2022 N° 45 | HISTOIRE INTERNATIONALE | INTERNATIONAL HISTORY

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THE GRADUATE INSTITUTE GENEVA

INSTITUT DE HAUTES ÉTUDES INTERNATIONALES ET DU DÉVELOPPEMENT

GRADUATE INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AND DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

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DOI: 10.4000/books.iheid.8895
Publisher: Graduate Institute Publications, Institut de hautes études internationales et du développement
Place of publication: Geneva
Year of publication: 2022
Publication date: 5 avril 2022
Series: eCahiers de l'Institut
Digital ISBN: 978-2-940600-40-3

ABSTRACT

This ePaper investigates the Straits Chinese community and their positioning relative to the British Empire and the Chinese Empire around 1900. It studies their responses to and interactions with the transition from a world of empires to a world of nation-states. The Straits Chinese are framed as a cosmopolitan community in a cosmopolitan city who played an important role in the reconfiguration of imperial citizenship and the deterritorialisation of China. Through their own and others' adoption of racial discourses, they found themselves in a double bind, not quite Chinese and not quite British. This shaped their encounter with early Chinese nationalism. Consequently, this paper disrupts the teleology of decolonisation and demonstrates how the transformations taking place in the international system in the early twentieth century relegated certain communities to the margins by virtue of their 'in-between' position.
We extend our heartfelt thanks to the Vahabzadeh Foundation for financially supporting the publication of best works by young researchers of the Graduate Institute, giving a priority to those who have been awarded academic prizes for their master's dissertations.

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1. Introduction

Once I thought and
felt being a *baba*
was being Malayan, or Malaysian,
I see now
as clearly as night follows day
the changing mood,
rundown melody,
loss of meaning...
Ee Tiang Hong, 'Heeren Street'[1]

1 The rise of the nation-state across the world is one of the most dramatic transformations of the twentieth century. Its triumph appeared to signal the end of empire and the beginnings of a new world order. This transition from empire to nation-state, however, was not inevitable, nor were its outcomes assured. For the Straits Chinese, once called 'men of three worlds', the formation of a Malaysian nation state on narrow ethno-nationalist lines was a source of great discomfort.[2] It marked the end of a period in which a cosmopolitan way of being could exist in the gap between empire and nation-state. As an in-between community stuck at the interstices of Britain and China, the Straits Chinese were not mere witnesses to these transformations but also active participants who sought to maintain a cosmopolitan ideal in the face of the increasingly restrictive scripts of sovereignty and identity available to them. As race was bound to nation and nation was bound to state, the Straits Chinese struggled to maintain their place between the three worlds they called home. This paper traces their formation as a separate community in the Straits Settlements and their role in the changing politics of empire and nation in Britain and China. It argues that this transitionary period and this urban space gave people like the Straits Chinese an opening to advocate cosmopolitan ideas about empires and nations, but that these openings were gradually closed off as race became affixed to nation, state and identity.

Cosmopolitanism, Identity and the City

2 Cosmopolitanism, here, refers to a particular 'way of being in the world' as Jeremy Waldron called it.[3] This way of being embraces multiple, layered and overlapping

identities and rejects the nation-state as the source of a terminal identity. While recognising difference between peoples based on their cultures or place of origin, it stresses the ultimate importance of hospitality and friendship over strangers and borders. As more recent accounts of cosmopolitanism have argued, this is not incompatible with a recognition that local attachments are important or significant, indeed cosmopolitanism can be 'located and embodied' or 'rooted' and 'pluralised'.[4] Indeed, early nationalists, like some of the ones I discuss here, combined their interest in achieving independence with an understanding of the 'cosmological right asserted in the name of a common humanity' which went against a world of discontinuous nation-states competing in an anarchic system.[5] Unlike 'locals', who assimilate 'items of some distinct provenance into a fundamentally local culture' but leave their 'structures of meaning', ultimately unchanged, the cosmopolitan has a 'greater involvement with a plurality of contrasting cultures' and is transformed as a result.[6] In Pico Iyer's words, they have a 'global soul'.[7] I argue that the Straits Chinese embodied this cosmopolitan habitus, and that by looking at their lives from roughly the 1890s to the 1920s, we can see how they used this to interact with nationalist and cosmopolitan ideas.

3 At the centre of this cosmopolitanism was identity. I take issue with Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper's complaint that 'identity' is too often generalised and deployed unselfconsciously, and rather suggest that the danger with the term comes more from a tendency to essentialise, narrow and constrict, rather than to broaden and soften its contours.[8] As Jean-François Bayart writes, 'an individual's act of identification is always contextual, multiple and relative.'[9] When we identify ourselves to others in this relational way, we always have a 'panoply of identities' at our disposal.[10] A cosmopolitan way of being allows us to make use of these. However, contra Bayart, when this identification is done by another person, such identities become reduced into a singular shorthand. For example, when Lee Kuan Yew arrived in Luzern and was asked by the hotel receptionist if he was 'Chinese' and Lee replied 'No, Malayan', the Swiss employee said, 'Never mind, I'll put you down as Chinese.'[11] With his identity fixed in racial terms to the nation of China, Lee was denied the possibility of being a Malayan or even a Singaporean. This was, in some respects, the product of the transition that is the centre of this study. To quote Andrew Arsan, 'in the time of the nation-state, travelling lives—and notions of belonging founded in webs of human community, rather than rooted in the soil of the territorial polity—became harder to countenance.'[12] Through the marking of citizenship with categories like race, a process that was already taking place under empire, the cosmopolitan habitus I described above became harder to maintain. Thus, Babas like Lee Kuan Yew were made into merely Chinese, and thereby conjoined to the nation and state of China. I contrast this with the various ways in which the Straits Chinese sought to form their own cultural community and identity based on their creole background that was neither British nor Chinese nor Malay in essentialist terms.

4 The formation of a distinctive Straits Chinese identity was aided by the cosmopolitanism of the cities of the Straits Settlements. Out of the cities' 'wider imagined communities', a social world was better able to come into formation in which creole peoples could articulate 'specific cosmopolitanisms' in spite of the pressures of competing nationalisms.[13] Su Lin Lewis positions the city as an 'arena for examining different layers of cross-cultural interaction' where 'civic communities were not imagined, but *built* through the intimate face-to-face interactions of individuals able to

look to shared notions of community, despite racial and religious differences.'[14] Moving away from a literature focused on segregation and difference, as Lewis does, we are better able to understand the formation of ideas that looked beyond the nation-state as the fundamental building block of the modern international system. Without this important social context, we would struggle to understand how the Straits Chinese straddled Britain and China, what this looked like in performative terms, and how this resulted in a more cosmopolitan politics than appeared elsewhere. As Leela Gandhi argues, we need to recognise 'new and better forms of community and relationality hitherto unimaginable within the monochromatic landscape of imperial division.'[15] This is something that rooted studies of in-between communities and their 'affective communities' in urban spaces better allow us to do, thereby breaking down the Manichean divide of self and other, empire and nation-state.

