



TRENDS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

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CONCEPTS AND PATTERNS OF CHINESE MIGRATION, WITH REFERENCE TO SOUTHEAST ASIA

Leo Suryadinata and Dorcas Gan

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FOREWORD

The economic, political, strategic and cultural dynamism in Southeast Asia has gained added relevance in recent years with the spectacular rise of giant economies in East and South Asia. This has drawn greater attention to the region and to the enhanced role it now plays in international relations and global economics.

The sustained effort made by Southeast Asian nations since 1967 towards a peaceful and gradual integration of their economies has had indubitable success, and perhaps as a consequence of this, most of these countries are undergoing deep political and social changes domestically and are constructing innovative solutions to meet new international challenges. Big Power tensions continue to be played out in the neighbourhood despite the tradition of neutrality exercised by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

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Concepts and Patterns of Chinese Migration, with Reference to Southeast Asia

By Leo Suryadinata and Dorcas Gan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Concepts and patterns of Chinese migration are often described with terms such as *guigen* (归根, return to one's original roots), *shenggen* (生根, sprout local roots), *shigen* (失根, lose original roots), *wugen* (无根, without roots), and *duogen* (多根, many roots). These terms, linked to the Mandarin word *gen* (根, roots), carry various meanings including home, citizenship, ethnicity, as well as local language, culture and society.
- In Southeast Asia, the predominant patterns of migration are *shenggen/shigen*, *guigen*, *shenggen/shigen*, *wugen* and/or *duogen*. These concepts represent the mainstream patterns during various periods, which may admittedly exist concurrently.
- The pattern in each particular period is influenced by an array of internal and external factors, such as colonial and subsequently government policies directed at migrants, as well as forces and opportunities afforded by globalization.
- Since the 1980s, the *wugen* or *duogen* concept has been at the forefront as Chinese migrate or even remigrate to developed countries. Notably, these migrants may be descendants of previously assimilated Chinese migrants from earlier periods.

Concepts and Patterns of Chinese Migration, with Reference to Southeast Asia

By Leo Suryadinata and Dorcas Gan¹

ROOTS (根) AND PATTERNS OF CHINESE MIGRATION

When dealing with Chinese migration, we often encounter terms such as *guigen* (归根), *shenggen* (生根), *shigen* (失根), *wugen* (无根), and *duogen* (多根). The key term, *gen* (根—translated as “roots”), carries multiple meanings. It can be understood as home, citizenship (as in nationality), ethnicity, local language and culture, or local traditions and society. Each of the terms indicates the varying degrees to which these migrants relate to their roots, and can be used to describe the different phases of Chinese migration in Southeast Asia.

The first, *guigen* (归根), describes migrants who retain their original language and culture during their overseas stay. These migrants and/or their immediate descendants do not sink roots in their host countries and instead look forward to their return to China. This is also commonly known as *luoye guigen* (落叶归根) or *yeluo guigen* (叶落归根), which translates to “falling leaves return to their roots.”

Those migrants who end up adopting local nationality and considering the host country as their homeland can be described as *shenggen* (生根) or *luodi shenggen* (落地生根), which means “to settle down and take local roots”.

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Some learn the local language and culture and intermarry with local women, often losing their original language and traditions along the way. These migrants and their immediate descendants gain local roots (*shenggen*) and lose their China-oriented roots, a process we may call *shigen*. This process may take over two generations, as argued by G. William Skinner in his study of Chinese migrants in Thailand.²

The last two terms—*wugen* (无根, without roots) and *duogen* (多根, many roots)—can be used to characterize *xinyimin* (新移民) or new Chinese migrants at the end of the twentieth century and the turn of the twenty-first century. With easy transportation and means of communication, migrants in recent decades have had a tendency not to stay in their host countries permanently. They neither sink their roots into local society nor fall into the earlier patterns of *luoye guigen*. Instead, they remain migrants without roots, like lotus leaves without roots, or *fuping wugen* (浮萍无根).

These migrants are more educated and therefore also more mobile, moving to more than one host country in their lifetime, and have probably not sunk their roots into either or any of these countries before remigrating. This phenomenon is called *duogen*.

In sum, these five terms can be used to describe the patterns of Chinese migration. With these concepts in mind, this paper seeks to chronologically characterize Chinese patterns of migration in Southeast Asia: *shenggen/shigen*, *guigen*, *shenggen/shigen*, and *wugen* or *duogen*.

These terms are similar to the ones used by Wang Ling-Chi in his article exploring the shifting identity of the Chinese in North America.³ While the terms are similar, unlike Wang, who characterizes these various forms of *gen* as identities, mindsets, and at times even a survival strategy, this paper understands *gen* as a pattern, i.e., the various terms describe

² Skinner argued that in the nineteenth century, “all the grandchildren of the Chinese immigrants achieved comprehensive assimilation into Thai society”. See G. William Skinner, “Chinese Assimilation and Thai Politics”, in *Southeast Asia: The Politics of National Integration*, edited by John McAlister Jr. (New York: Random House, 1973), pp. 383–84.

