For this purpose the Chinese wholesale stores in Ipoh were reduced from eleven to two after stiff competition that weeded out the weaker ones. Nestle invested in a marketing, distribution and sales
maintenance training programme for their two remaining agents of proven capabilities. Thus, when computerization made its appearance, the Zheng business was among the first in Ipoh to computerize their management system.

Westerners are smart in terms of plotting business strategies. They are very shrewd. When Nestle wants to capture a market, it allocates a share to you. Therefore you become one of the stakeholders. You become accountable and motivated to work hard to further your own and the company's interest.

Xingzhong Zheng made the above comments with an evidently admiring note, when he showed me around and explained the internal structure of his store to me. There are about thirty people working for the wholesale department. Twelve as clerks, half of them functioning as accountants working in front of computers at the administrative center while the other fifteen work at the storehouse as loaders. The store owns four trucks for making deliveries and the collection of stock. The store sells Nestle products and other grocery items wholesale through its network of branch shops, which are Hokkien-owned shops or shops run by the former workers of Xingzhong Zheng. By selling Nestle products, the store can make a turnover of about M$ two millions.

Living in a multi racial society, the Malaysian born Chinese have been exposed to in a multi-cultural atmosphere. Having been educated in the British educational system, Xingzhong Zheng's inclination towards appreciating Western ideology is not limited to the business arena, it extends further in a broad social sense. His recounting of the following story to me shows this.

'Do you have a kind of school called 'Outward Bound' in China? Xingzhong Zheng asked me and I said, 'No, we don't'. He then gave a detailed account. In Malaysia, the school was set up by Gerald Templer, a British general, in the 1950s. The Outward Bound School originally aimed at training promising young people to be the backbone of the armed forces to suppress the communist force in Malaysia. The general asked
foreign firms in the Malay Peninsula to support his project and got a hearty response because the communists had retreated into the jungle and tin mines and rubber plantations were often the targets of attack as they were usually located in rural areas. After the communists surrendered, the Outward Bound School remained in operation, but its new aim was to nurture the qualities independence, courage and leadership. When Xingzhong's sons were in their teens, without exception, he sent every one of them to the School for a 25-day course. After learning the basic techniques, they were expected to travel alone for thirty miles through the jungle in a mountainous area and to navigate a dugout canoe on the sea for three days. By this way they learned how to be independent and take initiatives in their lives. Only on completion of such practical exercises would participants be issued with a certificate.

Xingzhong Zheng is proud that his sons hold two "dog plates", one the for a diploma of this course and another one for their collegiate education. His sons are much sought after by western firms. Xingzhong Zheng does not expect his sons to inherit his family business like he did. If they wish to choose another line of career, they are free to do so. In this, he does not wish history to repeat itself!

Doubtlessly, Xingzhong Zheng has been strongly influenced by modern British business culture and education ideology, but this does not mean that he does not firmly believe in the doctrine of Chinese culture. He never forgets to practice what his father taught, which he sees as embodiment of Chinese entrepreneurship: being acutely conscious of opening up and exploiting any new business possibilities.

In the 1960s, Xingzhong handed the daily running of the business over to his cousin, who was appointed to be the manager of the store. He then focused his attention on his tin-mining enterprise.

This is the business from which you can earn big money. By running the grocery store I would be unable to afford to send my children to receive higher education abroad.
As mentioned earlier, as early as 1880's the Kinta area had started to develop into the most productive alluvial tin-mining region in the world. After the Second World War, the British Ministry of Supply together with mining companies in Britain was eager to rebuild the industry. Europeans were provided with loans from the Ministry of Supply in the United Kingdom and the Industrial Rehabilitation Finance Board in Malaya. Chinese, however, could only obtain loans from the Chinese Tin Mines Rehabilitation Board, where the amount available was extremely limited. Despite this setback, Chinese-owned mines held their own and made up 37.6% of the grand total tin production in Perak in the 1950s (Loh Kok Wah, 1988, 66). It was against such a background, that Xingzhong Zheng entered the tin-mining industry. Whenever he recollected his experiences in mining, he did not complain about the difficulties in raising capital. He was proud that he had been able to combine modern scientific knowledge and the methods of Chinese small-scale entrepreneurs in doing business and making a success in this field.

I dreamt of setting up a tin-mine as far back as the time I was following my father around the grocery wholesale business. To be involved in tin-mining business, the first step is to find a right place. In the past, Chinese tin miners depended a lot on luck. As opposed to them, we relied on scientific knowledge. So as soon as one my sons came of age, I sent him to study mineralogy and through his connections, we got a qualified engineer to be our mining consultant. When I found a place which I thought contained a tin deposit, I would ask our consultant to prospect it and run tests. Then he would make a report to me on the test results on the composition of the soil and a feasibility study with estimates of cost against market price of each ton of tin ore (50 kilograms). Then we would decide whether or not it was worth investing in opening up a mine. The cost also included a 12%-18% profit levied by the landlord, usually a member of the Malay royal family or the government.

I started my investment by co-operating with relatives. Being prudent, most Chinese always start this business on a small scale; that meant investing M$100,000 to 200,000 instead of putting in several millions like the Western firms. We expanded the scale
gradually as the tin ore brought in returns. There is an idiom that says something to the effect that a man uses his own soil to plaster his wall.