5 It is precisely these binaries which nationalism and the international states system increasingly encouraged. The politics of nationalism and its fusion with the state in the wake of the First World War pigeon-holed people into national affiliations that may or may not have matched up well with their identities, thus laying the groundwork for their exclusion from the body politic even in non-totalitarian states. Eric Weitz described this as the shift from the 'Vienna system' to the 'Paris system' where 'Vienna centered on dynastic legitimacy and state sovereignty within clearly defined borders' and 'Paris focused on populations and an ideal of state sovereignty rooted in national homogeneity.'[16] We see this in the 1921 plebiscite of Upper Silesia which was meant to determine, following Wilsonian principles, to which self-evident nation its people belonged. What James Bjork finds, however, in his study of this moment, is how many people felt indifferent to the idea of national identity, often finding common community in the Catholic Church instead.[17] Feelings of anationality and dual or multiple nationality indicated the gulf between the Paris archetype cultivated by the League of Nations and life on the ground in various parts of the world. In the Paris framework, the ideal form of nation-state represents a distinctive and bounded ethnocultural space in which all residents should be citizens, and all citizens should be residents. It is defined both internally and externally, and forms the basis of a patchwork of nation-states as discrete entities, a binary world of national ones and zeros. The reality of post-war Europe and the bulk of the colonial world was that few states lived up to this ideal. This gap generated tensions for states that sought legibility and coherency according to the limited scripts of sovereignty made available in the international system. As a result, states seeking to render their populations both legible and *national* had to police their boundaries of belonging. In other words, if the normative ideal of the nation-state as a territory containing all and only its ethnocultural citizens is something that was encouraged by the international system and which states therefore work(ed) towards, then states (tempered by, and in dialogue with, their existing citizens) must engage in a constant process of creating 'congruencies' and defining exteriorities, declaring who belongs and who does not.[18]

6 This world of 'hetero-nations', as the Comaroffs call them, was not inevitable.[19] Reading modernisation as nation-state formation overlooks the contestation and negotiation which produced this world in the first place.[20] This narrative has been challenged by historians seeking to recover alternative possibilities imagined by anti-colonial actors working through the processes of decolonisation. As Tracey Banivanua Mar writes, 'by exploring in their own context the ideas that would be dead ends... we can gain a multidimensional picture of the counter networks of the ends of empire.'[21] Ideas and

realities such as pan-Asianism, French Union, the British Commonwealth, the New International Economic Order and so on, all represented, at various scales and with differing relationships between their constituent parts, attempts at crafting political communities that transcended the nation-state.[22] Such visions, often called cosmopolitan, could be based on precolonial civilisational, cultural and religious foundations or on nations as part of larger federal or confederal structures.[23] However, one of the main faults with these revisionist accounts of empires and nationalism is that they too readily discard locative identities as a genuine concern for individuals and communities, and, furthermore, set these cosmopolitan visions in opposition to nationalism. Instead, this paper tries to find a middle ground for what Kwame Anthony Appiah called 'rooted cosmopolitanisms', which recognise local identities as being compatible with a cosmopolitan view of the world.[24] This is a cosmopolitanism that accepts diversity over homogeneity and celebrates '*different* local human ways of being'. [25] Thus, the Straits Chinese could be cosmopolitan while also retaining contingent attachments to China, Malaya and Britain.

7 In our context, cosmopolitan imaginings appeared not only in social and cultural aspects but also in Straits Chinese attempts to appropriate and reinvent discourses of imperial citizenship in order to make claims for equality within Empire. In this sense, being Anglicised and claiming British citizenship allowed non-white colonial subjects to advance their interests in pursuit of a more cosmopolitan ideal. Here, I follow Saul Dubow who proposes the British Empire as 'a more capacious category capable of including elective, hyphenated forms of belonging.'[26] People such as the Straits Chinese made use of their British subjecthood to reconfigure the Empire on more egalitarian lines. Thus, in contrast to Daniel Gorman who takes a metropolitan perspective on imperial citizenship, I echo Sukanya Banerjee in viewing the question from the other side of the colonial difference where it played a central role in the formation of cosmopolitan subjectivities for the Straits Chinese.[27] That this citizenship became marked by race, for example through racial restrictions on mobility, represented a double bind for the Straits Chinese who wanted to be both Chinese (racially/culturally) and British (legally/civically). As they argued during World War I, 'do not confound race with nationality… Our Straits Chinese are Chinese only by race and by religion and customs. Their nationality is British.'[28] While Britain's 'multiple, divided sovereignties' created opportunities for claim-making within empire, it also simultaneously laid the groundwork for the division of empire on territorialised lines, with racial restrictions on immigration in the White Dominions truncating imperial citizenship.[29] Thus, the Straits Chinese's self-conscious labelling as 'Chinese' (increasingly so in this period) and identification by others as such, was difficult to reconcile with their claims to belonging within the British Empire. Their failure to rework imperial citizenship on cosmopolitan lines through organisations such as the Straits Chinese British Association (SCBA) aided in the transition to the narrower nationalisms we are more familiar with in the twentieth century. This forms one important thread that runs through the paper.

8 The second major thread is the Straits Chinese's changing relationship with the Chinese mainland. The Straits-born played a crucial role in what Prasenjit Duara called the 'deterritorialisation' of the Chinese nation. As Duara argues, 'while territorial nationalism needs the discourses of race and culture for its own adequacy, it is not fully capable of containing them within itself.'[30] In other words, given the lack of congruency between nation and territory, the nation has to reach beyond its territorial bounds. Such a view held special purchase in the Chinese case with its primary ethnic

community increasingly spread across the world. Thus, both the late Qing Empire and the early Republic of China took on a deterritorialised vision of the Chinese nation. At the same time, we should not take this to mean that the diaspora was incapable of articulating its own form of transnationalism independently of the state. Through their involvement in particular 'diaspora moments', China came to be understood in more capacious terms from below and within diaspora than heavily methodologically nationalist studies have tended to recognise.[31] Seeing their potential for advancement within the British Empire as limited, being courted by China, and adopting a racial language that made them belong more clearly to the Chinese nation, the Straits Chinese took a leading role in this deterritorialisation of China. Rather than merely supporting a narrow idea of the nation-state limited to the 18 provinces of China proper, their engagement with Chinese politics in this period helped redraw the borders of the 'geo-body', the imagined territorial construct which represents 'the most concrete identification of a nation'.[32] This also found its way into the early nationalist thought of figures such as Kang Youwei and Sun Yat-sen who drew on their encounters with the diaspora to express a culturalist and universalist understanding of China.[33] While the Straits Chinese remained active participants in the new China after 1911, they also found it difficult to be accepted within their putative homeland given their distinctive background. Consequently, on the Chinese front, as on the British, the Straits Chinese were caught in a difficult position by virtue of the transformation of the international system.