³ Wang Ling-Chi, “Roots and Changing Identity of the Chinese in the United States”, *Daedalus* 120, no. 2 (Spring 1991), pp. 181–206.

various developments including the self-identities of Chinese migrants, as well as the result of government policies implemented both in China and in the host country. More importantly, while several of the terms used in this paper are similar to Wang's—such as *yeluo guigen* and *luodi shenggen*—the authors depart from Wang's work by asserting a different order. Further, while Wang focuses largely on Chinese migrants to America, this paper looks extensively at migration patterns in Southeast Asia, where the nature of the migrants and the local environment are very different.

The paper mainly focuses on the maritime Southeast Asian states and Thailand, where the most relevant examples can be found. It should also be noted that the pattern identified in one particular period does not mean that it is the only concept/pattern in that period, and instead simply signifies the mainstream at that particular point.

LUODI SHENGGEN OR SHIGEN—TAKING LOCAL ROOTS OR LOSING ORIGINAL ROOTS

According to Wang Gungwu, the modern concept of migration was not known to the Chinese. Most importantly, China subscribed to the idea of state-sponsored migration *within* the country (versus migration to other countries).⁴ As such, they subscribed to the concept of sojourning (侨居 *qiaojū*), in which migrants travelled for business and trade⁵ but were expected to return to their homeland after some time.⁶ As a result, the *luoye guigen* concept was particularly strong. Nevertheless, the objective

⁴ Wang Gungwu, "Migration History: Some Patterns Revisited", in *Global History and Migrations* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1997), pp. 10–11.

⁵ Wang Gungwu, "Sojourning: The Chinese Experience in Southeast Asia", in *Sojourners and Settlers: Histories of Southeast Asia and the Chinese*, edited by Anthony Reid (New South Wales: Allen and Unwin, 1996), pp. 1–14, particularly p. 4, where Wang elucidates the history of Chinese sojourning.

⁶ Wang Gungwu, "Sojourning, the Chinese Experience", in *Don't Leave Home: Migration and the Chinese*, by Wang Gungwu (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 2001), pp. 54–72, especially p. 56.

situation was often the reverse. Due to difficulty in transport, as well as the “embargo” on emigration imposed by the late Ming and later Qing dynasties, many Chinese settled in their overseas host countries and became local to varying degrees (*luodi shenggen*). Others assimilated completely (*shigen*) and became part of the local population altogether. This pattern can be observed in the various intermediate societies in Southeast Asia as termed by G. William Skinner, a leading authority on the study of the Chinese overseas in Thailand and Indonesia.

This phenomenon was facilitated by the intermarriage of Chinese men to local women in host countries, encouraged further by restrictions on Chinese female immigration. As noted by Skinner, “Chinese women seldom emigrated prior to the first decade of this century [twentieth century].”⁷ As such, many male immigrants married indigenous women and established their families locally. Yet, not all were completely assimilated into local indigenous society—at least not from the outset. Instead, in many places, due to a variety of social, economic, and cultural factors, these mixed Chinese-indigenous families formed a culturally intermediate community, like the Peranakans⁸ and Peranakan Babas in the Malay Archipelago, Lukchin in Thailand,⁹

⁷ G. William Skinner, “Change and Persistence in Chinese Culture Overseas: A Comparison of Thailand and Java”, *South Seas Society Journal*, Part 1–2 (1960), p. 94 ; Skinner, “Chinese Assimilation and Thai Politics”, p. 384.

⁸ Leo Suryadinata, ed., *Peranakan Chinese in the Era of Globalization* (Singapore: Chinese Heritage Centre and Baba House, 2010), pp. 41–49.

⁹ For the meaning and use of the term Luk Chin, see Kenneth Perry Landon, *The Chinese in Thailand*, a report in International Research Series of the Institute of Pacific Relations, issued under the auspices of the Secretariat, first published in 1941, reissued in 1973 by Russell & Russell, USA, p. 26; Richard J. Coughlin, *Double Identity: The Chinese in Modern Thailand* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960; reprinted 2012 by White Lotus Press, Bangkok), p. 89. Luk Chin is a term used by Thais to refer to children from a marriage between Chinese males and Thai females, but the meaning of the term in Thai is merely “Chinese children”. Chinese Thais who have been assimilated do not like the term. Scholars use Sino-Thai to refer to Thai Chinese who are Thai citizens and have been integrated.

the Minh Huong in Vietnam,¹⁰ and Chinese Mestizos in the Philippines.¹¹

Skinner, who in various of his works examined these communities in Southeast Asia—especially the situation in Thailand and Java—offers six reasons for the differences in why the Chinese in Siam assimilated into local Thai society, while the Chinese in Java remained a separate community via the Peranakan Chinese until the late nineteenth century.¹² The first is an intangible cultural factor relating to the ethnic and cultural superiority and confidence of indigenous elites and society. While Thais retained their cultural superiority and resisted formal colonization, the Javanese elite developed an inferiority complex arising from European subjugation. This difference had a subsequently significant effect on the cultural assimilation of foreigners into local society. The “cultural imperialism” of Thais meant that non-Thais were constantly acculturated into Thai society, thereby promoting a “cultural definition” of what being Thai meant.¹³ On the other hand, because of the low cultural confidence of the indigenous population in Java, very few foreigners assimilated into Javanese society, and Javanese identity remained tied to Javanese ethnicity. These differences thus exacerbated Chinese assimilation in the first case, and slowed it in the second.

