

Socio-Religious Institutions and Economic Migration: Case Study of the Bai Clansmen from Anxi, Fujian in Southeast Asia, c. 1880-present

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introduction

“When I first visited my mother’s ancestral home in Longmen during the 1980s, I couldn’t believe the deplorable condition of the toilets people were using!” Shaking her head, Madam Huang wrinkled her nose and eyebrows as she recalled how she had to answer nature’s call over two wooden planks laid over a shallow hole in a small shed next to a pig’s sty. This was her response when I asked about her first impression of her ancestral village during a chat in her shophouse in Iloilo in the Philippines in summer 2015. Philippine-born and second-generation descendant, Madam Huang said that after the experience, she promptly gave money for her relatives to build a “proper” toilet. Since China re-opened its doors to foreigners from the late 1970s, she had visited her mother’s ancestral village thrice. I asked her why she did not go back more often. She made a motion with her three fingers on her right hand as if she was counting money. “You know, we are expected to give the relatives money every time we return...”

Located about 60 kilometres northwards from the port city of Xiamen, the town of Longmen in Anxi county in Quanzhou prefecture of the Fujian province consists of 31 villages and more than a hundred hamlets. Around one-third or 20,000 of the residents are of the Bai surname, spread across about seven villages and 40 hamlets. Visitors of this hilly landscape – famous for the Oolong tea production – would be struck by how names of overseas Chinese were inscribed everywhere.¹ Besides sending remittances and giving angpow money to their relatives during their return, many Bai clanspeople also donated generously to rebuild and renovate the temples, ancestral halls and graves that dotted the town of Longmen. Safe for the main roads connecting provinces which are constructed with the government budget, the small roads leading to the individual villages and the inter- and intra-village roads as well as bridges were mainly built with the funds donated by overseas Chinese. Their names also featured prominently on the board of donations for schools in Longmen, including kindergarten and also primary and secondary schools.

Madam Huang was undeniably one of the most outspoken among the descendants of Bai clanspeople in Southeast Asia I have interviewed in my research on the Bai diaspora in Southeast Asia over the past years. Nevertheless sentiments of the relative “inferiority” of the economic situation of their relatives at home and the relative “backwardness” of the ancestral villages were shared by many whose forefathers came from the Longmen region in Anxi prefecture in Fujian. It was also usual to hear stories of how people regularly remitted money to help the education and household needs of their relatives in China especially in the late 1970s and 1980s.

These sentiments are diminishing especially among those clanspeople who have visited in the last decade and witnessed how the ancestral villages are enjoying rapid economic progress with the market reforms under Deng Xiaoping and his successors. But one thing is undeniable: most Bai clanspeople overseas have experienced considerable upward social mobility thanks to their forefathers’ departure in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although less than five percent attained outstanding business achievements forming listed companies with multinational economic activities, about forty

¹ Today Anxi produces more than one third of the total production of Oolong tea in China.

percent formed medium-level businesses or their descendants earned high-paying jobs and were considered among the middle-class in their respective countries of birth and/or residence. The rest may be drawing an average salary but would still be relatively well-off or the same as their forefathers, and usually better than their relatives remaining behind in the ancestral villages.

And neither was this group unique in terms of achieving upward socioeconomic mobility with their migration overseas. Many people emigrating from numerous villages in Fujian and Guangdong also experienced similar improvement in terms of income and their descendants also tended to earn better livelihood than the first migrants from southern China. For those who visited their ancestral villages from the 1980s when China reopened its doors to foreign visitors, they often expressed similar views as Madam Huang about the deplorable backwardness of their home brethren.

Using the case study of the Bai clanspeople from Anxi, this paper explores how Chinese migrants were able to achieve relative economic success in their ventures abroad. It argues that Bai diaspora relied greatly on clan and home village ties especially during the initial period of their sojourn overseas. The sentiments of close affinity were harnessed by socio-religious institutions which promoted a sense of shared patrilineage as well as common deity-cult beliefs. These clanspeople and their local-born descendants gradually developed broader networks with other Chinese migrants as well as other ethnicities, and the process was most rapid in areas where there was a smaller concentration of fellow Bai clansmen and home villagers. In particular I will examine three case studies to illustrate the centrality of the common clan and home village ties as well as the developments of broader networks over time for the Bai diaspora.

The reliance on shared clan and home village ties was not unique to the Bai diaspora but common among most Chinese migrants from the southeastern Chinese provinces of Fujian and Guangdong. For a long time the overseas Chinese historiography has placed little focus on these mechanisms and tended to regard Chinese migrants as a form of victimized diaspora. In other words they were either portrayed as hapless coolies who were kidnapped or tricked overseas or people forced to leave China because of political and economic troubles at home. Little attention is paid to the socioeconomic aid provided by the communal institutions. In the few works that discussed the clan associations and temples established by the migrants, they were merely regarded as traditional customs brought by the migrants without reference to how these ancestral cults and deity beliefs might have been central to their economic activities overseas (Yen 1981, Ho 1995, Cheu 1996).

In more recent research and writings, historians including Adam McKeown (2004) and Walton Look Lai (2009) are now paying more attention to the agency of the Chinese migrants, showing how many have left overseas relying on chain migration or the help of fellow friends and relatives. Through the analysis of the Bai diaspora, this paper demonstrates that beyond the help of immediate kinsmen and friends, Chinese migrants often enjoyed broader communal institutions that aided in their ventures abroad. This approach is taken in line with studies of other historical entrepreneurial diasporas on the Nattukottai Chettiars, Maghrebi and Armenians where increasing attention is paid to how socio-religious institutions have been central to the economic expansion of these mercantile communities in their economic ventures in Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central Asia and other foreign locales (Rudner 1994, Greif 2006, Aslanian 2011).

A caveat on spelling: there are many renditions of the Chinese names in European languages. For instance the surname of the clan “Bai” in pinyin was rendered variously as “Pek,” “Pe,” “Peh,” “Peck,” “Baek” or “Baik” in different Southeast Asian countries. In this paper I use pinyin throughout for

personal names except for the company names and very famous individuals such as Liem Sioe Liong – the richest Chinese Indonesian businessman in the 1980s and the large part of the 1990s.

Bai diaspora abroad, an overview

Most of the Chinese people of the Bai surname or their forefathers in present-day Southeast Asia hail from a cluster of around forty hamlets in the vicinity of the town of Longmen in Anxi prefecture of the Fujian province. These are namely Gongtou 宫兜, Qitou 崎头, Fuhai 福海, Daqianwei 大墘尾, Zhuangweiqi 庄尾崎, Zhangkeng 张坑, Geqiu 格坵, Kengqian 坑墘, Baiyun 白云, Tiandang 田当, Shifengtou 石峰头, Guishan 龟山, Houlong 后垄, Shangtang 上汤, Fudicuo 福地厝, Xiwei 溪尾, Guanshan 观山, Maolingjiao 茅岭脚, Xiazhai 下寨, Xiheng 西珩, Santing 三厅, Weian 尾垵, Houqu 后屈, Shanhou 山后, Liaotouwei 寮头尾, Jutoulin 垵头林, Wutongnei 梧桐内, Chilingshan 赤岭山, Xintian 新田, Weitouqiao 尾头桥, Kengnei 坑内, Shuanggejian 双格尖, Xianzhai 险寨, Jutou 垵头, Xiaokeng 小坑, Dawan 大湾, Niutapeng 牛踏坪, Xishan 西山, Xiapu 下埔, Songbolin 松柏林, Shegeliao 畚格寮 and Chuikeng 翠坑.²