9 This is the context that Ee Tiang Hong's poem above speaks to. As a community defined by its 'in-betweenness', the Straits Chinese struggled to find a home in Britain, China or Malaya. The narrowing of nationalism that took place at the end of our period thus pushed them into an increasingly liminal position as the community came to be seen as a relic of the past, a reminder of days in which the British used the Chinese to rule over the Malays. By examining the 'time between empire and nation' and the 'spaces besides empire and nation' we can better see how the rise of the nation-state was contested by, but ultimately triumphed over, hybrid peoples such as the Straits Chinese.[34]

FOOTNOTES

1. Quoted in Neil Khor, "Malacca's Straits Chinese Anglophone Poets and their Experience of Malaysian Nationalism," *Archipel* 76 (2008): 133.

2. "Men of Three Worlds: Babas of Malaya," *Malaya Tribune*, July 1, 1949.

3. Jeremy Waldron, "What is Cosmopolitan?" *Journal of Political Philosophy* 8, no. 2 (2000): 227.

4. Bruce Robbins, "Actually Existing Cosmopolitanism," in *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation*, eds. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 2-3. Carol A. Breckenridge, Sheldon Pollock, Homi K. Bhabha, and Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Cosmopolitanisms," in *Cosmopolitanism*, eds. Breckenridge et al. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 8. A similar idea appears in Richard Sennet, "Cosmopolitanism and the Social Experience of Cities," in *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism: Theory, Context, and Practice*, eds. Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 42-7.

5. Pheng Cheah, "Introduction Part II: The Cosmopolitical—Today," 24.

6. Ulf Hannerz, *Transnational Connections: Culture, people, places* (London: Routledge, 1996), 103.

7. Pico Iyer, *The Global Soul: Jet Lag, Shopping Malls, and the Search for Home* (London: Penguin, 2001).

8. Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, "Beyond "identity,"" *Theory and Society* 29, no. 1 (2000): 1-47.

9. Jean-François Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity,* trans. Steven Rendall (London: Hurst & Company, 1996), 92.

10. Ibid., 93.

11. Lee Kuan Yew, *My Lifelong Challenge: Singapore's Bilingual Journey* (Singapore: Straits Times Press, 2012), 33.

12. Andrew Arsan, *Interlopers of Empire: The Lebanese Diaspora in Colonial French West Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 254.

13. Mark Ravinder Frost, "In Search of Cosmopolitan Discourse: A Historical Journey across the Indian ocean from Singapore to South Africa, 1870-1920," in Pamila Gupta, Hofmeyr, Pearson eds., *Eyes Across the Water: Navigating the Indian Ocean* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2010), 75. "Specific cosmopolitanisms" comes from James Clifford, "Diasporas," *Cultural Anthropology* 9, no. 3 (1994): 308.

14. Su Lin Lewis, *Cities in Motion: Urban Life and Cosmopolitanism in Southeast Asia, 1920-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 10-11.

15. Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siecle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 5-6.

16. Eric D. Weitz, "From the Vienna to the Paris System: International Politics and Entangled Histories of Human Rights, Forced Deportations, and Civilizing Missions," *American Historical Review* 113, no. 5 (2008): 1314.

17. James E. Bjork, *Neither German nor Pole: Catholicism and National Indifference in a Central European Borderland* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008). See also, Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900-1948* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).

18. Brubaker, referencing Ernest Gellner, in Rogers Brubaker, "Migration, Membership, and the Modern Nation-State: Internal and External Dimensions of the Politics of Belonging," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 41, no. 1 (2010): 67-8.

19. Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Ethnicity, Inc*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 123.

20. As done for example by Loubna El Amine, "Beyond East and West: Reorienting Political Theory through the Prism of Modernity," *Perspectives on Politics* 14, no. 1 (2016): 102-120.

21. Tracey Banivanua Mar, *Decolonisation and the Pacific: Indigenous Globalisation and the Ends of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 21.

22. See, for example, Frederick Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945-1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), Duncan Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future of World Order, 1860-1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

23. Prasenjit Duara, "The Discourse of Civilization and Pan-Asianism," *Journal of World History* 12, no. 1 (2001): 99-130, Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

24. Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Cosmopolitan Patriots," in *Cosmopolitics*, 91.

25. Ibid., 94. See also, Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (London: Penguin, 2006).

26. Saul Dubow, "How British was the British World? The Case of South Africa," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 37, no. 1 (2009): 2.

27. Sukanya Banerjee, *Becoming Imperial Citizens: Indians in the Late-Victorian Empire* (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), Daniel Gorman, *Imperial Citizenship: Empire and the Question of Belonging* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006).

28. Straits Chinese British Association, *Duty to the British Empire (Being an Elementary Guide for Straits Chinese) During the Great War* (Singapore, 1915), ch 2.

29. Lynn Hollen Lees, *Planting Empire, Cultivating Subjects: British Malaya, 1786–1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 6.

30. Prasenjit Duara, "Transnationalism and the Predicament of Sovereignty: China, 1900-1945," *American Historical Review* 102, no. 4 (1997): 1030-1051. See also, Elena Barabantseva, *Overseas Chinese, Ethnic Minorities and Nationalism* (London: Abingdon, 2011).

31. Shelly Chan, "The Case for Diaspora: A Temporal Approach to the Chinese Experience," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 74, no. 1 (2015): 107.

32. Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994), x.

33. Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 74-6.

34. Tim Harper, "Singapore, 1915, and the Birth of the Asian Underground," *Modern Asian Studies* 47, no. 6 (2013): 1811.

2. Race, Nationality and the Straits Chinese

1 In the period I am looking at, the category of Straits Chinese took on increasingly racialised, gendered, and culturally specific connotations that gave it additional sociological meaning as a separate category in the Settlements. Being Straits Chinese, more than just Straits-born, meant to have mixed Chinese and Malay blood and to have a certain language, cuisine, ethics, education and several other features that denoted a specific culture and transformed them into something new and different. This definition of Straits Chinese and its gendered terms Baba and Nyonya has arguably persisted until today. In this chapter, I will argue that the Straits Chinese adopted Western notions of race and attempted to use these to achieve greater access to rights in the colonies. However, their incorporation into a racialised world also created a double bind whereby they were marked as non-white and Chinese and consequently barred from attaining full equality under empire. As a result, many Straits Chinese turned to a closer association with China as it too drew on racial discourses which wove the diaspora back into the fabric of national life, no matter where they were.