The next four factors Skinner proposes are interrelated and pertain to the social structures in each society. They are: (1) the differences in

¹⁰ Jian Anzi (简安志), “由‘明香’到‘明乡’看17世纪越南‘明香/明乡’的落地生根”, 2012年台湾东南亚区域研究年度研讨会论文, 暨南大学, 2012年5月2-3日.

¹¹ Edgar Wickberg, “The Chinese in the Philippine History”, *Asia*, no. 18 (Spring 1970): 1–15.

¹² Skinner, “Change and Persistence in Chinese Culture Overseas”, in *Southeast Asia: The Politics of National Integration*, edited by John McAlister Jr. (New York: Random House, 1973), pp. 399–413; Skinner, “Change and Persistence in Chinese Culture Overseas: A Comparison of Thailand and Java”, pp. 86–100; G. William Skinner, “Chinese Assimilation and Thai Politics”, *Journal of Asian Studies* 16, no. 2 (February 1957): 237–50.

¹³ Skinner, “Change and Persistence: A Comparison of Thailand and Java, *South Seas Society Journal*, pp. 88–89.

the structure of the elite, (2) the variation in which social structures are determined in each society, (3) the local policy towards the movement of Chinese peoples, and (4) the procedures made available (or not) to the Chinese regarding their identity.

The Javanese elite mainly consisted of indigenous people. However, as explained, the prestige held by the elite was in decline and largely symbolic due to Dutch colonization. As a result, the draw to assimilate and thereby enter the echelons of the Javanese elite was low. At the same time, ethnic groups came to be associated with different socio-economic classes under Dutch colonial control. The Chinese were considered “foreign Orientals” by the Dutch who came to favour them as intermediaries between them and the indigenous people; this allowed the Dutch to carry out “occupational specialization”.¹⁴ This placed the Chinese above the locals on the economic ladder and consequently created a Chinese middle class. This did not only reinforce ethnic definitions of class, but it also minimized social interactions between the Chinese and the indigenous population and made it undesirable for the Chinese to assimilate into the Javanese society, as doing so offered no economic or social benefits.

Colonial policy on the spatial movement of Chinese peoples also intensified the separation of the Chinese from the indigenous people. Under the pass-and-quarter system, the Chinese lived in specific areas and were required to have a pass when leaving a Chinese quarter. This policy was firstly for administrative reasons—the Chinese in Java were presided over by their own leaders. The policy was also economically motivated. Dutch authorities did not want the Chinese to move into rural areas populated by the indigenous people for fear that this would upset the social order there. Politically, too, the Dutch desired to keep the groups separate to effectuate a divide-and-rule system. Living separately reinforced each group’s distinctive culture and practices. In fact, there was no formal process for a Chinese to identify as Javanese, as descendants of Chinese-born families were automatically categorized

¹⁴ Skinner, “Change and Persistence: A Comparison of Thailand and Java, *South Seas Society Journal*, p. 91.

as “foreign Oriental”. This thus created an intermediate society that came to be known as the Peranakan Chinese.

The converse situation was true in Thailand. Prestige, power and wealth remained in the hands of the local elite, as they were never colonized. The draw to assimilate and enter the echelons of the elite was thus high. The fact that there was a strong and continuous tradition of ennobling the most influential of the Chinese also served to reinforce the idea that moving up the social ladder via assimilation was possible. Generally, Thailand practised a free and open economy, and there were also no restrictions to separate the Chinese from the indigenous people at a social level. At the same time, they also had an instituted practice in which local-born Chinese descendants could choose a Chinese or Thai identity. The choice carried no penalties but dictated his or her cultural practices (including dress and attire) and administrative duties—Thais would perform *corvée* labour, while the Chinese would pay a tax every three years. Concurrently, the ability to move freely in Thai society also spread the Chinese more thinly across Thai communities, and thus further fostered assimilation.

Finally, there is the factor of religion. In Java, the majority religion is Islam, while in Thailand, most practise Theravada Buddhism—a religion that is shared by many Chinese and familiar to all of them. Furthermore, while the former is exclusivist, i.e., it cannot be practised in tandem with other religions and demands physical renunciations, the latter is largely the opposite.

Skinner explains the differences in assimilation in the two societies. In Thailand, Skinner asserts that by the third generation, Sino-Thai descendants were virtually fully integrated into Thai society.¹⁵ Conversely, in the case of Java, an intermediate society of Peranakan

¹⁵ Other scholars have held different views from Skinner. These include Richard J. Coughlin, *Double Identity: The Chinese In Modern Thailand*; Cristina Blanc Szanton, “Thai and Sino-Thai in Small Town Thailand: Changing Patterns of Interethnic Relations”, in *The Chinese in Southeast Asia*, edited by Linda Lim and Peter Gosling, vol. 2: *Identity, Culture and Politics* (Singapore: Maruzen, 1983), pp. 99–125.