In the collective memory these Bai also claim direct ancestry to Bai Yingshun 白应顺 (deceased name: Bai Yiyu 白逸宇) and his patrilineage. Born around the turn of the fifteenth century, Bai Yingshun had allegedly come to Yiren in Anxi from Yaotou in Tong'an – located about 40 kilometres away – in 1424. Yiren was the old name of the region that roughly covers the area of what is today's Longmen town. This first ancestor had apparently fled from Yaotou in Tong'an to Yiren because of rivalry with the Lin and Ye clans in Tong'an. He settled down in the Houlin area of the Fuhai 福海 village. His descendants subsequently spread to other villages in Yiren or today's Longmen in the course of the Ming and Qing dynasties. Some went further away to other parts of south China including the coastal town of Xiamen and northern and eastern Fujian as well as neighbouring provinces in Jiangxi, Zhejiang and Guangdong and across the straits to Taiwan.

In the clan narrative the Bai settlement in the Longmen region in Anxi was in fact the development of one of the latter phases in their long history of migration from north China. The collective memory – inscribed in the genealogy of the Bai clan and other clan publications – reminisces an early phase of migration in the centuries before the fifteenth century. The distant ancestors of Bai Yingshun were said to have migrated from Fengyi 冯翊 in Shaanxi and Taiyuan 太原 in Shanxi to Luoyang in Henan. In Luoyang, the Bai clansmen apparently settled in the Xiangshan 香山 mountain. From here some of the descendants moved further to south China.

By the late Qing, the number of male lineage members residing in the villages around Longmen had exceeded 10,000. Beginning in the Tongzhi reign (1862-75) of the Qing dynasty, some clansmen also began to migrate to Southeast Asia in search for a better livelihood. Most of them ended up in Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia – especially east Java and west Sumatra.³ A number also went to Saigon in Vietnam, Bangkok in Thailand; Rangoon and other parts of Burma; as well as Manila, Iloilo and other Philippine islands. Except for Thailand, these countries were under the colonial governance of the British, Dutch, French or Americans during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

² *Bai Clan Association 50th Anniversary Magazine*: 69-70.

³ According to scattered information in the genealogy: in late Qing, among the clansmen from the 14-20th generation about 1,242 people went overseas, not counting Taiwan. Among the places receiving most of these migrants were Singapore 541, Malaysia 108, Indonesia 295 (*Bai Clan Association 50th Anniversary Magazine*: 108).

According to the clan history and genealogy, many Bai lineage members left Longmen due to poor conditions for agricultural production. The ones who left were mostly those who were in the more hilly parts of Longmen or from places with less fertile soils. But many also left because of political struggle with other lineage branches and political situation. In fact the major outflow to Southeast Asia occurred in the 1920s when the southern Fujianese militia were vying for territories and caused great turmoil in the home villages in Anxi. By this time, many also brought their wives and children to join them overseas and abandoned the dreams of ever returning to the home villages.

Increasing numbers of the Bai people went overseas as the domestic situation worsened during the Sino-Japanese war (1937-45), only to be subjected under the Japanese rule when the latter occupied Southeast Asia during the Second World War from 1942 to 1945. The end of the war precipitated the decolonization of Southeast Asian countries. While China previously regarded the migrants abroad as her subjects, Premier Zhou Enlai signed a treaty in Bandung, Indonesia, relinquishing these claims and encouraging the Chinese overseas to become faithful citizens in their various locales. As in the case of other Chinese, most of the Bai opted for permanent residence overseas.

The late 1950s and 1960s saw a stop to the emigration flow from Longmen, Anxi. As in the case of other parts of China, the region was caught in the turmoil of the Great Leap Forward movement and Cultural Revolution under Mao Zedong's leadership. After the Cultural Revolution, a small trickle of Bai lineage members left for Hong Kong and Macao. From Taiwan and various Southeast Asian countries, some of the clan people also remigrated to the United States, Canada and Australia since the 1950s.⁴

By 1984, or 560 years after Bai Yingshun first stepped into Longmen in Anxi, his descendants have extended for over 24 generations. The Bai clan people themselves estimated that the total descendants – in China and overseas – should have exceeded 100,000. Those remaining in the home villages in Longmen numbered about 17,000. Meanwhile more than 100,000 were overseas or in other provinces. Specifically there were about 40,000 in Jiangxi and Zhejiang (especially in Cangnan 苍南 and Pingyang 平阳 in Wenzhou), 26,000 in Taiwan (and from here to Kobe in Japan), 15,000 in Southeast Asia – with about 7,000 in Singapore alone; about 2,000 to 3,000 in Xiamen, Hong Kong and Macao; and a small number in north America and Australia.⁵ The following is an estimation of Bai clanspeople in various Southeast Asian regions in the early 1980s.

Singapore: 7,000

Indonesia, east Java: 800

Indonesia, Jakarta city: 200

Indonesia, Sumatra, Pekanbaru city: 100

Indonesia, Sumatra, Bengkalis: 200

Burma (especially Yaw and Irrawaddy division): 800⁶

Malaysia, Hulu Selangor: 500

the Philippines (islands of Palawan, Western Visayas, Cebu, Mindoro): 200

the Philippines (Manila): 100

⁴ *Bai Clan Association 50th Anniversary Magazine*: 69-70, 102.

⁵ *Bai Clan Association 50th Anniversary Magazine*: 69-70, 102, 106, 108-109. Now in Singapore, about 7,000 clansmen; note 13 times larger than the 541 clansmen who had migrated (*Bai Clan Association 50th Anniversary Magazine*: 106, 108-109).

⁶ According to Madam Thi Thi San (interview in November 2015), there are 200 households of Bai in Burma now, especially in the Yaw and Irrawaddy divisions. I am estimating there should be about 800 Bai in the 1980s.

clan and home village connections

It is evident that clan and home connections were essential for the mobility of the Bai diaspora in Southeast Asia. People of the Bai surname often moved to the same locales and also navigate towards similar occupations in their initial sojourn in Southeast Asia.

As with the case of many fellow Chinese migrants, the Bais who went to Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries mostly started out doing agricultural labour or did peddling trade in the rural areas and small towns. A small percentage was hired as coolies and harbour workers in the urban regions. Other employment opportunities were to serve as assistants in shops and other businesses. Those who accumulated sufficient savings also set up shops either as retail traders or wholesale trade in local commodities.