He stressed again that undertaking the tin-mining business depends 20% on luck while 80% should be reliance on diligence and well-researched work. For twenty years Xingzhong roamed the hills and forests looking for new mining resources, sometimes sleeping under trees in heavy thunderstorms. He explained why he worked so hard. The Malays are considered to be the natives of Malaysia and have privileged access to state-owned mines and funding (as mentioned above, quite a number of the landlords belong to the Perak royal family). Those Chinese businessmen with political clout and economic power, they could also apply to the authority through special channels. But ordinary people like Xingzhong Zheng, the small- or middle-class entrepreneurs, they have to look out for themselves.

The operation of a Chinese business to a great extent depends on mobilizing the ethnic community's resources. Luckily, earlier pioneers had already developed set patterns of operation. When a decision had been made to open a tin-mine, the second step was to hire a foreman and ask him to form a working group. The tin-mining workers are usually Hakka s from Mei county and Dapu county of Guangdong province. They have been working in this field for generations. The foremen usually recruit workers through Chinese-owned coffee shops or 'kopi tiam' (in Hokkien dialect), which have spread into every nook and cranny of the region. These were the places where Chinese men gather, the equivalent to local pubs in England. The 'kopi tiam' were centers for gathering and distributing information and sealing of deals and settlement of agreements/disagreements.

The third step, Xingzhong claims is to build up a Palong; a huge timber and steel
stairway-like framework. It transports dug-up mud/tin ore filled into steel buckets into an open mouthed multi-storey tin sheet plated 'factory'. Within the factory, tin ore is extracted from the mud. Remnants of these once gleaming and noisy giant tin sheet monsters can still be seen when you travel along the highway in parts of Perak. This is one of the 'traditional' ways the Chinese adopted for tin-mining in Malaysia for the so-called Gravel Pump Mines. To keep a Palong going full steam, three shifts of miners (totalling thirty-two workers), foremen, chief and assistant engineers, clerical staff, purchasing agent and cooks were needed. To cover this contingency, a 'Kongsi' (again this is the word for company in Hokkien dialect) was formed. Kongsi, however, is not a business company. Instead, it is a popular name Chinese use to call any commune that provides temporary housing for workers on site until the lode runs out and they move on.

When the demand for tin tapered off, the family business branched out into real estate development in the 1990s. Under normal circumstances, almost all the land is owned by the Malays as they are seen as the natives. Permission must be obtained in order to transfer ownership to a non-Malay buyer. The legal paperwork can take around three years to settle. Besides battling the red tape, a registration fee as high as M$18,000 is to be paid. Without exception, blood and personal connections again served to further the Zheng's business endeavors.

One of Xingzhong's brothers once worked as an architect in the City Planning Bureau of Ipoh. Accordingly, the threads were picked up to gain access into the real estate circle. Through his brother's connections, Xingzhong managed to make a direct purchase using a company registered to a Malay name, but where in actual fact, the
Zheng family holds the power of attorney.

Such a set-up is dubbed an ‘Ali-Baba’ arrangement. In the fairy tale, by just by saying the magic word, Ali-Baba opened the door to a great fortune, so by using a Malay company as front (the magic word), the Chinese circumvented the Malaysian policy that tried to retain wealth in the hands of the Malays. However, unlike Ali-Baba, the Chinese do work hard for their fortune. Xingzhong Zheng had this to say on the matter:

We paid four and half million Ringgit to take over the Malay company. If we registered a new one according to procedure, think of how much interest we would have lost if we had to wait for three years! Now we can see the profits right away. The land was parcelled out into 400 lots of property land after we made a careful market investigation and targeted those core families of the rising middle class. Each lot measured was 22 feet wide and 70 feet deep. We plan to build two-storey terrace houses on it in phases. Since the launch of this housing project, even before we have started construction, we have sold 50%.

One of the important features proving that Xingzhong Zheng’s identity is multifold, merging Western modern ideology with Chinese culture orientation, is that, following his father’s footsteps, Xingzhong has taken an active role in the Chinese communities. In the 1980s and 1990s, there were times when Xingzhong held prominent positions in both the commercial and regional sector like: the Association of Sundry Guild of Perak and the Perak Yongchun Hometown Association. Despite the fact that he lives in Ipoh, far away from Kuala Lumpur, where the Malaysia Zheng Lineage Association is located, he has never forgotten the importance of the basic organizations shaped by the ties of blood. As early as the 1960s, he was a full-fledged member of the Zheng Association and played a highly supportive role. In 1994, when the Chairman died in office, Xingzhong Zheng became the automatic successor. He stayed at the position till a great strain and conflict among the clansmen in Malaysia in 1999.

Because he strongly appreciated the British style of modern business management,
Xingzhong has been constantly awake of his task to introduce it into the Chinese community to reform the Chinese organizational culture. This sort of action shows that Xingzhong spontaneously acts as a bridge connecting Western-type, modern ideology to Chinese culture. This explicit intention later extended to his transnational conduct when he stepped into China. Therefore to see how his logic directed him in his trail in Malaysia local Chinese community, it is helpful to follow up the track of his operations in China.

When he held the chairmanship in the Perak Sundry Guild he set up a new set of regulations to serve as guidelines for how meetings should be conducted in the organization. He is proud of how much progress he has brought into this organization. He commented that, when Chinese have meetings in whatever association, everybody talks without a focus, while some even read newspapers. There are simply no established rules. Xingzhong learned the systematic method by having attended business meetings in Nestle Company. The Company always fixes rules for board meetings so that everybody is given a chance to speak their mind. Everybody must follow the pre-set agenda so as not disrupt the meeting by bringing in irrelevant matters that waste time and divert attention elsewhere. Xingzhong therefore launched a reform aiming at regularizing the administration and the management of Perak Sundry Guild.