Chinese emerged—a blend of indigenous and Chinese cultures, though distinctive.

The same observation can be made in other parts of Southeast Asia. Skinner notes that alongside the Chinese Peranakans in Java, the Mestizos in the Philippines and the Chinese Babas in the Straits Settlements also constituted intermediate creolized societies.¹⁶ Like the Peranakans in Java, the Chinese Babas and Mestizos held favourable positions in the colonial economy relative to their indigenous and Chinese counterparts, thereby perpetuating their distinctive identity.

Thus, until the late nineteenth century, Chinese migration to Southeast Asia could be characterized under the *luodi shenggen* or *shigen* concepts. These migrants, who were mainly male, had travelled alone to Southeast Asia in search of economic opportunities. They often settled down with local wives, lost their original roots to become part of an intermediate society, like the Peranakan Chinese, or take on local roots and become completely absorbed into indigenous society, like the Chinese in Thailand.

LUOYE GUIGEN—FALLING LEAVES RETURN TO THEIR ROOTS

The turn of the century witnessed not only a rise in Chinese immigration to Southeast Asia, but also in the number of migrant Chinese women. This development led to an increasing number of Chinese families remaining in touch with Chinese customs and cultures—what some Indonesianists call *totok*, meaning “pure” Chinese. This created a burgeoning and self-reinforcing population of culturally Chinese individuals who did not assimilate into their host country. Colonial policy to divide and rule discouraged the Chinese from integrating and mixing with the local population. As the *totok* community grew, so did Chinese institutions, which perpetuated Chinese culture. For instance, in Java, there was a

¹⁶ G. William Skinner, “Creolized Chinese Societies in Southeast Asia”, in *Sojourners and Settlers: Histories of Southeast Asia and the Chinese*, edited by Anthony Reid (New South Wales: Allen and Unwin, 1996), pp. 78–88.

proliferation of Chinese medium schools in the early twentieth century. In 1901, there was but one such school, but by 1908, fifty-four of these institutions existed.¹⁷

At the same time, Chinese nationalism was growing amongst Chinese inhabitants in Southeast Asia. The early part of the twentieth century witnessed several important political happenings, including the first and second Sino-Japanese War, the rise of the Constitutional Reform Movement and the competing Revolutionary Movement. The former shocked the Chinese in that a non-Western power could overcome China.¹⁸ Led by Kang Youwei, the resultant Reform Movement which sought to modernize and transform the imperial system in China found an audience amongst Chinese migrants. To gain support for their cause, Kang and other leaders of the Reform Movement engaged the overseas Chinese through discussions. In Malaya, they also focused on setting up schools aimed at imparting “love for the motherland”.¹⁹

At the same time, the competing Revolutionary Movement helmed by Dr Sun Yat Sen also emerged. Unlike the Reformers, the Revolutionaries hoped to overthrow the Manchu government, which they viewed as having failed to defend China against Western powers. Sun Yat San’s nationalist rhetoric managed to catch the imagination of the overseas Chinese, many of whom, living under colonial powers, could relate to the anti-imperialism being formulated by their Chinese compatriots.²⁰ To galvanize the illiterate overseas Chinese migrants, the Revolutionaries tapped on stories about the patriotic pursuits of the native provinces of their ancestors (i.e., from Fujian and Guangdong) and set up Tongmenghui (TMH) branches across Southeast Asia. These two movements had the

¹⁷ Leo Suryadinata, *Peranakan Chinese Politics in Java 1917–42* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1981), p. 12.

¹⁸ Stephen Leong, “The Chinese in Malaya and China’s Politics 1895–1911”, *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 50, no. 2 (1977): 7–24.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Wang Gungwu, “New and Old Nationalisms and the Chinese Overseas” (paper presented to ISSCO Xiamen Conference, November 1996, pp. 3–6).

combined effect of awakening nationalist sentiments oriented towards China.

Political consciousness was further heightened with the Sino-Japanese conflicts in the 1930s and the second Sino-Japanese War. Various anti-Japanese organizations sprung up with the aim of defending China. One such organization was the Federation of China Relief Fund of the South China Seas (FCRFSCS) which spanned across Southeast Asia. Their work involved the mobilization of overseas Chinese for China's war efforts, such as gathering willing drivers to travel to China to assist with transporting weapons. Other organizations like the National Salvation Army also tapped into the lay Chinese migrant's nationalist sentiments in Malaya to showcase anti-Japanese resistance by organizing boycotts, labour walkouts and fundraising.²¹ Parallel efforts to raise funds were carried out in the Philippines, the Dutch Indies (colonial Indonesia), Thailand and Burma.²²

All these led many members of the intermediate societies long settled in the social fabric of the region to reorientate themselves towards China. Of course, not all overseas Chinese were uniform in their political orientation; intermediate Chinese groups such as the Peranakans saw themselves to be different from the newly arrived Chinese migrant groups (*sinkeh* or *totok*), both culturally, socially and economically. As such, some remained oriented towards the colonial powers, such as the Peranakan/Babas (especially the elite) in the Straits Settlement, who usually identified themselves with their birthplace.²³ It is telling that

²¹ Stephen Leong, "The Malayan Overseas Chinese and the Sino-Japanese War, 1937–1941", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 10, no. 2 (September 1979): 293–320.