2.1 Becoming Straits Chinese

2 Since the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries, Chinese traders had been regularly visiting Southeast Asia to exchange goods and foster tributary relations with the mainland.[1] Over time, some Chinese began to settle in the region. Given the paucity of women who went abroad, many of these Chinese men married local women and became permanent residents in what the Chinese call the Nanyang or South Seas.[2] Through this fusion of Chinese and local cultures, a new community was born which at its loosest is termed *Peranakan* meaning local born in Malay. The Straits Chinese were Peranakans who were born in the Straits Settlements of Penang, Malacca and Singapore (or their antecedents) and in gendered terms were split between Baba men and Nyonya women. By the mid-nineteenth century they also held British subject status through their birth in the colonies. In the Islamic parts of Southeast Asia such as the Malay peninsula, Peranakans were less readily assimilated into local society and so had further reason to remain separate, especially as the Chinese generally placed a strong emphasis on maintaining

the traditions and rituals they had brought with them from China.[3] Nevertheless, through the female side of the family and prolonged residence in the Nanyang, this still became an increasingly creolised community rather than merely a transplant of China. They also quickly adopted aspects of the European colonisers' culture. As the sailor George Windsor Earl noticed in 1837, 'from their constant communication with the Europeans, they have acquired in some measure their general habits and mode of transacting business, which renders them more agreeable to the latter than those who have not enjoyed similar advantages.'[4]

3 In the nineteenth century, as emigration picked up following the opening of treaty ports, repeated crises in the Qing economy, and rising demand for non-white labour in tropical colonies, Peranakans became important middle-men who could work with the colonial administration, the local population and the immigrant Chinese.[5] It is out of this context that the Straits Chinese had to negotiate between their privileged status as British subjects and their racial difference which made them not quite British, not quite Chinese, and not quite Malay. Given the dominant monochromatic vision of race, nationality and citizenship, being 'Straits Chinese' became a difficult position to hold even in the cosmopolitan cities, especially as it became muddled with the broader category of 'Straits-born'.[6] In this period, therefore, we see the Straits Chinese trying to differentiate themselves from their China-born counterparts while at the same time adopting the same racial logics of the British and later China itself that would have them conflated with all Chinese.

4 One way of distinguishing the Straits Chinese was in racial terms. Given their mixed heritage, the Straits Chinese could quite easily claim to be different from the more ethnically homogenous China-born Chinese emigrating to the Straits who were mostly Han but spoke a range of different languages. An article in 1914 described the Straits Chinese as a 'mixed breed—half Chinese and half Malay' with numerous differences from China-born Chinese appearing as a result. [7]However, it was keen to point out, using the logics of social Darwinism that 'centuries of acquired characteristics could not be abrogated in the course of a few generations.' Thus, from the British perspective, any Malay influence was fairly inconsequential to Straits Chinese racial differentiation. And for those who believed it did make a difference, it was typically in negative terms, since in most cases the British held unfavourable views regarding the Malays relative to the Chinese. For example, *The Examiner* noted in 1854 that the mixed Sino-Malays were 'less laborious and enterprising' than native Chinese, implying Malay blood had weakened them in this regard.[8] Given the 'myth of the lazy native' was one of the main discourses justifying Chinese coolie immigration, it follows that the Straits-born would be seen as more lethargic than the China-born Chinese given both their different climatic and racial background.[9] It is also notable that immigrant Chinese agreed with the British and tended to see Peranakans negatively as a result of their mixed blood.[10] Regardless, late nineteenth-century race science dictated that miscegenation and time spent in the tropics would necessarily degrade their stock over time.

5 As a result of this difference in physical fitness, numerous articles appeared discussing health and well-being addressed specifically at the Straits Chinese. Their interest in fitness appeared to clearly distinguish them from their China-born counterparts, or indeed all 'Asiatics' besides the Japanese as one newspaper claimed.[11] In 1837, George Windsor Earl had described them as 'probably less active and energetic' than the actual natives of China.[12] By the late nineteenth century, this view seems to have changed. J.D.

Vaughan, a lawyer and former sailor in the Straits writing in 1879, still regarded the Babas as less robust than 'the real Chinese', perhaps due to their affluence, but he still saw them as superior to other 'real Chinese' because they had taken up exercise to counteract this degradation.[13] Similarly, in 1909, James Aitkin, Song Ong Siang's law partner, brought on some backlash by writing: 'Get into the less densely populated streets occupied by Straits Chinese who keep their houses scrupulously clean as a rule, and we find men of inferior physique, mostly married and the fathers of numerous children.'[14] He believed that a genteel lifestyle and marriages within the community were having a 'degenerative' effect on the Straits Chinese. He compared this to other creole communities such as the Malacca Portuguese, thus implicitly drawing on common racial theories that proscribed miscegenation.[15] Though some Straits Chinese respondents rejected his ideas and suggested Aitkin stick to the law, many seem to have appropriated this language of degeneration and argued that the Straits Chinese specifically start exercising more to counteract the negative effects of inbreeding, which was worsening their 'stock'.[16] For example, Lim Boon Keng, perhaps the most prominent Baba at the time, wrote an article in 1909 titled 'Race deterioration in the tropics' which attributed to climate and miscegenation the 'inferior' physical condition of Straits Chinese after just a couple of generations, which had made them more susceptible to immorality, immoderation and indolence.[17] Elsewhere he said, 'though these Chinese *Peranakans* (or local-born men), as the Malays call them, are to all intents and purposes Chinese, from a superficial acquaintance with them and their mode of life, they have developed such distinct social qualities and have shown so many characteristic ethnic and anthropological aspects that they constitute a class by themselves.'[18] Thus, Lim was careful to set the Straits Chinese apart from the inferior qualities associated with both Chinese and Malays. With this in mind, the Straits Chinese took significant interest in their personal health from around the turn of the century, coinciding with the wider cultural reform movement (discussed in more detail later) that sought to better the Straits Chinese in learning, political engagement, clothing, knowledge of Chinese, gender relations and more. Indeed, the cultural reform movement as a whole must be considered, in part, a response to an internalisation of social Darwinist views on race. For example, they created new organisations such as the Straits Athletic Physical Culturalists society which was captained by Chua Seng Chye, nicknamed the local 'Sandow' after a German bodybuilder who had toured the East and apparently inspired many Straits-born.[19] They were congratulated for this aspect of their 'physical development' later in the century.[20] All this points to an attempt by the Straits Chinese to demonstrate their superiority to the belittled immigrant Chinese and local Malays.