Now you can see, when we hold our annual banquet-cum-assembly meeting for members, a much looked forward to event, we can fill hundreds of tables in order to seat over the more than one thousand members without too much hassle. On one such occasion, the chairman of the Association of the Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Perak, which is the top organization in the Chinese community, who was one of our guests of honour, made a public comment. He said that although his Association is much bigger than our guild, their annual assembly catered to only around forty tables, which means that less than four hundred members would attend. You see, there are many Chinese associations in Perak, but our Guild is the only one to have installed a computer system that keeps track of the whereabouts of our members and can offer the latest up-date to any inquiries. The income from the real estate property of our Guild is several hundred thousand Ringgit and it still rising in value.
Furthermore, as the leader of the Chinese grocery business, Xingzhong is imbued with a strong sense of mission to reform this traditional style of trade. He brought the members of Perak Sundry Guild to visit Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. He said that

We need to improve our mode of operation and the management of our stores. We should learn how to display our goods in supermarket style; with clear labelling, good lighting, a comfortable environment and efficient checkouts. Instead of keeping to the old pattern that is just piling up goods in whatever space is available, relying on memory to say prices when asked, manual stock taking and so on. We should attract customers to come into our shops.

Some of members complained that they could not afford to invest so much capital and labour in making the improvements. Whereupon Xingzhong countered, "If you don't make efforts to improve, you have no other way to go but the road to ruin."

Xingzhong explained that the Chinese grocery trade is a family business. Parents are fully engaged in the operation alongside their children. When their children grow up and graduate from higher education, they prefer to be employed by Western companies instead of being involved in the family stores. So groceries will gradually die out as the younger generations also prefer shopping in supermarkets. The number of Guild members has already declined from 1,356 to the present 1,134. This indicates that the expected downwards trend has begun. The only way to extricate themselves from such a difficult position is to transform a grocery store into a mini-supermarket.

3. Going back to his Father's Native Place

With regard to the relational tie between Southeast Asian Chinese and the native places in China, the prevalent assumption is that it is common for an immigrant generation to remain tied in terms of emotion and cultural imagery, tied socially in terms of correspondence and tied economically in terms of remittance. This generation, since they had cultivated firsthand experience in the native place before migration, still
treasure memories of and sentiments for their hometown. But among those Southeast Asia-born second and third generations of migrants, their identity with their ancestral hometown is supposed to grow fainter since they do not have any direct personal experiences in the preceding generation's native place. As expressed by Chinben See, a Philippine-born Chinese scholar, in the 1980s, “China of course is still our hometown, but that is what we inherit as a ‘land of ancestor’ from our preceding generation instead of what we have experienced as our childhood hometown.”\(^{11}\) However, Xingzhong Zheng’s case tells us that the issue of identity is not based only on the single dimension of place of birth. Although personal experience is important to one’s identity, there are multiple social factors influencing its formation. In Xingzhong’s case, for instance, certain elements both in the macro-and the micro-contexts play roles in the forging of his identity. First of all, the opening up China and economic development by and large makes the country attractive for ethnic Chinese to visit. The prosperous perspective offered by China in the past two decades is a new factor, which indeed is engendering an increasing impact on Chinese overseas identity. Secondly, one’s identity is also shaped by local conditions. For a long time Xingzhong has actively participated in the Malaysian Chinese community, which indeed is fully Chinese culture oriented. Thirdly, one’s position in a family in the case of a Chinese migrant also influences one’s self-identity. As a rule, the eldest son in an immigrant family is deemed to take responsibility for the family. Consequently, this sense of responsibility is likely to be extended to local Chinese community where his family located as well as in and to his father’s hometown where the family still maintains connections\(^{11}\).
Although Xingzhong Zheng never set foot into China until 1986, when he was nearly seventy, from the moment of his first visit, a process of commutation began. The first time he joined a touring party visiting China, he recounted:

The tour took us to Guangzhou, Beijing and other places. I was very happy to see China. Those big cities are advanced and attractive looking. I was always unwavering in my conviction that the Chinese are clever, diligent and capable people, before my eyes lay the proof.

When I reached Yongchun, I was however, not happy to see the run-down condition of Peng Xiong School. My father was one of the ‘Group of Three’, so dubbed teasingly by Malaysian clansmen for never ceasing to push its maintenance onto the agenda. It hurts to see my father’s blood and sweat rotting away. I wanted to re-establish the school.

Apparently, the state of the affairs of the lineage school, into which his father had once thrown an abundance of energy, impressed him most during his first visit to China. Actually, this school was the only remaining property of the Zheng lineage after the establishment of New China in 1949. However, in the Great Cultural Revolution which was launched in 1966, it was taken over by the government and turned into a public school. After China started to pursue its reform policy at the beginning of the 1980s, restoring ties with Chinese overseas became a prime concern of every local authority in the Qiaoxiang region. The school therefore was officially restored as lineage property. Since then, the Zhengs of Malaysia have contributed unceasingly towards the upkeep and upgrading of the school. Among all those enthusiastic Zhengs, Xingzhong Zheng has stood out because of his spectacular efforts.

In the late 1980s when Xingzhong Zheng first time visited China, mindful of the unsettled ‘communist terrorists’ issue, the Malaysian government used diplomatic pressure on China and passed a ruling in the late 1980s stipulating that Malaysian-born Chinese could visit China only once every five years. The age limit for male visitors
must be over sixty and females over fifty-five.