²² Antonio S. Tan, "The Philippines Chinese Response to the Sino-Japanese Conflict, 1931–1941", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 12, no. 1 (March 1981): 207–23.

²³ Kwa Chong Guan, "The Colonial State and the Making of the Peranakan Community", in *Peranakan Chinese in Globalizing Southeast Asia*, edited by Leo Suryadinata (Singapore: Chinese Heritage Centre and Baba House, 2010), especially p. 55.

one of the major Baba community organizations was named the Straits Chinese British Association.²⁴ But in other societies, nationalism amongst these intermediate groups was divided—while some were indigenously or colonially oriented, others identified with Chinese nationalism. For example, in Java, there was a group of Peranakan Chinese who supported the *Sin Po* strand of nationalism which backed China and the idea of a “Greater China”.²⁵ This group staged the anti-*Nederlandsch Onderdaanschap* (Dutch Subject-ship) campaign in 1918, objecting to their status as Dutch subjects and desiring recognition of their status as Chinese nationals. Though this failed, the campaign shows the growth of Chinese nationalism amongst established intermediate communities like the Peranakans.

LUODI SHENGGEN OR SHIGEN—TAKING LOCAL ROOTS OR LOSING ORIGINAL ROOTS

The advent of newly independent states in Southeast Asia during the second half of the twentieth century reversed Chinese migration back towards being *luodi shenggen* and *shigen*. The biggest challenge facing the governments of these independent states was unsurprisingly their multi-ethnic and multi-religious population. Unlike the colonial powers who sought to divide and rule, these new states had a vested interest in promoting national integration.²⁶ These policies were aimed at undermining the roots and orientation of the local Chinese towards China, and consequently, *luoye guigen* was replaced by *luodi shenggen* and *shigen* as the dominant mindset.

²⁴ Eng Seng Ho, “Baba Identity in Penang”, pp. 129–51, cited in G.W. Skinner, “Creolized Chinese Societies in Southeast Asia”, in *Sojourners and Settlers: Histories of Southeast Asia and The Chinese*, edited by Anthony Reid (New South Wales: Allen and Unwin, 1996), p. 91.

²⁵ Suryadinata, *Peranakan Chinese Politics in Java 1917–42*, pp. 1–41.

²⁶ Leo Suryadinata, “Ethnic Chinese and the Formation of Southeast Asian Nation”, in *The Making of Southeast Asian Nations: State, Ethnicity, Indigenism, and Citizenship* (Singapore: World Scientific, 2015), pp. 71–83.

Let us examine the political scene faced by the inhabitants of Southeast Asia soon after World War II. During the war, the Japanese, having faced fierce resistance in China, employed a more discriminatory and oppressive attitude towards the overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia, which they were occupying. This amounted to a divide-and-rule tactic involving the Chinese migrants and indigenous populations.

The Japanese colonialists also encouraged the local/indigenous population to fight with them against the West and build what they termed a “Greater East-Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere”. To gain their support, the Japanese often promised nationalists that independence would be given to their country, and in some cases, local nationalists were also allowed to build up armed forces, such as in Burma and Indonesia.²⁷ That the Japanese army had managed to defeat Western colonial forces also impressed many Southeast Asians. As such, the experience of Southeast Asia during the Japanese occupation often prepared them for the eventual independence of their countries.²⁸ Unsurprisingly, the majority of Southeast Asian countries proclaimed independence soon after the Japanese surrender. As Western powers returned to re-establish colonial rule, struggles between indigenous nationalists and Western colonialists recurred for several years before the final victory went to the nationalists.

In mainland China, the political situation also changed after World War II. In October 1949, the Communist Party of China (CCP) succeeded in securing power and proclaimed the birth of the People’s Republic of China (PRC). This gave them heightened prestige.²⁹ The losing party,

²⁷ Goto Ken’ichi, “Modern Japan and Indonesia: The Dynamics and Legacy of Wartime Rule”, *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 152, no. 4 (1996): 536–52.

²⁸ David P. Chandler, “The Kingdom of Kampuchea, March–October 1945: Japanese-Sponsored Independence in Cambodia in World War II”, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 17, no. 1 (March 1986): 80–93.