6 Straits Chinese attention to their racial differentiation fits in with a more decisive shift in the same period to count Straits-born Chinese separately in the census and other government reports. For example, the 1906 Annual Report listed the ambulance force as consisting of '7 Europeans, 14 Eurasians, and 4 Chinese (Straits-born).'[21] Likewise, the 1881 and 1901 censuses recorded 'Straits-born' as its own category alongside the other 'tribes' of Chinese such as Hokkien.[22] In 1881 there were 9,526 Straits-born Chinese, rising to 14,631 Straits-born Chinese by 1901, or roughly 10 per cent of the Chinese population of the colony. In Benedict Anderson's view, these 'bound serialities' form the basis of ethno-nationalist politics by attaching governmentality to imagined communities.[23] While this may not have occurred straightaway, their identification as a separate community in the census did create a difficult position for the Straits Chinese

as they were made a sub-set of 'Chinese', thus fixing them categorically to the Chinese race. By being placed in this taxonomy, they were less able to adopt the more expansive, universal registers of citizenship and cosmopolitanism.

7 Despite whatever differences the British may have recognised, the Straits Chinese were still lumped in with the Chinese population. While on some matters, the Straits Chinese were content with this fact and it became an important part of their cultural revival, on others, it put them at risk of the same kinds of prejudices and discriminatory practices that they felt were undeserving of a British subject of superior background. This conflation of Straits Chinese with Chinese appeared in even the most minor of incidents. For example, one Straits Chinese complained of being refused service at the Adelphi Hotel bar 'on the ground that Chinese are not allowed to drink there.'[24] The Baba was clear to sign the letter as '[a] Straits-born Chinese.' Similarly, another Straits Chinese wrote to the *Daily Advertiser* on behalf of the community complaining that Eurasians were being given better treatment in prison than Chinese Babas who are 'brought up in most instances in a more delicate manner than his neighbour the Eurasian.'[25] The newspaper responded by following the racial logic that those of a similar fortitude to Europeans should be placed in their portion of the prison, or, in other words, that the Straits Chinese should not be dumped in the 'native' wing with all the other Chinese.[26] While the Straits Chinese may have been descended from the Chinese and to a lesser extent the Malay 'races', they tried to present themselves as more evolved and therefore deserving of more equality with the Europeans in keeping with the prevailing discourses of the time.

8 As several scholars have argued, the delimitation of rights along racialised lines in the birth of modern liberalism was linked to notions of whiteness.[27] Thus, rights-bearing was made contingent on a subject's ability to emulate or embody certain conditions of whiteness. We also see this logic appearing in regard to the Straits Chinese as they made arguments for equality with Europeans and distinguished themselves from other Chinese. This differentiation was never fully accepted nor embraced, however it did represent a conscious effort to establish a better place for themselves within the racial hierarchies that governed empire. Furthermore, the Straits Chinese appropriated ideas of whiteness and challenged its exclusive nature. J.D. Vaughan recalled speaking to a Baba who was offended at being asked if he was a 'Chinaman' and said, 'I am not a Chinaman, I am a British subject, an *Orang putih*', which in Malay means white man.[28] Although their persistence in following Chinese rituals and wearing Chinese dress confounded English observers who were otherwise impressed by their success and loyalty to the British, for the Straits Chinese, these two things were not mutually exclusive. By claiming whiteness on the basis of their education, knowledge of the English language, success in colonial administration and subject status, as well as their racial differences, the Straits Chinese were thereby making a claim to rights within the British Empire. Nevertheless, the British were evidently not always willing to recognise them as equals, even on civic terms, and so, as we shall see in the next section, those rights were not always forthcoming.

2.2 The Colour Bar

9 Racial restrictions on British subjecthood/citizenship were made evident to the Straits Chinese on numerous occasions in this period, leaving them with the sense that the

universal languages of the British Empire were not being met by the particulars of life on the ground. Although their class granted them a certain degree of access that other non-white colonial subjects were less fortunate to have, they still ran into barriers to advancement that exposed the limits of imperial cosmopolitanism. This is now a familiar story in the literature on early twentieth-century empires and their negotiations with prominent subjects who sought an equal place within empire rather than outside of it.[29] The Straits Chinese were little different in this regard, however they did have the added complication of their race marking them as belonging to a country that was still nominally independent and could theoretically welcome them as equals. Combined with the nationalist movement in China, the reform movement in the Straits Settlements, and their declining influence in trade and commerce, these racial barriers in public service pushed the Straits Chinese towards closer associations with a nascent Chinese nation. I want to highlight one incident in particular that took place in this period and found its way to the House of Commons.

10 One of the most significant legal barriers to the Straits Chinese existed in the colonial administration. In 1904 the rules were changed to specify that persons who were not of pure European descent on both sides could not sit the cadet exams and enter the civil and police services.[30] This went against the liberal language used by Queen Victoria in her Royal Proclamation of 1858 where she said that 'it is our further will that, so far as may be, our subjects, of whatever race or creed, be freely and impartially admitted to offices in our service, the duties of which they may be qualified, by their education, ability, and integrity, duly to discharge.'[31] In India, Anglophile nationalists liked to remind their government of this proclamation and its contrast with life in the colony. Dadabhai Naoroji, for example, referenced it in a paper on the 'Admission of Educated Natives into the Indian Civil Service', in 1868.[32] Perhaps not coincidentally, he had also set it for translation into Gujarati on the examination for the Indian Civil Service in 1861.[33] While many young Indians imbibed the liberal spirit of the Royal Proclamation, they increasingly had to come to terms with the limits of British universalism and the persistent discourses of civilisational differences and racial hierarchies. [34]As Uday Mehta and others have argued, this racialisation of liberalism and rights-bearing was part and parcel of the imperial project, embedded in the thought of some of its most prominent theorists such as John Stuart Mill.[35] What has been less remarked upon is the experience of colonial subjects in other parts of the Empire such as Southeast Asia where there was another English-educated elite class wanting to embrace those same liberal ideas. What makes the Straits Chinese more interesting and unique, however, is the fact that they were still associated with a country in which they did not reside and which was not fully colonised. Thus, the development of nationalism out of encounters with the colour bar manifested itself differently among the Straits Chinese community.