There are strong indications of mutual aid among the fellow home villagers and clansmen. The Bais did not migrate randomly but tended to concentrate in specific locales. In Indonesia the Longmen Bais were mainly in the eastern Javanese towns and villages including Surabaya, Pasuruan, Kediri and Rogojampi; in the central Sumatra coastal village of Tanjung Belit and parts of Medan and Asahan; as well as the capital city of Batavia or today's Jakarta. Their Malaysian counterparts mainly stayed in the vicinity of Ulu Selangor to the north of Kuala Lumpur while those in the Philippines scattered in the islands in the southeastern region including Palawan, Western Visayas, Cebu and Mindoro as well as the capital city Manila. In the small port-town of Singapore of less than 600 square kilometres, more than 70 percent of the Bais resided along the Tampines Road, in the vicinity between 7th and 11th milestone (postal code: 51-55). There were also pockets of Bai – averaging about 10-20 households – in Ulu Sembawang, Jurong 12th milestone, Choa Chu Kang 16th milestone or today's Choa Chu Kang, Bukit Batok, Bukit Panjang, Jurong East areas. A small group of less than ten households also stayed in Ulu Sembawang in northern Singapore.⁷

It is not only the case that the Bais tended to concentrate in select locations. Where information is available it also appears that they tended to migrate to places where their clansmen from the same hamlet and branch lineage had congregated. Migrants arriving in Burma were from Kengnei 坑内, especially Shipihou 石皮后. Most of the Bais in Jakarta, Kediri and Asahan were from Kengnei 坑内, Geqiu 格坵 and Xiazhai 下寨 respectively. The ones in Tanjung Belit, Bengkalis hailed from the same lineage branch from Xiapu 下埔. In Medan the clansmen were largely derived from Fudicuo and Kengnei 福地厝 坑内. While there were many Bais in Singapore, almost all the ones residing in the Choa Chu Kang area (close to Jalan Bahar) were from the village of Wutongnei 梧桐内.⁸

The Bai clansmen stayed in similar locales to help facilitate one another in their socioeconomic ventures. With apprenticeship, business collaboration and other forms of partnership, it is commonly observed that the Bais engaged in similar occupational lines. We could trace these trajectories closely in the case of Singapore. During the prewar period the Bais who just arrived in the port-town without friends or relations knew that they could find work growing pineapple, coconut and rubber in the estates of a leading clansman Bai Lin 白廩. The latter had started out clearing land for cultivation along Tampines Road and in the Choa Chu Kang area during the turn of the twentieth century. By the

⁷ interview, Bai Huoduan May 2010; interview, Bai Shenggui May 2010.

⁸ *Perayaan Ulang Tahun Perkawinan Emas* 2009: 1-4; *Bai Clan Association 50th Anniversary Magazine*: 108, 243-44, 265, 303-306; interview, Bai Shenggui May 2010.

1920s, he owned a sand quarry, a 40-acre rubber plantation called “Elias Rd Rubber Estate” and fifteen hectares of land along the Tampines Road.⁹

The more successful ones would go into provision shop business. In Singapore these included “Yuanfa” a partnership by Bai Chi and Bai Jia 源发 白赤 白嘉 in Tampines Road 7th milestone, the “Quanxing” shop started by Bai Na 泉兴 白那 in Geylang Ave 3 in 1907, “Fuyücheng” – a brother partnership establishment between Bai Rikui, Bai Gan and Bai You 福裕成 白日葵 白甘 白友 launched in Choa Chu Kang 11th milestone in 1921; Bai Ban’s “Zhenfa” 振发 白办 in Choa Chu Kang 16th milestone since 1920, Bai Lie’s “Zhenmao” 振茂 白烈 in Hougang 6th milestone, the shops “Chengji” owned by Bai Meiwen 成记 白梅文 and “Xinlong” by Bai Qinghui 信隆 白清辉 in Jurong 12th milestone.

Others went into the trade of used goods such as gunny sacks, bottles and scrap metal. A number of them became fairly successful. For example Bai Xiang established “Zhengzhong” 正中号 白祥 along Syed Alwi Road (off Serangoon Road). Other more successful cases could open their business in the city centre. These included “Yuanxing” by Bai Shuzhi 源兴 白树枳 in Chin Chew Street (off South Bridge Road), Bai Chi’s “Hesheng” 和盛 白池 in Nankin Street (off South Bridge Road) as well as “Yonghe’an” – partnership of Bai Wenxi, Bai Ping and Bai Jintu 永和安 白文溪 白平 白金土 – in Nankin Street.

Other more successful businesses established by the Bai clansmen were the import-export trade in native products in Southeast Asia. These consisted of agricultural goods such as copra, pepper, pinang nuts and subsequently also rubber; as well as the marine commodities of sea cucumber, shells, fish and other dried products. The earliest known establishment by a Bai dealing in this trade was Bai Hui’s “Qing’an” 庆安 白会 founded in Telok Ayer Street during the late nineteenth century. More of these businesses were launched during the 1920s and 1930s. They were Bai Qiyin’s “Yuan’an” 源安号 白圻引 aka 白什 located in no. 32 Hokkien Street; Bai Xizhi’s “Ruixiang” 瑞祥号 白锡志 which started business in 1934 in Church Street; Bai Xishi’s “Yisheng” 议盛号 白锡时 in New Market area (in Boat Quay area today); as well as “Rongmei” – a partnership between Bai Qizhong and Bai Xicheng 荣美号 白圻中 白锡澄 aka 白属清 – in no. 131 Cross Street during the 1930s. The lattermost also dealt in remittance between Singapore, Vietnam, the Netherlands East Indies and South China.

Several enterprising Bai clansmen such as Bai Xinzheng and Bai Jin’ou launched successful businesses trading tea produced in the home regions in Anxi to Singapore and other parts of Southeast Asia. Their brands “Bai Sanshun” 白三春茶庄 and “Bai Xinchun” are still famous Chinese tea brands in Singapore today. Bai Wenmei 白文美 also started ventures in transport and delivery. His shop space was located in no. 30 Hokkien Street second floor and the Bai clansmen mostly sent things back home using his services. Others also developed enterprises in the production and export of soya products. Bai Hao’s “Feng’an” 丰安 白好 in Tampines Road 7th milestone primarily produced Chinese traditional soya products (豆签) for sale to Singapore and Malaysia.¹⁰

temples, ancestors, rituals

⁹ interview, his grandson Bai Tianshui May 2010; interview, Bai Changji May 2010.

¹⁰ *Bai Clan Association 50th Anniversary Magazine*: 78-79.

Key individuals had been central to maintaining the networks among the fellow clansmen and home villagers from Longmen. We have seen above the central role played by towkay Bai Lin in Singapore in attending to the employment needs of the Bai clanspeople and the resultant concentration of their settlement pattern along Tampines Road in Singapore. In other places there were also leading clansmen whose houses often acted as temporary lodges for the newly-immigrated as well as community centres for the older migrants. They included Bai Tianzhu 白天注 in Burma, Bai Guangcan 白光灿 in Surabaya and Bai Shandong 白山东 aka 白圻方 in Surabaya.¹¹

Such close-knitted ties were fostered by the ancestral and deity rituals back in their ancestral villages in Longmen, Anxi. As mentioned earlier, the people of Bai surname in the 40 villages in the town of Longmen traced direct ancestry to Bai Yingshun 白应顺 who had first settled in the Houlin area of Fuhai village after fleeing from Yaotou in Tong'an. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there were a set of rituals these clansmen observed. Every year all clansmen in the 40 villages were obliged to visit and worship at the Ancestral Hall of the Bai in Yaotou 窑头祖祠 three days before Winter Solstice. On the actual day they should gather at the ancestral hall in Huatang 华汤祖祠 to worship Bai Yingshun, the first ancestor to come to Longmen, Anxi.¹² Furthermore they should also worship at the ancestral halls of their branch ancestors located variously in several villages in Longmen.