²⁹ Victor Purcell, “Chinese Society in Southeast Asia”, in *Southeast Asia: The Politics of National Integration*, edited by John McAlister Jr. (New York: Random House, 1973), pp. 370–81.

the Kuomintang, escaped to Taiwan. The victory of the CCP, however, brought forth a slate of anxieties in newly independent Southeast Asian states about the expansion of communism into the region via the overseas Chinese. The KMT had earlier espoused an aggressive nationalist policy regarding citizenship. The CCP too, in its early years until the mid-1950s, pursued a policy to attract overseas Chinese back to China for the country's redevelopment and economy in the wake of the war.³⁰

However, the priorities of the PRC were made clear at the 1955 Asian-African Conference at Bandung. At the event, Zhou Enlai, the Chinese Premier, signed a treaty between the PRC and Indonesia making provisions for the end of dual citizenship, which the overseas Chinese had essentially held since the KMT announcement. This treaty signalled to the states in Southeast Asia that the CCP was more interested in gaining international recognition and allies than expanding Chinese influence in the region.³¹

Faced with this new situation in mainland China and Southeast Asia, the ethnic Chinese had to reconsider their own position and identities and many began to realize that to continue living in Southeast Asia, they needed to acquire local citizenship. As such, various migrant Chinese groups actively encouraged local governments to pass such policies.³² Culturally, however, many continued to retain varying degrees of Chinese orientation. The three overseas Chinese cultural pillars of Chinese organizations, Chinese media and Chinese schools continued to exist until nation-building policies clamped down on some of them.

For the newly independent states, the overseas Chinese remained a suspect group. These governments sought to limit the inflow of new migrants while seeking to integrate existing Chinese migrants into the

³⁰ G. William Skinner, "Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia", *The Annals of the American Academy of Political Science and Social Science* 321, no. 1 (January 1959): 136–47.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Cui Guiqiang (崔贵强), 《新马华人国家认同的转向 1945–1959》(新加坡: 南洋学会, 1990), Chs 10 and 11.

socio-cultural fabric of their societies and win over their loyalty. At the same time, they had to grapple with the problem of economic disparity (often in favour of the Chinese) and anti-Chinese sentiments among locals. Across Southeast Asia, this included a mixture of forced cultural assimilation and accommodationist policies depending. For instance, in Indonesia, name-changing and a common (non-Chinese) education were made essentially mandatory under Suharto's rule.³³ Elsewhere in Southeast Asia, like in Vietnam and the Philippines, the localization or abolishment of Chinese-medium schools also occurred. Chinese citizens were encouraged to take up local citizenship and were compelled to abandon their Chinese cultures and traditions. In Malaysia, however, the Chinese have been accommodated—Chinese-medium schools have been allowed to operate.

The post-World War II period thus saw large political changes in both Southeast Asia and China, which altered the mindset of Chinese migrants from *luoye guigen* to *luodi shenggen/shigen*. The newly independent states felt it necessary to impose nation-building measures that either accommodated, acculturated or assimilated Chinese migrants into their societies. And as the Chinese became integrated, their orientation towards China also weakened, and they began to grow roots and build a future in the region for themselves and their descendants.

WUGEN OR DUOGEN—THE DRIFTING CHINESE MIGRANTS

New vs Old Chinese Migrants

Since the second half of the twentieth century, particularly beginning in the 1980s, there has been a new wave of Chinese migration. There are four points in which this wave differs from the earlier ones: first, in terms of the geographical origins of the migrants; second, in the educational quality of migrants; third, with regard to the destination of the migrants; and fourth, with regard to the ambitions of these migrants.

³³ Leo Suryadinata, "Ethnic Chinese and the Formation of Southeast Asian Nation", pp. 72–73.

Where geographical origins are concerned, while the old migrants came from the southern provinces such as Fujian, Guangdong and Hainan, the new Chinese migrants come from all over China, as well as from Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macao, and even from within Southeast Asia. The majority still come from mainland China, no doubt.³⁴ The older migrants generally came from villages and had not had much formal education. Their economic status was also low, and the majority came from poor families. But contemporary Chinese migrants have a higher educational and economic status, and some are in fact wealthy.

Where their destinations are concerned, it appears that contemporary migrants aim to move to developed countries rather than to developing countries. According to the estimate of Zhuang Guotu, a mainland Chinese scholar, among these new Chinese migrants, 80 per cent have gone to the West, Japan and other developed countries. Only about 20 per cent went to Southeast Asia.³⁵ This differs from older waves when 90 per cent went to Southeast Asia and only 10 per cent went to the West. This is because of modern means of travel, and the fact that the majority of mainland Chinese migrants consider migrating to developed countries as the best way for them to enhance their economic position. According to the joint research report issued by China's Commercial Bank and Bain Company, in December 2011 there were 500,000 Chinese millionaires who owned \$10 million (about US\$1.56 million) which is investable capital. Of these, 60 per cent were already making arrangements to migrate or have migrated. Their destinations were developed Western countries and Singapore.³⁶ In 2015 it was reported that 300 Chinese millionaires had invested US\$1.7 billion in the New York Skyscraper project.³⁷

³⁴ Zhuang Guotu (庄国土), “中国新移民与东南亚华人文化”, *CHC Bulletin*, Issue 9 (May 2009), p. 9.

³⁵ Zhuang Guotu, *idem*.

³⁶ Dexter Roberts and Jasmine Zhao, “China Super-Rich Buy Better Life Abroad”, *Bloomberg Businessweek*, 28 November – 4 December 2011, pp. 15–16.

³⁷ See “300华人富豪掷13亿纽约建摩天轮, 换美国绿卡”, taken from 《当今世界》 2015-8-17, Source: 东网泉水编辑07月17日 (五) 13:43 ON. CC, 东网专讯页, 22–23.