11 In response to new statutes in 1904 which specified that cadets for the Straits Settlements and Hong Kong Civil Services must be of pure European descent on both sides, Lewis MacCallum Scott, a liberal MP, raised questions to the Colonial Secretary, Lewis Harcourt, in 1912, as to 'the reason for the erection of this colour bar' against colonial subjects.[36] MacCallum Scott was following Tan Jiak Kim of the Straits Legislative Council who had asked to see papers from the Colonial Office regarding these regulations and was refused access. They both felt that these new regulations went against the common legal status of subject/citizen that had been expressed in documents such as the Royal Proclamation. Scott made it clear that this was a question

of rights and citizenship being deprived to 'British-born Chinese and Malays' and went against 'the fundamental laws of the British Empire'.[37] Scott likewise pointed to the farce of 'racial purity' in the statute and questioned whether an Armenian would be counted as pure European or whether the Civil Service Commissioners performed genealogical investigations to see if any applicants had one non-European ancestor.[38] Harcourt's justification in Parliament was that non-Europeans would be unable to pass the examinations and so the regulation effectively made no difference to their admittance to the Civil Service. Scott pointed to Ho Kai, Lim Boon Keng, Wu Lien-teh and Song Ong Siang as exemplary British subjects of non-European descent who should have been able, if they were so inclined, to sit the cadet examinations for admittance into the Civil Service.[39] The latter three were Straits-born and had won Queen's Scholarships to study in Britain, another policy that was scrapped around the same time, much to the chagrin of the Straits Chinese community who fought hard for its continuation. Scott felt this might be related to the new cadet regulations as it removed a means for gaining the education necessary to pass the examinations.[40]

12 Naturally, the Straits Chinese community were dismayed with this exchange in Parliament which revealed the problem of the colour bar in colonial Malaya. Tan Jiak Kim, who had recently been appointed a CMG and said he hoped he would not be the last of His Majesty's 'Asiatic subjects' to do so, led the Straits Chinese British Association in petitioning the government on this question.[41] The SCBA said they would welcome the appointment of civil service or police 'officials not of pure European descent on both sides' and countered that they would be open to officers of *any* nationality (equated here with race) to being placed in authority over them.[42] The end of the Queen's Scholarships around the same time produced a similarly strong response. One newspaper correspondent said, 'since the abolition of the Queen's Scholarship, and the introduction of the colour bar many parents are not inclined to keep their children in school longer than they can help.'[43] Lim Boon Keng, in advocating for their return during the war, argued 'one of the greatest aspirations taught by the war is freedom. Surely, if Britain is fighting for the freedom of other nationalities, men brought up under the flag and taught the aspirations and ideals of Englishmen have the right to expect to become men and not mere machines always under domination.'[44] Rather than being treated as raw labour, as the bulk of the Chinese and Indians of the colonies were valued for, Lim argued that Asiatic subjects should have greater representation and recognition for their contributions as fellow men of the Empire. The related issues of Civil Service admission and Queen's Scholarship was evidently a crucial point of reckoning between the ideals of Straits Chinese British subjects and the realities of the British Empire. Lim's response should be read as a challenge to the hierarchical nature of the British nature over its liberal language and a realignment with other Asians including China-born coolies. Like Sukanya Banerjee's Indians who were 'denied the "benefits" of abstraction', the Straits Chinese, as non-white subjects of empire, found themselves fighting the particularising gaze of imperial citizenship on the ground.[45]

13 The reality of the colour bar acted as a countervailing force to Straits Chinese interest in creating a place for themselves on equal terms in the British Empire in the twentieth century. As Chong Fook Loy argued in a brief retrospective on the cultural reform movement so far in 1906, the Straits Chinese became aware that 'by their birth and their colour they were debarred from many privileges which an Englishman enjoys.'[46] With new restrictions on non-European subjects entering the Civil Service, this only

became more apparent and therefore pushed the Straits Chinese in the direction of China which was, by the beginning of the new century, now welcoming ethnic Chinese back into the mainland as important contributors to the country's future. Both Lim and Wu Lien-teh would settle in China where they perhaps sensed greater opportunities for advancement. As another Baba wrote responding to the newly revealed restrictions: 'Since the colour bar has come into existence [the Straits Chinese] can only become rich or "slaves of the desks", for they are not allowed to share in the government of the country in which they live.'[47] As a result, the Straits Chinese had more reason to identify their political future with a transforming China that could accommodate their claims to Western modernity and Chinese traditions.

2.3 The 1905 Anti-American Boycott

14 Straits Chinese identification with China was further encouraged by expansive racial exclusion laws which viewed all Chinese as alike. The boycott of American goods in 1905 was a response to this and serves as a prime example of what Shelly Chan calls 'diaspora moments' in which the connections that form diaspora come to life.[48] The boycott is particularly significant for it brought China-born Chinese and Straits Chinese together in opposition to American racial exclusion laws specifically and overseas Chinese treatment more broadly and reshaped the contours of Chinese nationalism beyond its physical borders as a result. Western observers of the boycott noted its intimate connection to a larger transformation in Chinese society, referring to it as a sign of the 'awakening of national life'.[49] One anecdote is telling of the atmosphere in Singapore at the time: 'There was a funny sight down the Orchard Road yesterday. A bread-seller was doing a good business, when one of the Chinese cried out that the flour was American. In a second the breadseller's goods were upset and rolling along the road.'[50] Boycotters did not shy away from referencing the 'ill treatment meted out to us by foreigners' in many parts of the world and that which was suffered 'on arrival at America' was enough to break the camel's back.[51] Due to the racialisation of the global division of labour, all ethnic Chinese came to be viewed as coolies or potential coolies by the West, thus throwing up barriers to skilled migrants who might otherwise have been seen as desirable if it were not for their race. Thus, in 1905, we see how any local differentiation of the Straits Chinese community was undermined by the prevailing racial logic by which their phenotype locked them in as Chinese no matter their place of birth, wealth, or upbringing. Although some Western figures tried to contest this logic, the racial exclusion laws still shuffled the Straits Chinese into the broader racial and national category Chinese. At the same time, the Straits Chinese actively appropriated this identification as Chinese, with prominent Babas becoming leaders in the campaign. This helped further the transnationalisation of Chinese nationalism. In this way, race, migration and its control proved central to the (re-)Sinicisation of the Straits Chinese against the hierarchies that had been frequently exposed in the British Empire and the international state system at large.