Under such restrictive orders, Xingzhong’s visits to China were put on hold until this ruling was lifted in September 1990, when Malaysia and China resumed normal diplomatic ties. After the doors re-opened, Xingzhong went back to Yongchun more regularly, as often as twice to thrice a year in the second half of the 1990s. He stayed in Yongchun for three months each time with the self-imposed mission of keeping up donation projects to the lineage school one after another.

During the first visit in 1986, Xingzhong Zheng reached an agreement with Zhonglian Zheng, who was on the same tour. Zhonglian Zheng would take responsibility for mobilizing Zheng members in Kuala Lumpur for fund raising, and Xingzhong would underwrite any deficit. In 1996 the personal pledges of these two Zhens eventually led to a new major teaching block costing 800 thousands yuan with twenty-one classrooms to be constructed.

The second project Xingzhong launched was to construct a science building for the school. He recalled how the idea came up.

In 1994, when the Malaysian regulation restricting Malaysia Chinese from visiting China was abolished I went back again. This time the head of the education bureau suggested I build a science building. He confirmed that the school had been running rather well. However, he said that the future would be the era of science and the computer. If a school possesses such facilities, we could set up this school as an exemplary school. I was convinced that this idea was a very good one.

However, Xingzhong Zheng may be an exception to the general rule that second generation Chinese who received a non-Chinese education and had never had personal experience of China, and who are professionals, do not foster any particular feelings towards their ancestral native place.

This was the reason that Xingzhong’s brothers opposed spending so much money in China. Among his three brothers and eight sisters, only the third sister had received a Chinese education. In Xingzhong’s view, she is the best in the family, imbued with filial piety and a sense of Chinese culture. She and her husband support Xingzhong’s
intention of making further donation projects. The brother-in-law works as a general manager in a bank in Thailand and has made his fortune by running a palm-oil factory. He is deeply grateful to Xingzhong because the latter once helped him to establish his enterprise. Xingzhong recalls that:

When I told him my idea, he supported it readily. He has had plenty of floating capital for financial business in Hong Kong, thus he could directly allocate the money for constructing the science building. He has spent 1.6 million RMB for building it. I should say that this was Yongchun’s lucky streak because of the timing. If this project were to have been conducted during or after financial storm of Southeast Asia, like now, he would be not able to afford the expense.¹

However, among his series of projects the most conspicuous is the setting up of the Yiding Zheng Foundation. Not simply because it relates to the Jujing Hall, the symbolic object of Xingzhong’s identity, but also because Xingzhong has made this his major undertaking in Yongchun. Xingzhong Zheng explained how the idea of establishing a foundation was born.

I didn’t set up a foundation in Malaysia as I think it is necessary only for huge enterprise owners to establish foundations or trust funds because they serve as tax relief that help to reduce income tax, and certainly not for my family. You see, my family business does not belong to the high-flying type where they made millions upon millions. My business is confined to Malaysia, so the idea of setting up a foundation in Yongchun is not meant to make any financial gains.

The idea was just to use the Foundation to build up a permanent recyclable financial resource for providing scholarships to Zheng lineage offspring in Yongchun.

While he sharing his experience, I noted that he repeated several times this general statement: “Who knew me in Youngchun in the past?”, and then gave the answer himself: “Nobody. But now it is different. Everybody among the older and younger generation of our lineage knows me through the scholarships given without prejudice by the Foundation.”

What he states seems revealing in that his identity towards his father’s hometown is not
only rooted in the historical connection his family had with the place, it has pertinently also been produced by a dialectic process. The more deeply he has been involved in the projects of constructing the lineage school in the ancestral hometown, the more feelings he builds up of being connected to this place. The more he identifies with the place, the more appeal the place has for him. Thus, one’s identity does not remain static, instead, it changes along with the new accumulations to one’s personal experience.

He said that in a few years from now, he would stop having a hand in running the family business and he would turn his affairs over to his younger brothers in Malaysia. Then, like his father, he intends to live in Yongchun for the rest of his earthly life. Then he continued:

Throughout my life, I have worked like a beast of burden for my family business, for my brothers and sisters as well as for my children. I have tried to the best of my ability to adhere to my father’s last will and testament – he wished for all his offspring to have a decent education. To achieve this, I haven’t truly enjoyed or lived my life, as I would have really liked to. Now my duties are done, and in coming back to my hometown, I find contentment and fulfilment that is of my own making. Life here is relaxing and free from pressures. I find that the air is fresh, the food is more natural and you always have people to chat to you.

To understand fully what Xingzhong Zheng said, I reproduce here a passage from my notebook, which recorded my own experience and impressions on this visit to Yongchun:

I was seated with two respected elders of the lineage in the Yiding Foundation Building to wait for the arrival of Xingzhong Zheng and others from Malaysia. It was about five o’clock in the evening and I knew Xingzhong Zheng, Zhonglian Zheng and their entourage had arrived from the peals of laughter and greetings that echoed up from downstairs.

After due introduction I started to chat with them. Not long after, we were often interrupted by people who, having heard of Xingzhong and company’s presence in Yongchun, just popped in to say hello, to drop some homely gifts and at the same time
extend warm and informal invitations to them to visit their homes. Not all of them were their relatives, because among them were some members of the local elite like the President of Peng Siong School and the village head. What impressed me was the atmosphere created by local people whose genuine warmth traversed the boundaries of nationality – their bond is bred from sharing a common blood tie. I was also surprised by the speed with which the news spread as Xingzhong and entourage had just put down their luggage! It was apparent that these friends, relatives and well-wishers have been looking forward to the arrival of their Malaysian clansmen.