The educational status of migrants also affects the patterns of migration. New Chinese migrants possess better qualifications and are also more mobile. This means that a larger number tends to remigrate, lending weight to the condition of *wugen* (lotus with no roots).

Indeed, Zhuang has argued that the integration of new Chinese migrants into “mainstream society” will be a problem because “compared to old [Chinese] migrants, new [Chinese] migrants are more open and have multiple ideologies. They have both better adaptive capability and job skills and see international mobilization, including returning to China, as the new normal. They have bid farewell to the traditional patterns of migration such as *luoye guigen* and *luodi shenggen*.”³⁸

However, some mainland Chinese scholars have argued that these people are not rootless; they have multiple roots instead; because new migrants migrate to more than one destination, they tend to plant roots at every destination. Therefore, they have more than one set of roots, i.e., they are *duogen*. Nevertheless, if we examine these new migrants closely, we will notice that they often reside too briefly in one place to have settled down properly.

It is also pertinent to note that this stream of migrants includes the descendants of previously assimilated Chinese migrants. Even though their predecessors had properly settled into the region, the forces and opportunities of globalization may influence them to move overseas, sometimes to multiple locations. Thus, these individuals, though conventionally considered part of the fabric of local societies, may also become part of the stream of *wugen* and/or *duogen* migrants.

New Chinese Migrants and Their Impact on Chinese in Southeast Asia

There are no official figures for new Chinese migrants, and all figures provided in this paper are estimates provided by researchers. In 2007, Zhuang estimated that there are about 1 million new Chinese migrants.

³⁸ Zhuang Guotu (庄国土), “中国新移民与东南亚华人文化”, *CHC Bulletin*, Issue 9 (May 2009), p. 10.

He did not reveal the sources of his information. Whatever the case, if we compare his estimates to United Nations figures for 2005, we see that the latter figures, with the exception of Singapore, are on the high side (Table 1).

According to the UN reports which record the new Chinese migrants to Southeast Asia over a few periods, the number of new Chinese migrants is lower than Zhuang's. While Zhuang estimated that there were about 1,000,000 new Chinese migrants in Southeast Asia in 2007, the UN only listed 552,553 of them, half Zhuang's estimate (Table 2). Even up to 2020, the UN calculated the total number of new Chinese migrants to be at 688,000, far below the 1 million estimated by Zhuang for 2007. It is probable that Zhuang included illegal migrants while the UN figures are more conservative and only recorded those who were legal. As such, a case can be made that the UN figure underestimates the flow of new Chinese migrants.

More importantly, the figures provided by both Zhuang and the UN show that the number of new Chinese migrants has been small when compared to the population of the host country. As such, they form an absolute minority within both the community and also the local Chinese community, ranging from 1 per cent to 10 per cent of the latter.

Table 1: New Chinese Migrants in Southeast Asia

<i>Country</i>	<i>Up to 2007</i>
Singapore	200,000–250,000
Thailand	200,000–300,000
Philippines	150,000–200,000
Malaysia	100,000–150,000
Indonesia	100,000–120,000
Vietnam	50,000–100,000
Laos	10,000
Cambodia	10,000
Myanmar	100,000?

Source: Zhuang Guotu (庄国土), “中国新移民与东南亚华人文化”, *CHC Bulletin*, Issue 9 (May 2009).

Table 2: Chinese Migrants to Southeast Asia, 2000–20

<i>Country/Years</i>	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020
Total numbers	526,422	552,553	595,897	696,732	688,000
Singapore (1)	250,198	299,651	365,797	448,566	426,000
Thailand (2)	200	33,311	68,811	74,411	77,000
Indonesia (3)	83,502	72,094	65,307	72,302	76,000
The Philippines	88,418	71,566	35,398	35,952	38,000
Myanmar	44,999	38,118	35,082	33,656	35,000
Laos	3,005	2,820	8,110	13,400	14,000
Malaysia	54,430	29,909	9,306	11,347	12,000
Vietnam	2,573	2,661	2,440	3,005	3,000
Brunei Darussalam	1,926	1,969	2,012	2,055	2,000
Cambodia	2,998	2,340	1,682	1,518	2,000
Timor-Leste	1,104	1,172	1,196	953	1,000

Source: United Nations (Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs), as reproduced in Aranya Siriphon and Fanzura Banu, “The Nature of Recent Chinese Migration to Thailand”, *ISEAS Perspective*, 2021/168, 22 December 2021, Fig. 2.

Accordingly, they have not brought about a change in the nature of local Chinese communities. The situation differs from the developed countries in the West where there are more new Chinese migrants than local-born Chinese.

New Chinese Migrants and Their Impact on Chinese in Western Countries

In developed countries in the West, new Chinese migrants have turned local Chinese communities into migrant communities again. Let us look at four “migrant states” in the West which have been the favourite destinations of new Chinese migrants in Tables 3 and 4.