Besides worship at the ancestral halls, the descendants also had to attend to the graves of the first four generations of ancestors beginning from Bai Yingshun. These rites were performed in rotation by the three major lineage branches, one centred in 寮头 (i.e. 寮山), the second in 后沟 (today's 榜寨) and the third in 下寨 (today's 浩沟).

To further bind the relations among members of each of these three sub-lineages, the descendants also developed rituals around deity cults. One of these was the Tiandu yuanshuai – believed to have protected the ancestor Bai Yingshun when he fled to Anxi (in the clan history it was said that Yingshun carried a statue of Tiandu yuanshuai during his flight). On his birthday – the fifteenth day of the first lunar month – the branch rotated to be in charge of the rituals and celebrations yearly at Temple for the Deity Worshipped by the First Ancestor (Zufeng xianggonggong 祖奉相公宫) and also at the Big Ancestral Hall (Huatang zuci 华汤祖祠) next door, accompanied with feasting, opera performance and Daoist rituals.

Besides the Tiandu yuanshuai the Bai clansmen regarded six deities as their ancestral deities (*zufu* 祖佛), namely Tianshi 天师, Dishu 地师, Renshi 人师, Zushi 祖师, Jiutian xuannü 九天玄女 and Shengzu 圣祖. The branch of each area should rotate to prepare the festivities during the birthdays of each deity.. They were formerly worshipped in Lingyinggong 灵应宫 located in today's Meian area in Liaoshan village, Longmen town 龙门镇寮山村美垵. To cater to the convenience of the worship by descendants who have spread out to many villages, this set of deities were divided out in the nineteenth century, two each for each of the sub-lineage. The Liaotou 寮头 (i.e. 寮山) segment was assigned Tianshi and Dishu, the Hougou 后沟 (i.e. 榜寨) segment was given Renshi and Zushi while the Xiazhai 下寨 (i.e. 浩沟) segment acquired Jiutian xuannü and Shengzu. The branch of each area should rotate to prepare the festivities during the birthdays of each deity.

¹¹ *Bai Clan Association 50th Anniversary Magazine*: 242-44.

¹² Note the son of Bai Yingshun who built the ancestral hall had moved to Huatang village and hence the ancestral hall was not built in Fuhai or where Bai Yingshun had resided in his lifetime.

A combined celebration of all the clansmen for these *zufu* is organized every year back in the original temple site in Mei'an. On every twelfth day of the first lunar month, the whole clan would come to this mother temple to worship these deities (*qingxiang jinhuo* 进香请火). Those who had newborn or newly married in the family should prepare a cannon (*huotong* 火銃) each, firing in a procession. Each village (*jiaoluo* 角落) should also prepare one of the following acts: *songjiang* 宋江 (a kind of martial arts performance using weapons), *wuxi* 武戏 (wayang with a lot of martial arts), *zidixi* 子弟戏 (wayang performance), comedy wayang (*chouju, zhuangge* 丑剧 装阁), singing etc. to perform in a procession on the thirteenth day of the first month. On this day, every deity from the various corners should also join in the procession encircling all the villages of the Bai clan, then gather at the Lingyinggong compound for a vegetarian meal (*qingjing* aka *caiyan* 清敬, 菜筵).

These annual rituals around the ancestral halls and graves as well as the deity cults of Tiandu yuanshuai and the six *zufu* served to bind relations among descendants who have greatly increased and spread to various villages in the region of Longmen and elsewhere. Initially these bonds were necessitated by desires to bind the kinsmen to bear their share of the imperial taxation and corvée labour during the Ming and Qing. Moreover during the imperial era and the early Republican period the central government could not extend their governance of every part of China especially in the far south. The elders of local clans, including those of the Longmen Bai, were often imbued with duties of self-administration, doing the actual tax collection, policing the behaviour of clan members, adjudicating on their disputes and punishing the miscreants. The rites, genealogies and other symbolic mechanisms not only buttress and reinvigorate clan ties, foster a sense of brotherly ties and mutual assistance, but also tend to recreate the hierarchy and respect for the elders in a ritualistic manner. In other words these cultural and religious institutions had real socioeconomic impact.¹³

It is no wonder that these fellow clansmen and home villagers tended to cluster together for mutual aid when they ventured overseas. A new immigrant could approach an established fellow clansman and home villager overseas for temporary lodgings and employment opportunities. Although the preference was to establish sole proprietorship and keep the ownership of the firm within the immediate family, a Bai would often approach another Bai for loans, advanced credit or business partnership. In other words clansmen abroad maintained a deep sense of connection and offered mutual help to one another if needed.

While in diaspora in Southeast Asia, it is also observed that the Bai clansmen also tried to foster and enhance clan and home-village ties by setting up clan associations, ancestral graves and temples in foreign locales. These included the following:

Singapore

- Baishi gonghui, established in 1933, last address in Rangoon Road
- Jiuxiangong, established in 1928 along Tampines Road
- Yutiangong, probably established in the 1940s or 1950s in Ulu Sembawang
- collective Bai grave at the cemeteries of Sijiaoting 四角亭 (in Tiong Bahru) and Linjishan 麟记山, and in Wulinshan 武林山 from the 1960s; housed as an ancestral hall in 1985.¹⁴

Indonesia, east Sumatra

- Lingyanggong 灵阳宫, formally established in Tanjung Belit in 1951, existing as family temple in 1926

¹³ Mitter 2008: 21.

¹⁴ *Bai Clan Association 50th Anniversary Magazine*: 75-77.

- Jiuxiandian 九仙殿, established in Rumbai, Pekanbaru in 1985
- Yuhuang Jiuxiandian 玉皇九仙殿, established in Pekanbaru city in 2000
- Lingying Jiuxiandian 灵应九仙殿 on the Rupert island in 2008

Annual rites and rituals similar to those practiced at home were also enacted in these Southeast Asian locales. The Bai clansmen would gather at to celebrate the birthdays of the principal deities worshipped in the various temples. In the case of Jiuxiangong the main festivities were during the birthdays of Jiutian xuannü (4 month 15 day), Sanwangfu (10 month 15 day), Tiandu yuanshuai (1 month 15 day) and Tianshi (6 month 24 day). These occasions and gatherings served to socialize the Bai clansmen and home villagers as well as their descendants as a communal group with shared destinies.

developments beyond clan and home village ties

Although the Bai clanspeople relied on their home village and clan ties in their initial sojourn, it is seen that they quickly developed broader ties with those from larger region of Anxi and also Chinese community, especially in locations in Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines where not many of their home brethren were around. Even in places with a greater concentration of brethren such as Singapore, their second- and third-generation developed broader ties as well, with other Chinese, and also other ethnic groups. I will illustrate these developments by examining three case studies of the Bai clansmen below.

i. Bai Chengzong

Bai Chengzong was born in 1928 in Bengkalis, a regency in the Riau province on the east coast of Sumatra in Indonesia. When he came of age, he did triangular trade between Sumatra, western coast of Malaysia and Singapore, primarily exchanging rubber, rice, vegetables and other local products from Bengkalis and Siak Kecil for manufactured goods in Malaysia and Singapore. When he formally retired at age 80, he had become one of the most successful businessmen in the Riau province with business interests in timber, palm oil plantation estates and refinery.