When Xingzhong Zheng goes back to Yongchun, he receives the full attention of his lineage fellows because he is the one whom they considered has made the greatest contribution to the lineage, not just for the money, but keeping the spirit of the lineage alive is also a big part of it.

Furthermore, the environs of Yongchun is another element that made Xingzhong prefer his ancestral hometown. The majority of Zheng lineage still live concentrated in the eastern area of the county seat (in the olden days, according to historical records, this was the neighbourhood of the Eastern Gate). Therefore they address themselves as “Eastern Gate Zheng” in order to distinguish themselves from the other Zhengs of the county. The ‘Eastern Gate Zhengs’ lived mainly in four villages in the area. Among them, Taodong village, the original home of Xingzhong Zheng’s family is also the one that is closest to the town centre. The whole village was renamed geographically a township when the local government took over the village farmland. Jujing Hall is located right at the entry of the road to the village. As I mentioned earlier, the first and the second floors of the building are being used as a hotel. You can imagine the scene which presents itself to Xingzhong Zheng and company when they are sitting, facing the street, in the open-style lobby of the hotel. All his clan fellows coming into or going out of town pass by Yiding Zheng Foundation Building and can conveniently drop in to greet and chat with him. This part of everyday life links Xingzhong to the intimate atmosphere of a small community.

A lifestyle that combines the simple nature of a rural area and having easy access to the facilities of a township also makes Yongchun another attractive point for Xingzhong Zheng. He usually eats in a small restaurant on the first floor of his building.
The writer can be witness to his simple diet; a freshly steamed carp, a dish of toufu and vegetables are enough to satisfy his appetite. He apparently enjoys the local dishes prepared from local products very much and always claims that even vegetables here taste sweeter because people plant them on the mountain, where they are lavishly supplied with dewdrops.

Back in Malaysia, the Zhengs’ homes are spread out over the country, but with main concentrations in a few places like Segamat (in the south), Kuala Lumpur and Kuala Selangor (in the central region). In Xingzhong’s case, it is hard to meet his clan fellows in Ipoh, even though he is able to enjoy the company of his circle of intimate friends – five in all regularly. His friends are about the same age, but come from various dialectic backgrounds with middle-class career experiences and have been born and bred in Malaysia. They gather together as often as they can in the early mornings in a Chinese restaurant to have morning tea, a typically Chinese style breakfast. In the Hokken dialect, morning tea is referred to as ‘lintei’ and in Cantonese it is called ‘dimsum’. This kind of friendship is, different in essence from the ones which grew from sharing a common heritage based on belonging to a group that has its unique culture and history. This may be what Xingzhong in his moments of nostalgia refers to as his ‘true identity’.

4. The Jujing Hall Disturbance

The so called “Jujing Hall disturbance” refers to a dispute that agitated Zheng’s lineage members both in the homeland and abroad from the 1980s to the 1990s. It focused on the property rights to Jujing Hall which was later called the Jujing Building. This dispute reveals the complicated course of restoring the transnational lineage tie, and how new interests generated at the present time combine with traditional themes. It also shows how this rebuilt social field produces a new source of social capital for people who participate in this arena, and at the same time, throws conflicts and contradictions
in the lineage into sharp relief.

In the autumn of 1981, backed by his three brothers, Xingzhong, as a vice chairman of Zheng Clan Association in Malaysia, decided to contribute the hall to the Zheng Clan Association. In June of the next year, the association held a discussion and passed a resolution. This declares that the association will set up an agency of the Zheng clan in the hometown and the agency will be located in the Jujing Hall. This agency should be a permanent institution to be in charge of all the public affairs of the Zheng lineage (such as culture, education, public property, public welfare and so on). The resolution appointed a fifteen-member council consisting of eight Malaysian members and seven townspeople. It even designated precisely which members of the hometown should be the candidates. However, as the issue of agency could not be settled at that time, the Malaysia association later authorized the transfer of the said property to the newly reestablished Peng Siong School Board of Trustees in Yongchun. When that board took up the matter, a conflict emerged.

The cause was the following. When Yiding Zheng had built Jujing Hall in the 1930s, he sent his brother, Yichun Zheng, back to take care of this project. When the house was completed, Yiding did not make it back to Yongchun. The house was entrusted to some distantly related cousins. At the beginning of the 1950s, when the new Chinese government demanded the re-registration of housing property, the relatives registered, without authorization, Yichun Zheng and his son as well as Xingzhong Zheng as the co-owners. So when the Board of Trustees of Pengxiong School asked these clansmen to move out from the house in 1981, they met with a refusal from these households. Furthermore, Yichun Zheng, the brother of Yiding, stood up and questioned the property rights of Xingzhong and his brothers, claiming that he also held one-third of the property rights to the house. A dispute around the property rights therefore flared up
between this pair of uncle and nephew: Yichun Zheng and Xingzhong Zheng. Both sides sent letters to the Yongchun government asking this authority to solve this dispute. In 1984, Yichun Zheng started a legal procedure against Xingzhong. The court, however, ruled in favour of Xingzhong Zheng, but those clansmen who resided in the house refused to abide by the judgment. In 1986, when Xingzhong Zheng visited for the first time, he went to see the premises and had this to say:

I felt it would not be inappropriate if I were to convert the premises for commercial use so that income could be generated to pay for the upkeep. Otherwise, I had to send a constant stream of money to Yongchun to maintain the premises.