Before the arrival of new Chinese migrants, the Chinese populations in these countries had been very small. In Canada, the Chinese population

Table 3: The Rapid Rise of Chinese Population in Four Western Countries, 1970s and 2006

<i>Country</i>	<i>Percentage of Ethnic Chinese to Total Population in the 1970s</i>	<i>Percentage of Ethnic Chinese to Total Population in 2006</i>
Canada	0.57%	4.13%
USA	0.21%	1.19%
New Zealand	0.47%	3.36%
Australia	0.27%	2.64%

Source: Liao Jianyu (廖建裕), “全球化中的中华移民与华侨华人研究”, 《华侨华人历史研究》 (Overseas Chinese History Studies), no. 1 (2012): 5–8.

Table 4: Percentage of Population in Chosen Western Countries That Are Chinese and the Proportion of Those Who Are Local-Born

<i>Country</i>	<i>Total Population</i>	<i>Chinese Population of Total</i>	<i>Percentage of Chinese Population Who Are Local-Born</i>
Canada	32,623,490	4.13%	23%
USA	299,398,484	1.19%	37%
New Zealand	4,186,900	3.36%	11.76%
Australia	20,848,760	2.64%	25%

Source: Liao Jianyu (廖建裕), “全球化中的中华移民与华侨华人研究”, 《华侨华人历史研究》 (Overseas Chinese History Studies), no. 1 (2012): 5–8.

constituted 0.57 per cent of the total population. The USA and Australia had 0.21 per cent and 0.27 per cent respectively, while in New Zealand, the Chinese population only constituted 0.47 per cent. However, by 2006, one can see that the ethnic Chinese population in these four countries had increased tremendously (see Table 3).

A large number of new Chinese migrants has transformed the composition of the Chinese community in these countries, and now far exceeds the number of local-born Chinese (Table 4). Differences in the values of new and old migrants have created friction and conflict between the two and also brought about some hostile generalizations of the Chinese community. For instance, one of the desires of new migrants is for the Chinese government to reintroduce dual nationality, thereby creating the impression that Chinese migrants wish to “have their feet on two boats” (脚踏两只船), that is, reap the benefits of being citizens of both countries.

At the same time, there is often a disconnect between the ideals and expectations that new Chinese migrants have of the developed country and the reality that they face. Thus, while many hope that migrating will provide a better life, not all can realize this dream. Indeed, some face difficulties fitting into the host country. One challenge that new Chinese migrants face pertains to language. It is worth noting that these four Western countries use English as their main language, although their ethnic policy has been described as “multi-cultural”. Thus, there is an implicit expectation that minority groups like the Chinese will mix with the majority English-speaking group and use English as their common language. Some citizens even believe that a minority group (like new Chinese migrants) ought to be assimilated into the majority group. Zhou Min posits that Americans do not regard Chinese Americans as “genuine Americans” but as a model minority group, which actually functions as an “expelling mechanism” that makes ethnic Chinese “eternal foreigners”.³⁹ As a result, new Chinese migrants often face two possible outcomes: they migrate back to China or remigrate in search of better opportunities, or they leave their wives and/or children in these countries while they themselves return to China to conduct business (known as a “flying man”).

³⁹ See Zhou Zhaocheng (周兆呈), “美国亚裔学者周敏: 模范少数族裔, 另一种排外机制”, 《联合早报》, 2011年4月10日.

CONCLUSION

Guigen, *shenggen*, *shigen*, *wugen* and *duogen* can be argued as concepts illuminative of patterns of migration adopted by Chinese migrants and their descendants during different periods and circumstances in Southeast Asia. These patterns are not only linked to personal preferences and social developments but, more importantly, are associated closely with the environment stemming from relevant policies in China and in the host state. This is particularly true where *shenggen* and *shigen* are concerned. As argued in this paper, before the era of globalization, the policy of the host country was crucial for the patterns adopted by Chinese migrants.

Changes at the turn of the twentieth century, including the rise in female Chinese migration and the rise of Chinese nationalism, created fertile conditions for a self-perpetuating *totok* Chinese community, espousing the *guigen* mindset. This changed with the advent of new independent Southeast Asian states. When the countries of Southeast Asia gained independence, they began to introduce varying degrees of assimilationist policies. Some “indigenous states” instituted total assimilation as their policy towards their Chinese minorities, while others were more accommodative. Regardless, many Chinese migrants lost their original roots and gained the roots of the adopted land in this process.

Since the 1980s, new Chinese migrants have emerged. These migrants are vastly different from older migrants. Their higher educational background and their relatively high mobility enable them to migrate more than once. This group can be considered to be *wugen* or *duogen*.

Lastly, it should be noted that the concept and pattern in one particular period do not mean that it is the only one going on in that period; it only means that a particular concept/pattern is dominant. For instance, during the period when *luoye guigen* is common, there might also be the process going on of *luodi shenggen*, but occurring in a more limited fashion. One can also maintain that during the process described as *luodi shenggen*, there might also be the *luoye guigen* phenomenon happening, but again in a limited fashion. And during the process described as *wugen* or *duogen*, both *luoye guigen* and *luodi shenggen* might also exist, but again, not predominantly.

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