Bai Chengzong's initial commercial interests were built on the basis of his forefathers' ventures. The first person who came to Bengkalis was Bai Jiuying's grandfather Bai Jiuying. Hailing from the Xiapu 下埔 village, he went to Singapore in 1908 in search of a better livelihood. During the 1920s he heard about good prospects of Bengkalis from his friend Wang Xindi who was visiting Singapore from Bengkalis. After he obtained the permission to clear the jungle in the *desa* (village) of Tanjung Belit from the local authorities (*penghulu*), he fetched his wife Hong Duanniang and their two sons Tianshou and Tianbao, daughter Jinqi and two daughters-in-law Ye Anxi and Chen Jinfa from Singapore in 1926. Other relatives of his extended family within five generation 五序内 also joined, including the forefathers of Bai Wenkui and Bai Wangxi.¹⁵

Since their arrival in Bengkalis, Bai Jiuying and his clansmen combined their work as market agriculturalists with rural trading, granting advanced credit to other producers who paid with their products of rubber and rice. By the late 1930s, the extended family of Bai Jiuying became quite successful in their ventures. They owned a provision shop, rubber mill, rice mill and warehouse, as well as a rubber estate. Bai Chengzong's triangular trade was a complementary extension of the economic activities his family members were engaged in.¹⁶

¹⁵ *Nawasura* v.1: 1-4; interview with Bai Ana February 2015.

¹⁶ *Nawasura* v.1: 1-4.

During the period from 1945 to 1949 the enterprising individual had established connections with the Indonesian military, supplying them weapons and provisions in their war against the Dutch colonial regime in central Sumatra. His interaction with the Indonesian army was intensified during the 1960s when he did similar provisioning during the Confrontation period (1963-65) when Indonesia was in conflict with Malaysia. He also assisted the local military authorities when they were cleansing Indonesian Communist Party members in the Bengkalis region during the couple of years after September 1965. For his help and collaboration, Bai Chengzong was given several official awards and medals, including a land gift of 5,000 square metres in the suburbs of Pekanbaru, the capital of Riau province in central Sumatra.¹⁷

From 1967 Bai Chengzong went into timber trade, probably thanks to the bureaucratic connections through the military links. He founded PT Siak Raya Timber in Siak and became one of the company directors. By the late 1970s the family of Bai Chengzong moved out of the village into the Pekanbaru city. His timber interests further expanded when he obtained Hak Penguasaan Hutan (HPH) and developed sawmill industry from 1993-2003 – PT Tamanros Master Indo. By the 1980s the entrepreneur also developed interests in oil palm plantation estates and refinery. These included PT Siak Raya Timber 1975-1987, PT Taman Ros Indah 1985-2003, PT Siak Pakan Raya 1987-1993, PT Tamanros Master Indo 1993-2003, PT Peputra Master Indo 1993-2003 and PT Peputra Supra Jaya 1995-2003. By the 1990s Bai Chengzong's children also expanded into hotelier investments, property development as well as coal, petroleum and natural gas exploitation.¹⁸

Unlike their forefathers, Bai Chengzong and his children – as second- and third-generation Indonesian-born Chinese – hardly relied on clan connections for their businesses. The links Bai Chengzong formed with the Indonesian military and bureaucracy during the 1940s and 1960s were crucial for his expansion into timber and oil palm interests. When he first went into timber trade in 1967, he formed a partnership with Ke Guoxing [Ke Kok Heng] that is a non-Bai clansmen. The subsequent businesses he and his children developed involved cooperation with non-clansmen as well.¹⁹

As was the case with their economic undertakings, the socio-religious activities of Bai Chengzong's family also gradually grew beyond immediate clan and ancestral village concerns. A staunch believer in the ancestral deity Jiutian xuannü and the patron deity of his home village Sanwangfu, Bai Chengzong's grandfather Bai Jiuying had set up an altar and worshipped these gods when he built his house in Bengkalis in 1926. Also worshipped on the altar table were several other common deities among southern Fujianese – Qitian dasheng, Nezha, Five Generals, Taisui and Dabogong. In 1951 his two sons and other lineage members decided to set up a proper temple for the gods called Lingyanggong 灵阳宫.

Over time the management of the Lingyanggong temple did not remain solely under the Bai clansmen however. In 1975 when parts of the temple building required repairs, it is seen that besides the Bais and their in-laws, an outsider Zhuo Yufu (Tok Yu Hok) was one of the five sponsors for the renovation works.²⁰ It is also observed that these Bais participated widely in the other Chinese clan temples in the vicinity and villagers of other surnames were also active in the management and festivities of the Bai

¹⁷ *Perayaan Ulang Tahun Perkawinan Emas* 2009: 21-22, 37-39; *Nawasura* v.1: 5.

¹⁸ *Perayaan Ulang Tahun Perkawinan Emas* 2009: 23-25, 40-41; *Nawasura* v.6: 1; interview, Weng Qiaoling February 2015.

¹⁹ *Nawasura* v.2: 3; *Perayaan Ulang Tahun Perkawinan Emas* 2009: 23-25, 40-41; interview, Weng Qiaoling February 2015.

²⁰ *Nawasura* v.1: 7.

temple of Lingyanggong. They included Yunshouguan 云寿馆 and Yunmeiguan 云美馆 temples belonging to the Zhuo clan, the Wang clan's Longshanmiao 龙山庙 and the Zhang clan's Guandimiao 关帝庙. The initiators of these temples hailed variously from Anxi and Jinmen prefectures in southern Fujian.²¹

In other words the phenomenon of cross-donations and multi-surname temple management was fairly common in Bengkalis. In this region there were only a few towns and villages with a sizeable Chinese population. More than 90 percent of the population consisted of Malays and other indigenous Indonesian people. Even in the hamlet of Tanjung Belit there were less than 20 households of Bai in Bengkalis in the mid-twentieth century. Broader networks were necessary. The phenomenon of cross-donations among the temples was probably a reflection that the Chinese realized that more broadly construed local ties would be more important than clan ties to survive as an ethnic minority in the region.

Nevertheless the belief in the deities did not diminish with the later Bai generations. In fact Bai Chengzong himself appeared to believe strongly that blessings from the gods promoted his success. Once business at the sawmill and timber warehouse of PT Siak Pakan Raya (now PT Rosna) in Rumbai, Pekanbaru became more stable, Bai Chengzong and his wife solicited the ash from the Tanjung Belit temple and established a branch temple on site called Jiuxiandian 九仙殿 in 1985. The temple was meant for protection of the owners and workers of the company.²²

Bai Chengzong believed that the deity worship should be made more public however. When his financial ability became stronger with the success of his timber and palm oil business in the 1990s, he wanted to establish a temple dedicated to Jiutian xuannü for public worship. The anti-Chinese authorities during the New Order period did not grant his repeated requests for permission to build the temple. After Suharto stepped down Bai Chengzong again approached the Department of Religion which finally gave him the green light. Construction began promptly and Yuhuang Jiuxiandian 玉皇九仙殿 was formally inaugurated in February 2000. A staunch believer in the popular Chinese religion, Bai Chengzong also took on the position as the first chairman (*ketua*) of the Tri-Religious Temple organization (Tempat Ibadah Tri Dharma TITD) when a branch was established in Riau in 2002. The task of the organization was to oversee the member temples – all established by Chinese Indonesians – and mediate between them and the authorities.²³

By the year 2000 this Bai family had thus built three temples dedicated to the Jiutian xuannü in Tanjung Belit, Rumbai and Pekanbaru. But their temple-building craze did not end there. In 2008 Bai Chengzong's third daughter Bai Ana started constructing Lingying Jiuxiandian 灵应九仙殿 in her oil palm estate on the Rupert island off Dumai in eastern, central Sumatra. Believing that the goddess has protected her father's business in Pekanbaru she hoped to receive similar blessings for her ventures. Bai Ana also initiated Sunday classes to impart religious teachings on the deity to children.²⁴

The sponsorship and new temple construction was largely a single-family obsession. This Bai family is aware of other Bai in Pekanbaru and other parts of central Sumatra region but there was no attempt to organize them. Similar to the developments of temple activities in Singapore and Tanjung Belit, the

²¹ field trip to Bengkalis, February 2015.