In 1986, with the support of the school Board of Trustees, Xingzhong filed a suit at the Middle People’s court in Quanzhou of which the authority transcends that of Yongchun. Xingzhong had his father’s will translated into Chinese. In his will, Yiding divided his entire property into 200 shares. He endowed the Jujing Hall with 100 shares. Another 100 one was divided among his wife (10%), his brother (10%) and nephew (10%), his sons (each got 10%) and his daughters (20% sub-divided between eight daughters) and the last 10% was for various charities. In his will, Yiding stipulated that the interest earned from his real estate property should be allocated to Jujing Hall to be used as maintenance money.

Deyu Zheng, the current chairman of the Board of Trustees of the School thought the fact was clear. He made use of his friendship with the head of the court and settled the matter quickly. The court pronounced that the premises belonged to Xingzhong Zheng and his brothers and ruled as follows.

That Xingzhong Zheng and his brothers and the said uncle out of their own free will donate the entire premises known as the Jujing Hall to the Malaysia Peng Siong Teh Clan Association. In turn, the later will appoint the Board of Trustees of Peng Siong School to be in charge of the premises. The premises concerned should only be used for public service and educational purposes. No private households will be allowed to reside therein under any circumstances. As and when it is necessary for the building to be repaired, the hall and main gate should be kept in the style of or re-built to resemble their original form and it is forbidden to make design changes. The court also orders the four households to move out within a definite time period.
This incident seemed to have come to an end with the ruling, however, it turned out to be just a prelude to a whole affair. Although the premises were assigned to the Board of Trustees of the School, they could not make use of it as an efficient resource for the lineage welfare. It was not until the early 1990s that an opportunity presented itself for Jujing Hall to fulfill its destiny.

At that time, the Yongchun government launched a municipal project for modernizing the appearance of the county seat. According to the plan, some major streets needed to be expanded. One of them was the street on which the Jujing Hall was located. The sharp business acumen of Xingzhong immediately spotted the possibility of turning Jujing Hall into a modern building for commercial purposes so that it could generate a profit. Xingzhong decided to support the county plan. He invested 780,000 yuan RMB out of his own pocket to rebuild the Jujing Hall, though the Hall was already considered a publicly owned property. In 1994, Xingzhong was nominated to be the Chairman of the Zheng Clan Association in Malaysia and therefore, he had a free hand in determining how to put Jujing Hall to use. The refurbished five storey Jujing Hall covers a total of 1,462 square meters and has twenty-nine rooms. By letting out of the major part of the building for commercial purposes, an annual income of about RMB140,000 was created. With this financial resource, Xingzhong Zheng set up the "Yiding Zheng Foundation Fund" and registered it with the local government.

In order to analyze the dispute that followed, Bourdieu's concepts of "field" and "capital" (Bourdieu 1992) may be relevant here because the theory uses the angle of relationships; relationships among subjects and locations. A foundation as a sort of organization that could be considered a field which provides a virtual space for people who are involved in it to act and interact.
The basic elements of a Foundation consist of financial resources and an executive board, which together provide a dependable base to generate social capital. The social capital has been sought by people who are pursuing power, social status and economic benefits according to the boundaries of their ambitions. Now, in order to understand the conflict presented later, I will identify the actors who spearheaded the eventual formation and function of the Foundation.

Xingzhong Zheng who, after the twists and turns in events, is now considered by the lineage in Yongchun to be the founder of Yiding Foundation Building instead of Yiding Zheng himself. The motive of Xingzhong is a two-fold one, namely fulfillment and utilitarian. The former stems from his sense of responsibility to consummate the terms of the will of his father and also from his own need for self-fulfillment.

At the utilitarian level, first, by setting up the Foundation, Xingzhong Zheng can exercise power and control over the school, the Board of Trustees and the lineage. Second, by being the major donor to the school and running the Foundation, he has earned himself quite a high social status in Yongchun. Xingzhong has moved out from beneath his father’s shadow and carved out an identity of his own. The third motive is actually rather subtle. Xingzhong is a successful businessman in his own right and while heading the family enterprises in Malaysia, they grew tremendously. From this angle, there is really no practical reason for him to get involved in controlling the finances of the Foundation. Yet, as we examine the issue more closely, it becomes evident that ‘a leopard can’t change its spots’. This entrepreneur has a strong professional sense. As the controller of Yiding Foundation, Xingzhong reserves the
right to have the final say on all approvals of monetary claims related to the Foundation. The fourth motive thus is personal economic interest. Whenever he stays in Yongchun, all his expenses are paid for by the Foundation.

There are seventeen members on the Board of the Foundation. Two of them are respectable prominent elders in local education circles who are also the former head of the best local high school and the former president of the Zheng Lineage School respectively. Another is the current chairman of the Union of Returned Overseas Chinese (UROC) at the county level. The fourth figure is a retired official from the local Construction Bureau. The fifth is the current head of Taodong Village where the school is located and where the ancestral home of Xingzhong is located. Others are either senior officials or cadres at the level of local administration. All of them are Zheng clansmen. For them, to be a member of Board of the Foundation means access to a sort of social capital, because as highlighted earlier, the schools of Fujian province have been always the social stage on which elites could excel.

First, the membership of the school board guarantees respect and honour from the local community. Second, as a member one can partake in the process of decision making mainly on matters about the school and the lineage. In this sense the board offers a base for power play and politics. Third, as a member of the Board, what can be earned in terms of monthly income is limited, a mere token sum for rendering social service. Yet, in a rural area where the average income is much lower in comparison to that in the metropolitan cities, it is still attractive enough for people to get involved. Besides, as the Board wields a certain financial power, for a member, it offers
opportunities to enjoy banquets and side benefits in the name of Board on some occasions like receiving overseas visitors, entertaining officials or supervisors from various levels of local government.

