Between 1830 and 1930, migrants speaking various dialects of Chinese originating in a small number of regions in Guangdong province dominated transpacific labor migrations. When significant numbers of migrants began to move in the 1850s, it was initially on routes that extended the existing trade and migration networks that linked ports on the southern Chinese coast with Southeast Asia. Throughout the century, the total numbers of Chinese migrants to Southeast Asia dwarfed those of migrants to the Americas and Australasia. For instance, in the first half of the nineteenth century, Zhu Guohong speculates that the balance of out-migration to Southeast Asia and to the Americas was fairly even—200,000 out of 320,000 migrants from southern China went to Southeast Asia; with an estimated 17,000 to Cuba, 10,000 to Peru, 10,000 to Australia, 18,000 to the U.S., and 15,000 to West Indies.

By the third quarter of the nineteenth century, migration had quadrupled. Zhu estimates that out of a total of 1.28 million out-migrants, 350,000 went to the Malay Peninsula, 45,000 to Philippines, and 250,000 to the East Indies—compared to 25,000 to Hawai‘i, 55,000 to Australia, 30,000 to Canada, 160,000 to the U.S., 135,000 to Cuba, 30,000 to West Indies, 20,000 to British Guyana, and 110,000 to Peru. Then, in

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1 Variations of some of the arguments made in this essay were presented to the “Inside and Outside the Nation” workshop at the University of Manitoba in April 2009, to the “Pacific Worlds in Motion II” conference at the National University of Singapore in March 2009, at the Center for the Study of the Pacific Northwest at the University of Washington in February 2009, to the “Deconstructing Empire II” conference at the University of Victoria in June 2007, to the “Visualizing the Ethnic Chinese in Indonesia and North America” conference at the University of British Columbia in March 2007, and to the Institute for Pacific Northwest Studies at the University of Idaho in November 2006. My thanks to the attendees for their helpful questions and comments, in particular for the useful suggestions from Eiichiro Azuma, Greg Blue, Gordon Chang, Ann Curthoys, Penelope Edwards, Catherine Hall, Moon-Ho Jung, Abidin Kusno, Renisa Mawani, Adele Perry, John Price, Vicente Rafael, Adam Sowards, Anand Yang, and my late mentor Edgar Wickberg, to whom this essay is dedicated.
the last quarter of the nineteenth century, transpacific migration to the white settler colonies in the Americas and Australasia dropped precipitously because of anti-Chinese legislation. Only 12,000 went to the U.S., 5,000 to Hawai‘i, 4,000 to Canada, and 8,000 to Australia—compared with 360,000 to the Malay Peninsula, 320,000 to the East Indies, and 20,000 to Philippines. In other words, in the final decades of the nineteenth century, nearly all of the estimated total of 750,000 out-migrants went to Southeast Asia. For Southeast Asia this pattern continued into the first quarter of the twentieth century (125,000 to the Malay Peninsula and 300,000 to the East Indies), assumed a new World War One induced migration to continental Europe, Britain, and North Africa (150,000) and another 55,000 to South Africa-Transvaal. Thus, of the estimated total of 650,000 out-migrants (Zhu), the number going to the Americas and Australasia had dropped to an insignificant fraction.2

As pointed out in the essays by Elizabeth Sinn and Karl Trocki (in this volume), the ports of Hong Kong and Singapore became the major nodes of migration from Guangdong and Fujian province into the Nanyang (i.e. Southeast Asia). Migrants followed the routes of the junk trade across the South China Seas. However, while “Chinese” transpacific networks were extensions of the existing migration networks between southern China and Southeast Asia, they only extended the Cantonese-speaking network. Virtually no Hokkien-speaking migrants crossed the Pacific, a surprising absence since migrations of Hokkien and Cantonese to Southeast Asia were split nearly evenly (along with smaller Teochow, Hainanese, and Hakka-speaking networks). Almost every location in Southeast Asia that had Chinese migrants had both Hokkien and Cantonese-speaking migrants, each of whom formed fairly separate linguistic and familial networks.

How did the Pacific become so dominated by migrants speaking various dialects of Cantonese? The answer lies in the fact that the nineteenth century transpacific began as a British project, centered upon their newly acquired port of Hong Kong (granted to the British in

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