²² *Nawasura* v.1: 8; *Nawasura* v.2: 5, 17.

²³ interview, Weng Qiaoling February 2015.

²⁴ interview, Bai Ana February 2015; *Ringkasan Riwayat Kiu Thian Hian De* 2012: 9-10; *Nawasura* v.1: 1-4, 9-10.

active worshippers and participants of temple festivities were not people of the Bai surname. Many were also not ethnic Chinese.²⁵ To acquire religious knowledge on their patron deities, Bai Chengzong and Bai Ana visited the Jiuxiangong in Singapore and the Lingyingong in Longmen. But they did not limit their circles to the Bai clansmen. During the 1990s and 2000s father and daughter also paid frequent visits to Liu Shunmei 刘顺美, a religious expert on Jiutian xuannü deity based in Xianshan Lingdonggong 仙山灵洞宫 located in Shitan, Miaoli, Taipei 台北苗栗县狮潭乡.²⁶

ii. Bai Deming²⁷

Bai Deming was born in the hamlet of Fudicuo in Longmen, Anxi in 1933. His mother Liao Shuxia 廖淑霞 brought him to join his father Bai Yujian in Rogojampi – a small town in the extreme eastern end of east Java province in Indonesia. Bai Yujian was then working as a highly-paid accountant for a Chinese firm trading in local products.²⁸ The family fortune dwindled during the Japanese Occupation. Bai Deming was forced to quit schooling after grade six and worked variously as a shop assistant, driver and peddling trader in Rogojampi and Surabaya.

In 1962 Bai Deming started his first business as a hardware trader in Surabaya, the second largest commercial city in Indonesia, expanding into warehousing, cement import and retail trade. In 1968 the entrepreneur decided to expand his activities further by moving to Indonesian capital Jakarta and left his business concerns in Surabaya to his three younger brothers. At the peak of his career during the mid-1990s, his Tamara Group of companies was involved in banking, tin and petroleum mining, hotelier and property development, timber business, steel and textile production as well as warehousing for container shipping. In particular his bank was listed among the top ten among the 150 private-run banks in Indonesia with 89 branches, more than 200 ATM machines and several hundreds of thousands of clients. His personal wealth was valued at 800 million to 1 billion USD.

In the capital city Bai Deming also enjoyed business and social relations with the most prominent Indonesian Chinese businessmen such as Liem Sioe Liong, Prajogo Pangestu, Eka Tjipta Widjaja, Mochtar Riady and had close ties with the family members of President Suharto who were partners and commissioners in many of his companies. In his biography Bai Deming confessed that he could especially win the trust of Suharto's mother-in-law – a princess in the Solo royal court of Central Java – because of his familiarity with the Javanese language. He also formed joint companies with investors from Taiwan, Japan, South Korea and China and played an important role assisting in the revival and negotiation of diplomatic and economic relationships between Indonesia and China.

Even when he lost the bulk of his wealth during the 1998 financial crisis in Indonesia, Bai Deming continued to serve a key role in Indonesian political economy. He often accompanied subsequent Indonesian presidents Suharto, Habibie, Megawati and Gus Dur on diplomatic trips to China.

When he was developing his career, Bai Deming did not really count on clan and home village ties. This was mainly because there were less than five Bai households in Rogojampi, the small Indonesian

²⁵ For example there are other Bai not related to Bai Chengzong's family now in Pekanbaru: one from Padang, one from Selat Panjang; also Bai surname people in Bengkalis and Selat Panjang (interview, Bai Yana, Weng Jiaoling February 2015).

²⁶ *Nawasura* v.3: 6-8; *Nawasura* v.4: 3-4; interview, Bai Yana February 2015.

²⁷ Information for this section is drawn from *Bai Deming hua zhuan* [Biography of Bai Deming] 2013; field trips to Longmen, Anxi in July 2015; <http://tamaraland.co.id/>.

²⁸ In fact Bai Yujian was born in Indonesia. His father Bai Chongde had sojourned and worked in east Java. In the early 1910s he brought the family back to Anxi to ensure his sons had proper Chinese education. Bai Yujian returned to work in east Java as a young adult during the late 1920s.

town where he came of age. The Bai clansmen in this area mainly relied on their connections to people of the larger home prefecture of Anxi and other southern Fujianese who together formed a third of the local Chinese population. Making up the other two-thirds were Chinese from Huizhou, Chaozhou and Jiayingzhou in eastern Guangdong, and those from Xianyou county in Putian prefecture, Fujian.

Thus Bai Deming's first job was working for someone from the Anxi prefecture. So did his father whose accountant job was also with a fellow Anxi boss rather than someone from his home village and clan. When Bai Deming moved to Surabaya to seek greener pastures his first employer was also a non-clansman but an Anxi Chinese. Although one of the four partners of Bai Deming's first business venture the hardware store PT Patuh Setia was a Bai clansmen and home-villager Bai Chuanneng 白传能, the other two were not fellow clansmen (they were a Liao and a Hong).

When Bai Deming's business took over in a major way in the capital city of Jakarta, it is clear that the expansion was entirely because of his networks with other Chinese and prominent Indonesians. With the exception of Eka Tjipta Widjaja who was a Hokkien or southern Fujianese, most of his close business associates are Chinese from other speech groups: Liem Sioe Liong (Hokchia), Prajogo Pangestu (Teochiu), Sugeng Prananto (Hakka [Chinese name 叶联礼]) etc. Thanks to his familiarity of the Indonesian and Javanese languages and customs due to his childhood in east Java, Bai Deming was also able to form close connections with the various Indonesian presidents and their family members as well as elite military officers and politicians. Examples of the latter included General Wiranto – who still has a special office in the company headquarters of Bai Deming's holding company Tamara Land. Bai Deming could also easily make a connection with investors from Taiwan, Hong Kong and China because of his ethnic Chinese background and knowledge of the Mandarin and Hokkien languages.

Probably as a result of his childhood and business experiences, Bai Deming realized that the connections have to be beyond clan and home village ties. The socio-religious organizations he participated also had a broader identity base. Since his childhood he was a keen believer in Chenfu zhenren, the principal deity of the sole Chinese temple Delongdian 德龙殿 in Rogojampi. This temple was not only patronized and supported by the Bai clansmen but a communal temple among all the various groups of Chinese in the small town including the Lin, Yang, Huang, Wu and others from Anxi, Xianyou, Huizhou, Chaozhou and Jiayingzhou in Fujian and Guangdong provinces 林杨黄吴; 安溪, 仙游, 惠潮嘉. In his biography Bai Deming said that he participated actively in the festivities of the temple, especially the Yuanxiao procession on the fifteenth day of the first month on the Chinese lunar calendar. When I visited the temple in summer 2015 the temple committee told me that Bai Deming was the key fund raiser for the renovation and expansion of the temple complex when the Indonesian authorities started to relax restrictions against these activities in the last fifteen years.