15 The boycott, which had begun in Shanghai in direct response to abuses in San Francisco and quickly spread, reached a climax in Singapore when the American ship *Acme* arrived at Tanjong Pagar for repairs in December 1905. A large number of Chinese labourers went on strike and refused to work because it was an American ship owned by Standard Oil.[52] Placards were posted in Chinese instructing workers not to board the

Acme and the press reported, possibly hyperbolically, that they were threatened with decapitation for scabbing.[53] The strike was quickly stopped by a contingent of Sikhs.[54] Shortly after, Chinese headmen met with the Protector who hinted that if the strike was not called off they could be deported as alien Chinese. It seems clear from their responses that this was an extension of the boycott to show their discontent with American policy and anti-Chinese sentiment more broadly.

16 The boycott in Malaya illustrates how the Chinese diaspora was brought together through their collective exclusion. When one of the instigators of the boycott committed suicide in Macao, Chinese temples in Singapore (on Wayang Street) made offerings that made them part of a 'mass ceremony' of Chinese temples across the world doing the same thing.[55] Further to Anderson's idea of the mass ceremony of newspaper reading in 'homogenous, empty time' as enabling modern nationhood, events such as this indicated the global and deterritorial dimensions to Chinese diasporic nationalism.[56] This was also evinced in a new play that dramatised the suicide of a boycott leader in front of the American consulate in Shanghai which was sweeping China and found its way to the Cantonese theatres (also on Wayang Street) in Singapore.[57] A report in late November 1905 suggested that the Chinese boycott in Singapore was still ongoing despite signs it was waning in the mainland, pointing to the autonomous agency with which different parts of the diaspora addressed the issue.[58] Placed in its global context and alongside the growing revolutionary movement in China, we can better see how the overseas Chinese were not only reformulating Chinese nationalism in response to restrictions on mobility but also how these very restrictions brought them back into the imperial Chinese fold no matter their place of birth, thus limiting the potential for a more cosmopolitan idea of China embodied in the former.[59]

17 The Straits Chinese were active leaders in the boycott from its start earlier that year. In June of 1905, Lim Boon Keng chaired a meeting of hundreds of Chinese traders at the hospital in Wayang Street which approved the boycott.[60] Lim subsequently headed the main boycott committee in Singapore and encouraged Penang to follow suit.[61] Lim was keen to point out that the exclusion laws did not differentiate between different classes of Chinese, implying precisely that it was a racial exclusion which could affect the Straits Chinese like any other coolie. Consequently, many Straits Chinese joined the boycott. In Singapore, for example, it was said that 'the better class of Straits Chinese' had started avoiding the new tramways under the impression that it was managed by an American concern.[62] Many Europeans were surprised by the scale of the boycott and its acceptance by all Chinese including Babas. As one paper reported, it was 'to the astonishment of the world' that 'there was a unanimity of opinion amongst all sects and grades of Chinese that such a course was desirable.'[63] The racial exclusion laws and abuse of Chinese in the US and elsewhere thus pushed the Straits-born into solidarity with their designated race despite their many attempts to differentiate themselves. In so doing, they were also making a claim towards belonging in the overseas Chinese diaspora and to a prominent position at its head that perhaps derived from their differentiation. For Lim Boon Keng in particular, this would prove important to his continued political engagement with China as both Chinese and Baba.

18 While so far I have presented the boycott in the Straits as essentially equivalent with other parts of the world, there were some notable differences by virtue of the unique conditions of Straits colonial society. For example, we find a great deal of sympathy in the British press for the boycott (at least until the *Acme* incident), as they similarly felt

that the 'Yank needs teaching' a lesson regarding their unfair trade policy.[64] It also seemed that local Chinese did not connect the British Empire to America's exclusion laws. For example, the theatres performing the martyr play hung up Chinese flags and Union Jacks indicating their friendship with the British who, in the Straits at least, had tended to side with the boycotters so far.[65] As an American writing in the *Straits Times* said, people in the Settlements usually opposed the American Exclusion Acts 'based upon the general desirability of the Chinese in the Straits.'[66] Similarly, in 1890 the *Straits Times* responded to an Australian article which asked 'will the Chinese over-run the world?', saying 'we in the Straits Settlements are chiefly concerned because the Chinese stay at home too much.'[67] Chinese labourers were a necessity for the colony to profit; the *Times* was writing at a time when Chinese immigration had slowed and tin and sugar prices were down.[68] Thus, the economic exigencies of the colonies superseded any concerns about the 'Yellow Peril'.[69] Indeed, the very idea of 'Yellow Peril' held less water in Singapore. A letter to the editor of the *Singapore Free Press* entitled 'The True "Yellow Peril"' complained about rickshaw drivers 'slinging along the road, head down, and don't draw up until they bang into something'.[70] Although race was undoubtedly important, Chinese emigrants were not competing to become the labour force here; they were the labour force as far as the British were concerned. Not only does this underline the social construction of racial categories relative to material conditions but also helps explain why the Chinese in the Straits were able to move much more freely in that urban society than elsewhere. As the next chapter will show, the cosmopolitan nature of Straits society allowed for the construction of 'affective communities' that set it apart from settler colonies where a group like the Straits Chinese would have struggled to emerge. These communities were offset by Britain and China's use of nationality law to specify the relationship between race, nationality and citizenship, which encouraged division and mutual exclusivity.

2.4 Nationality Law and the Straits Chinese

19 One aspect of identity that Burbank and Cooper do recognise as important is the external identification 'that has no counterpart in the domain of self-identification: the formalized, codified, objectified systems of categorization developed by powerful, authoritative institutions.'[71] The history of Chinese and British nationality law, for example, demonstrates how issues of belonging that were formerly more fluid became solidified through their connection to the state. Nationality law, however, has received very little attention in this field, especially in studies of China which only seem to mention it in wary terms of contemporary Chinese Communist Party encroachment abroad, and yet it was precisely in nationality law that subjecthood/citizenship was defined.[72] The fact that British subjecthood/citizenship was established through nationality law shows how the two were conflated by the early twentieth century within the imperial framework. Belonging to a nation-state is typically defined both in formal terms such as the legal category of citizen, often materialised in identity documents, and informal terms of ethnicity and/or culture.[73] However, when the legal category of citizen/subject is defined by nationality (i.e. to be a citizen is to be a national and vice versa), it immediately takes on an ethnic, cultural and territorial component. In other words, nationality as a form of identity or belonging with racial

connotations also becomes bound to the state-defined legal category of citizen. Thus, nationality law is central to the definition of who is and can become a citizen.