In the administrative structure of the foundation, Xingzhong’s position is supposed to be more than that of a figurehead. In fact, when he is not in Yongchun (as is often the case), the Board does wield the actual power. Strictly speaking, there are three members on the Board who are empowered to carry out its core functions. One is Yuanliang Zheng, the Chairman of the Board, a man in his seventies. Having held the post of head of local Number One High School for a very long time, he is highly respected by the local community and government. His personality is such that he tries not to offend anybody. The second is Yongren Zheng who is in his sixties and a cadre in his post as the Chairman of the UROC. Being placed in a prominent public position, an experienced communist cadre with a background of having overseas connections (his parents are Malaysian Chinese), one can understand how he tends to act cautiously in anything related to the affairs of the Foundation which ‘off the record’ belongs to a Chinese overseas. Therefore, he does not trumpet his position on any issue. The third person is Mingkun Zheng, a demobilized soldier who joined the Local Construction Bureau and has now retired. He is the Treasurer of the Foundation. He is ambitious and is the only one of the three who dares to stand up to Xingzhong. He actually is on the look out for every opportunity to wrest control. Compared with the former two, he is regarded to be the actual power to be reckoned with and to be more concerned with making headway than obtaining general social esteem. Consequently, it is not surprising that he is ranged on one side and Xingzhong on the other when the eruption of the “Jujing Hall Disturbance” brought their rivalry to a head.

As a matter of fact, their antagonistic relationship started after the self-recommendation of Mingkun, a lineage nephew of Xingzhong, that he supervised the re-building of Jujing Hall. According to Xingzhong, he trusted Mingkun and gave money whenever Mingkun asked for payments carried out in the framework of the construction. However, as time passed, Xingzhong became dissatisfied for two reasons.
First, when the building was completed, many cracks appeared in the walls. When Mingkun was queried about them, he simply answered that this was a natural phenomenon. Another disappointing matter from Xingzhong’s point of view was that, whenever he asked for the title deeds to the property, Mingkun always came up with excuses. Xingzhong Zheng also lost his trust in Mingkun because of other personal disappointments.

I also gave Mingkun money as personal gifts because he helped me to construct this building, also it is a custom upon greeting when one comes back from overseas. But what he repaid me with was a strip of fake ginseng. From that moment on, I no longer trusted him.

The conflict between the two men had been growing in intensity in early 1999, when this research was conducted in the field. Both sides focused on the financial control of the Foundation. Mingkun Zheng claimed that all income from Jujing Hall belongs to the Foundation and as such, it should only be used for the collective purposes of lineage. He rejected Xingzong Zheng’s claim to some part of the fund. As a result, Xingzong Zheng was thoroughly annoyed with him and declared that he would reform the board of administration in order to dismiss Mingkun and two other aged members. When Mingkun found out about what Xingzong Zheng was planning to do, he flared up, striking the table in front of Xingzong and pouring out a stream of abusive words. Angrily, Xingzong Zheng claimed that he would disband the Board of Administration and turn the lineage school over to the government. Furthermore he leaked news that he was planning to sell the Hall. Since the Jujing Hall is supposed to have been donated to the Zheng Lineage Association in Malaysia, Mingkun formally protested to Malaysia.

The nature of the transnational lineage tie is complicated in the sense that it displays itself in many dimensions: various sub-groups and various interests are involved in it. The reason Mingkun took such an uncompromising stance toward Xingzhong, the main contributor to the Lineage undertaking and his clan uncle, was that he had an alliance
with a group in Malaysia. One of the subgroups in the Zheng lineage resides at Tangkak, a town near Malacca, where most of Zheng members' native place is Dayu Village in Yongchun. They form the main opposition faction to Xingzhong in the lineage. Hence, it is necessary for us to turn our sights to the lineage side in Malaysia.

As the current chairman, Xingzong and a few members of the Board were in favour of selling the association building in downtown Kuala Lumpur to buy a new lot in a nearby suburban area. There were two reasons which led them to believe this deal would benefit the members and the Association. First, the old building is located on the street called Jalan Masjid India which, being a popular shopping area, is crowded. Therefore visiting members find it difficult to find parking space. This was beginning to affect attendance at activities organized by the Association. The proposed new building is near a light rail station so it is convenient even for non-car owning members to participate in activities of the Association. The second reason was that, although the new building would cost M$1.73 million, a buyer was willing to buy over the old building for four million. So the Association would have a new building with easy road and light rail access and make a profit at the same time. To persuade some doubting members, Xingzong promised that the Association need not worry about the payment for the new building. He was willing to pay a 10% down payment and the Association could pay him back later; interest free and no repayment time limitation. So at that meeting, the proposal was pushed through, albeit with considerable reluctance. After the down payment had been paid by the association, the voice of discontent grew louder and it led to the calling of a special meeting of all members of the Zheng Lineage Association to make a final decision on this matter. At this special meeting, votes not in favour of the sale of the old building to buy a new one were cast. The malcontents cited the following reason: the property of the association acquired by the preceding generation should not be sold, even if the deal were a profitable one. The real reason behind this claim indeed was a rumour that was spread that those favouring the deal were getting an undeclared commission. Moreover, members of the Dayu group called
Xingzong to account: why had he not paid the down payment for the association as he had promised to do so. They even insulted him by saying that since he is a man who had gone back on his word, he should be wearing a skirt.