Indeed when the post-Suharto regime gradually allowed the ethnic Chinese to form their social-cultural and economic organizations from the early 2000s, Bai Deming was also at the forefront of these activities. What is striking is that he did not put efforts in forming associations catering only to Bai clansmen or their ancestral villages. Instead he was interested in broader formations. For instance he formed the Anxi tongxianghui in Jakarta in 2010. This native-place organization did not only cater to the Bai clansmen from Longmen, Anxi but to the descendants of migrants from the whole of Anxi prefecture in Fujian province. Bai Deming was also active in the Indonesian Chinese Chamber of Commerce 印尼中华总商会, Organization Promoting Indonesia-China Economic, Social and Cultural Relations 印中经济社会文化合作协会, Overseas Chinese Federation in Hong Kong 香港世界华侨华人总会, Anxi Commercial World Federation 世界安溪商会, Indonesia-Taiwan Industrial and

Commercial Organization 印尼台湾工商联谊会 and Indonesia National Chinese Calligraphy Organization 印尼全国书法协会. He served variously as the deputy or honorary chairman, commissioner or consultant of these organizations.

While Bai Deming may not actively rally behind Bai clansmen and home village activities in Indonesia, he continued to pay attention to the social and religious developments in the ancestral village. In the 2000s, he donated a school building to Longmen Secondary School named after his father Bai Yujian. In the town of Longmen he also donated to the Bai ancestral hall in Fudicuo as well as the educational funds of Lanxi Secondary School, Anxi Number One Secondary School, Hanyuan Primary School and Longmen Fuguan Kindergarten (located in his ancestral hamlet Fudicuo) 蓝溪中学、安溪一中、龙门中学、翰苑小学、龙门福观村幼儿园.

iii. Bai Huoduan²⁹

Bai Huoduan was born in Singapore in 1930. His father Bai Tianding 白添丁 was illiterate and came to Singapore in the 1920s. He brought his wife and two sons from his home village Shidun 石墩 (in today's Xiashai) after working in odd jobs supplemented with farming and pig-rearing. The third son of the family Bai Huoduan stopped schooling at age 12 and worked as an assistant at a rag-and-bone shop in downtown Singapore. His father also started his own second-hand goods trading called "Peck Tiong Choon" (*pinyin* "Bai Changchun" 白长春) at about the same time. Two years later, when the father's business took off, Bai Huoduan quitted from his first job and helped out at his father's shop instead. By the early 1950s Bai Tianding had several shophouses, trucks, chicken farms, pig farms, fishponds, duckweed ponds and warehouses under his name.

In 1955 Bai Tianding decided to divide his inheritance so that his adult sons could develop their own careers. After receiving the share of his inheritance from his father, Bai Huoduan and two of his younger brothers Bai Rongfeng and Bai Chengqin 白荣丰, 白成勤 reinvested their share and continued with their father's shop name. In 1959 Bai Huoduan also formed a company "Tiong Seng" (*pinyin* "Changcheng" 长成) in partnership with Li Tuanji. In the 1960s and 1970s when the Singapore government promoted many projects in land reclamation and public housing construction, the business of "Peck Tiong Choon" and "Tiong Seng" took off in a major way.

After inheriting "Peck Tiong Choon" from their father, Bai Huoduan and his brothers decided that the second-hand-goods trade was no longer lucrative. They switched the business focus to transportation instead. The fleet of lorry and transport vehicles enlarged to several hundreds during the 1960s and 1970s when there was a big demand for the transport of sand, soil and other construction materials during the height of housing and infrastructural construction in Singapore and Malaysia. In the course of transporting earth for construction projects, Bai Huoduan and his brothers learned more about the construction industry and eventually expanded the business to include land excavation and reclamation. Today it specializes in lifting and transportation of heavy cargo and equipment relating to civil engineering projects, construction as well as marine and petrochemical industries. It also provides logistics services and freight forwarding services, the leasing of heavy vehicles and equipment as well as warehousing and storage. By the late 1980s and 1990s it expanded its business beyond the shores of Singapore and Malaysia to China, India, Papua New Guinea and the Indochinese peninsula. The company also began exploring business opportunities in the Middle East in the 2000s.

²⁹ Information for this section is drawn from <http://www.pecktiongchoon.com/>; <http://www.tionseng.com.sg/>; interview, Bai Huoduan May 2010; *Bai Clan Association 50th Anniversary Magazine*, especially pp. 271, 281-83; *Laying Foundations, Building the Future 1959-2009: Tiong Seng 50th Anniversary*, 2010 etc. He passed away recently on 22 December 2015.

As for “Tiong Seng”, from undertaking earthwork projects initially, the business diversified into civil engineering and land reclamation in Singapore and Malaysia. The firm also moved from building roads and bridges into public housing, schools and by the 1990s it also went into the construction of private condominiums, hotels and resorts. Instead of using traditional construction methods, the company now uses state-of-the-art technology and especially pays attention to using environmental-friendly technology and constructing green buildings. Moving in tandem with “Peck Tiong Choon”, the company activities also expanded to Papua New Guinea, India, People Republic of China, Vietnam, Laos and the Middle East countries from the late 1980s. Its registered capital increased from about SGD\$2 in 1964 to \$20 million at the end of 2009. In the latter year its net assets stood at \$125 million.

Bai Huoduan and his father certainly counted on clan and home village ties in the early development of their careers in Singapore. The father had come as a poor coolie from Shidun. He apparently had to borrow money to fund his passage to Singapore. When he arrived in Singapore, Bai Tianshui worked and resided in Danshuigang 淡水港 or today’s Upper Thomson Road and Yishun area where he could count on the help of his clansmen from the same hamlet Shidun in Longmen, Anxi. Not surprisingly Bai Huoduan’s first job was also with a Bai clansmen from the Shidun hamlet.

By the 1950s Bai Huoduan’s business had expanded beyond clan and home village ties. “Tiong Seng” was a partnership with a fellow Anxi man Li Tuanji 李团济. Even though the directorship and central management was still dominated by the family members, the workforce of both “Tiong Seng” and “Peck Tiong Choon” had become greatly diversified as business expanded. Not only other Chinese besides the Bai and Anxi people are hired, the companies also employ workers of other ethnicities and nationalities. By 2010 for instance its team of more than 1,000 construction workers was mostly drawn from China, India and other parts of Southeast Asia.

The expansion of investment and construction activities in China, India and the Middle East were also mostly undertaken as joint investment projects with companies from these countries. Especially for cost-saving means and environmental-friendly construction technology, “Tiong Seng” worked with foreign companies such as Samsung C&T Corporation, Dong-A Geological Engineering and GS Engineering & Construction from South Korea and Kajima Overseas Asia from Japan.

Simultaneously the socio-religious activities of Bai Huoduan and his family have also seen interesting developments. When the Jiuxiangong temple was built along Tampines Road in 1928, Bai Huoduan’s father provided a small donation. Travelling to Tampines Road for deity worship and religious rituals was probably taxing for Bai clansmen living in the Upper Thomson/Yishun area of Singapore during that time. By the 1940s when Bai Tianding 白添丁 had become a relatively well-off businessman he built Yutiangong 玉天宮 in this northern part of Singapore to cater to the worship of Jiutian xuannü among his clansmen in northern Singapore.³⁰

With the Singapore government land’s appropriation in the late 1970s, Bai Huoduan and his brothers decided that instead of establishing a new temple site for Yutiangong, they would move the deities into Jiuxiangong temple. The high cost of construction and obtaining a government’s permit for the temple site was probably one factor in their decision. Furthermore travelling from one part of Singapore to another was greatly eased with the construction of island-wide expressways and cement roads during

³⁰ interview, Bai Huoduan May 2010.

the 1970s and 1980s. Until today Bai Huoduan continues to be a very loyal follower. He and his family attended all major festivities in Jiuxiangong temple.

Besides temple activities, Bai Huoduan also actively participated in Baishi gonghui. He served variously on the executive board of the association and was among the biggest donors of its funds and activities since the 1970s. To facilitate wider connections and networks in relation to his business activities, Bai Huoduan also took part in the Singapore Transport Association 新加坡运输业公会, Association of Metal and Hardware Traders 五金公会, and Anxi Association 安溪公会.

concluding remarks

Several observations could be made from the three case studies. Firstly in areas with less numbers of Bai clansmen and fellow home villagers, the migrants and their descendants veered towards broader networks more rapidly. In this regard the concentration of Bai clansmen in Singapore was remarkably since the island of about 600 square kilometres had over half of the Bai diaspora in Southeast Asia. Hence Bai Huoduan and his father Bai Tianshui did not merely count on their fellow clansmen in the early stage of their careers, but especially those who were from the *same* ancestral hamlet of Shidun.

Meanwhile their counterpart in other Southeast Asian regions did not have such luxury. They usually expanded their trust circles to people from the same prefecture, or even Chinese from neighbouring prefectures or speech group, and sometimes also other prefectures, provinces and/or speech groups. The Bais in Bengkalis hence participated actively in the socio-religious institutions of the Zhuo, Zhang and Wang hailing from Jinmen and Anxi since the mid-twentieth century. Those in Rogojampi also collaborated with the people of the Lin, Yang, Huang, Wu and others from Anxi, Xianyou, Huizhou, Chaozhou and Jiayingzhou in Fujian and Guangdong provinces in the communal temple of Delongdian.

For those second- and third-generation descendants who had close familiarity with local languages and customs growing up in the Southeast Asian countries, they would also engage in cross-ethnic networks. The trend was particularly obvious with their business expansion. To gain access to mining permits, timber concession and business licences in New Order Indonesia, it was essential to build relations with military generals and members of the presidential family.

These types of inter-ethnic cooperation may not be true for the Bais in Singapore where more than 70 percent of the local population were ethnic Chinese. Nevertheless as Bai Huoduan's firms went regional, multi-national collaboration was necessary. This was true not only for business partnership but also in terms of the employee profile.

From the discussion of Bai Chengzong, Bai Deming and Bai Huoduan, a second observation is that even as they forged broader networks – both in their business as well as socio-religious activities – they still retained a sense of sentiment towards their clan and ancestral village. Whether to facilitate their business concerns or to establish wider social networks, all the three case subjects have participated in organizations that have wider membership beyond the Bai clansmen and fellow ancestral villagers and their descendants. Bai Chengzong's family may have established four temples dedicated to the patron deity of their clan and fellow Longmen villagers but he was also the chief of the TITD which catered to the temples established by the Chinese Indonesians in the Riau province. While he is very active in the Baishi gonghui and the Jiuxiangong temple, Bai Huoduan also plays key leadership role in non-Bai organizations, serving as committee members and honorary chairman in the Singapore Transport Association, Association of Metal and Hardware Traders, as well as the Anxi Association.

Bai Deming may not have been active in the Bai organizations overseas but he remains committed to his clan and ancestral village. He has made many donations to the ancestral halls, temples and schools in Anxi and also generously funded the construction of a four-storey tall building for Longmen Secondary School. In fact the names of all three case subjects could be spotted in the stone inscriptions listing the donors to many socio-religious institutions in their ancestral home region. While clan and home village ties are no longer as important as they used to be, its historical role has left a legacy for many of its descendants today.

Needless to say it would be fallacious to regard the life trajectories of these case subjects as representative of the Bai diaspora in general. They are highly successful in their economic achievements and are among the top five percent wealthiest among the Bai migrants and descendants in Southeast Asia. In fact it is thanks to their business accomplishments that more records and documentation are available to help provide an outline of their family's activities over several generations. As noted in the introduction about forty percent of the diaspora forms the middle class in their respective countries of adoption – either because of the small and medium enterprises they established or from decent-paying jobs – while a slight majority perhaps do not necessarily fair much better than their home brethren today.

Nevertheless similar developments could be observed for these Bai descendants. Most of them developed networks and connections beyond clan and home village ties especially during the second- and third-generation overseas. Although maintaining connections with the home regions in Longmen was probably very difficult or even impossible for those with lesser wealth, some sentiments towards their clan and ancestral village have been maintained in many cases.

In this regard it is noteworthy that the Singapore Bai clan members have been making most efforts in this direction. Since the 1980s the committee members of Baishi gonghui have actively rallied the Bai clansmen in Singapore to make donations for the reconstruction and renovation of the ancestral halls and gravesites as well as the temples worshipping the patron deities of the Bai clan in the Longmen villages. The amount of donations indicated the varying economic classes among the Bai diaspora – while some could donate tens of thousands of Renminbi, many also donated smaller amounts, ranging from a few tens to several hundreds to several thousands.

Comprising of the large part of the Bai diaspora in Southeast Asia, the Bai clansmen of Singapore also took it as their responsibility to maintain clan and home village sentiments. In the past three decades, executive members of the Baishi gonghui of Singapore actively establish connections with their home brethren and also fellow clan members in Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Burma and also further afield in South Korea and Japan. When they organized important events such as the celebration of the 75th and 80th anniversary of the Baishi gonghui, invitation letters would be sent to the contact clan members in these countries who would disseminate the information to other members. It was also thanks to the active encouragement of the Singapore Bai clan association that similar organizations were established in Malaysia (1986), East Java (2012) and the Philippines (2013).

The actual effects remain to be seen. According to various committee members of the Singapore Bai clan association, many Bai's who participated in the gatherings and events took the opportunity to establish business ties with their clanspeople in other countries. Meanwhile others, including Madam Huang discussed in the introduction said she was interested to meet some "relatives" in these occasions while doing some sightseeing in Singapore. Yet many more perceived that the Bai clan diaspora have undergone many transformations, among which the permission for female members of the Bai clan and also the descendants of those whose mothers are Bai to take part while they may be of other surname.

But it is too early to judge that clan and home village ties are dying in the diaspora. While these sentiments have weakened in many cases and acquired new contours in others, they remained dormant if only because the subjects still bore the surname or had the memory that their forefathers did. Where energies are channeled to “revive” the connections as witnessed in recent decades, such memories could be summoned and new networks formed as the participants invent their rationalizations of what they may mean.

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