The prestige and respect for Xingzong was being eroded and undermined. Xingzong found it difficult to work sincerely for the Association, so in February 1999, he resigned. Although the Association did not push through with the new building, Xingzong reimbursed the M$19,900 down payment and all fees paid for the conveyancing and the lawyer’s fee.

About the same time, another incident happened which was also related to the conflict in Yongchun. It sharpened the contradiction between Xingzhong Zheng as one side and the subgroup of Dayu village on the other.

When the new Jujing Building was completed, as the chairman of Zheng association, Xingzhong declared that the guest 'house' in the building would be offered free of charge to Malaysian clansmen who visited the hometown. Once, two clansmen of Dayu Village origin went to Yongchun and when they asked for lodgings at the guest house, they were refused because there were others already staying there. These others were not Zheng clan members but friends of Zonglian Zheng, a close crony of Xingzong Zheng. Feeling disgruntled that outsiders had been given preference over genuine lineage members, these two clansmen went back to lodge a complaint to the Zheng Lineage Association. So within the Association itself, a faction that threw in its lot with Mingkun to oppose Xingzong began to take shape.

The development of events eventually involved both the board of trustees of the school and the Malaysian Zheng Aassociation in the situation. In May of 1999, the board got news that Xingzhong Zheng had sent someone to the Department of Housing Management to go through the formalities of selling the Jujing Building. They immediately faxed the Malaysian Zheng Association asking the current chairman himself to come over to Yongchun to take charge of the matter. Jingxing Zheng, the new chairman, made a phone call to the Head of Yongchun County asking the local
government to intervene in this lineage affair. At the same time, two clansmen of Dayu village origin proposed themselves as representatives of the association to go back to Yongchun to handle this affair, and Jingxing Zheng agreed. Letters officially appointing them to act on behalf of the Association, both to the Board of Trustees in Yongchun and the local authority were drawn up. Enclosed in the letter of authorization were documents showing clearly that the Jujing Building is the property of the Zheng Lineage Association of Malaysia.

In the second half of 1999, the disturbance was eventually settled through mediation of a senior uncle of the lineage who was respected by all because of his dual capacities: being a former official with a rich experience in dealing with the issues of the Chinese overseas and also holding a senior position in the lineage. The solution was that the title deed of the Yiding Foundation Building has been transferred formally to the Board under condition that Xingzhong Zheng has the right to use 30% of the income generated by the building whenever he stays in Yongchun.

5. Conclusion

Overseas Chinese of the Xingzhong type show us the following characteristics. He belongs to the first, second or even third generation of the migration, with either a vivid direct or indirect personal memory of the ancestral native place; he has been entrusted with responsibility for his extended family (as the eldest son in the family he is supposed to take care of the family business and the interests of the whole family, therefore his sense of belonging to his parents' hometown has also been developed, he has been closely connected with Chinese communities in the country of residence where he has cultivated the recognition of his Chineseness; he has already obtained business success hence his financial power enables him to act in the transnational space.
He takes the opportunities provided by the flexibility and mobility of present era to step into China, partly for sentimental reasons, partly for rational purposes. While the former show themselves in the activities carried out to fulfill the wishes of the older generation or to commemorate his parents, the latter are expressed in his seeking for new sources of social capital, with which he can achieve self-satisfaction in this yearning for social status, reputation or power. In the practices of this group, we may see more functions of social and cultural than of economic logic, but they are also an embodiment of the flexibility and mobility offered by the present time.

The process of restoration of the old trans-territorial lineage tie merits attention in the sense first that the actor seizes the opportunity offered by the time to turn the old type of donation project into a new enterprise-like, profit-generating one. Therefore he creates financial capital for enlarging and strengthening the lineage undertakings, which at the same time, renews the social capital he needs for his self-fulfillment.

Second, the actor acts as a bridge, introducing Western ideas of modernity into his hometown which is located in a basically agricultural area. For instance, he tries to bring in British management culture to influence the management of the lineage organization and the running of the Foundation. For this reason, overseas Chinese have been regarded as an important force. Their transnational activities are seen to make a contribution to the distinguished modernity in southern coast region of China.

Thirdly, this case not only shows that the renewal of transnational lineage ties provides a solid base for forging group identity in a new era, but even more interestingly, it discloses how contradictions and conflict can occur in this trans-places social space.
since the different interests of various subgroups and individuals have been involved in
this space much more intensively than ever before. Within clan associations factions are
natural. In the transnational situation, however, these factions are also constituted
transnationally, both in the location where the hall is built and used and in Malaysia. In
other words factionalism is now transnational. This is new in the transnational aspect of
lineage ties.

\[\text{Chinben See, "Childhood and Hometown" in Crossroads: Collected Words of
Philippine Chinese, eds by Hong Yuhua and Cai Lili, p30.}
\]
\[\text{This is a phenomenon I recognised when I conducted my fieldwork. Several my
interviewees, who are the second generation of immigrants but who are the eldest sons
in families, are orientated towards Chineseness.}
\]
\[\text{Indeed, the original project planned to invest 2 millions RMB, which included two
parts: 1.4 million for computer rooms and 450 thousands for interior facilities. However,
when author visited the school in the summer of 1999, the rooms of the building were
still void of computers and other relevant facilities.}
\]
\[\text{This piece quotes from the mediating paper (1987) of Fujian Province Quanzhou City
Intermediate People Court, the 7th of Civil Court of Quanzhou Intermediate People
Court, August, 30, 1987.} \]