20 In an era of rising migration, numerous states began to formalise their nationality law alongside creating new institutions and instruments such as passports to manage their populations and define their limits. As Adam McKeown writes, the passport 'is a tangible link between the two main sources of modern identity: the individual and the state.'[74] In the case of Japan, for example, the creation of nationality law and institutions to police it was expressly directed against Chinese immigration and helped place Japan on more equal terms with the West by joining a shared international legal migration regime.[75] Other countries' nationality laws had a similar negative function.[76] What is of interest in our case is how British nationality law performed a conflation of citizenship with nationality despite having the category of 'imperial citizen'. Like Wilder's idea of the French imperial nation-state, British policy softened the boundaries between empire and nation-state and similarly had to contend with its subjects' ideas of what imperial citizenship represented.[77] This allowed for the slippage between 'nation' and 'empire' in the language used to refer to citizenship of the British Empire. At the Imperial Conference of 1911, for example, as the difference in privileges associated with naturalisation in the metropole versus the Dominions came up, it was said that 'Imperial *nationality* shall be world-wide and uniform.'[78] The Straits Chinese repeated this kind of language on several occasions, for example in their pamphlet on British subjects' duties during the war which frequently referred to British empire and nation as if they were coterminous.[79] However, this was always undermined by the identification of 'Chinese' as being a race *and* a nationality, therefore making it incompatible with British nationality and citizenship.

21 Anxieties around race and migration in the Dominions encouraged the truncation of shared imperial citizenship by coupling citizenship to increasingly territorialised states, thus, in a sense, nationalising imperial citizenship and slotting this into different territories. These states sought to make population congruent with territory and singled out indigenous peoples and non-white migrants for exclusion in various ways. This included other British imperial subjects. For example, the literary test invented in Natal was used in Australia and New Zealand to exclude Asian migrants without explicitly racialising imperial citizenship and the passport was produced in India to control the number of Indians who could go overseas.[80] Inhabitants of the Straits Settlements took note of these developments. A good example of how the racialisation of citizenship trumped the letter of the law was given in the press when George Mackay, a Canadian missionary, returned to Vancouver and had to pay a $50 head tax when the immigration officials said his Chinese wife was not considered Canadian, even though they were married and she had taken his nationality under the law of both countries.[81] The paper was aware of the wider imperial dimensions, saying 'here is a wrinkle for the Australians'. The drawing of a global colour line between the white settler colonies and Britain's tropical colonies further truncated imperial citizenship despite the continuation of metropolitan universalist discourses on Empire. The division of sovereignty within empire thereby allowed the Dominions, in conversation with other white settler colonies, to 'decolonise', in the sense of enforcing nation-state congruencies *avant la lettre* and before the metropole.[82] Consequently, the idea of imperial citizenship was broken up by the marking of citizenship by race and its enforcement by self-governing territories. While this has mostly been studied in

relation to South Asians, British subjects in Southeast Asia were likewise affected, especially as they were labelled Chinese and thus prey to exclusionary laws directed against them as a race more than a legal nationality.

22 At the same time, China engaged in its own project of controlling migration and assigning belonging to its diaspora. In the late stages of the Qing Empire, as they begun to take on the trappings of a modern nation-state, the Qing formalised an expansive nationality law that recognised the principle of *jus sanguinis* and thus created a legal framework through which members of the diaspora could get Chinese nationality. This was carried through into the Republican period and remains little changed today. Historically, Chinese nationality had been based on the principle of perpetual allegiance and despite the ban on emigration, those who went abroad were still considered Chinese subjects no matter where they went or the nationality they acquired.[83] After the Opium Wars, the principle remained (for instance, embodied in the Burlingame Treaty) but its application was loosened and so nationality cases were mostly decided by local officials if ethnic Chinese returned to China. One benefit of this vagueness was that Chinese born abroad such as the Straits Chinese could more easily slot their identity into the gap left by Chinese nationality law and British common law practices, acknowledging themselves as British subjects with Chinese cultural and racial characteristics (but not subjects of the Qing) and creating the potential to manoeuvre in China or the Straits as British or Chinese depending on the circumstances. To a Chinese state that was becoming increasingly nationalised and modernised, even before 1911, this system was increasingly intolerable. Thus, the Qing, like the British, took aim at the threat of mixed loyalties and challenged foreign governments who were granting citizenship/subjecthood (and through nationality law, also a new nationality) to ethnic Chinese living abroad.[84] In particular, the 1909 Chinese nationality law was a response to a proposed change in Dutch law that would grant Chinese born in the Dutch East Indies Dutch subject status. [85]The Chinese law granted Chinese nationality to children of Chinese fathers no matter where they were born. It also required any Chinese subject wishing to acquire a foreign nationality to first get permission of discharge. If their loss of nationality was not proved, they would be considered to have remained a Chinese subject. It also contained the expansive clause that 'any Chinese subject who, prior to the operation of this law, has long resided abroad in consequences of his birth and yet is desirous of retaining Chinese nationality shall be deemed to be a Chinese.'[86]

23 The nationality law formed part of a longer-term process of Qing courting of the overseas Chinese, including those born abroad. Hoo Ah Kay's appointment in 1877 as the first Chinese Consul to Singapore was a noteworthy shift in policy.[87] He was followed by Tso Ping Lung, a well-known employee of the Zongli Yamen who made the post more significant by his prominent reputation in China.[88] Tso focused on ensuring the Chinese in Singapore kept in touch with their Chinese roots by starting a literary association for classical learning and helping found the Chinese language newspaper *Lat Pau* in 1881.[89] He felt that locally born Chinese were just British subjects who wore Chinese clothes and was appalled at their loss of Chinese identity.[90] Other Chinese likened this process to 'becoming barbarians', thus making them, by definition, outsiders to the Chinese nation.[91] As a result of these conflicting allegiances, it was all the more important that China corral overseas Chinese back into their fold if they were to be made useful in the development of China. Consequently, the Qing began selling titles to wealthy Chinese as a way of earning both money and loyalty at a time of great

uncertainty about the future of China.[92] Titles were also given as rewards for overseas Chinese who had donated large sums for things like flood relief, hospitals, coastal defences and so on. For example, Gan Eng Seng, born in Malacca, was gifted a title for his philanthropic donations to Fujian.[93] This prompted concerns within the British administration about the Chinese population moving towards China.[94] Here, the Qing were competing with the British who did not award a knighthood to any Straits Chinese until Song Ong Siang in 1936 (although it did grant lesser titles such as Justice of the Peace which were much prized by Babas). Tso also launched a fortnightly debating society which sought to remind Straits Chinese of Confucian values and customs.[95] Lim Boon Keng ended up becoming one of the most active leaders in promoting Confucianism in the Straits and later mainland China. As a result, we can see how Straits Chinese also fell under the Qing's new transnational concerns.

24 In 1893, Chinese diplomat Xue Fucheng sent a memorial to the imperial court to end the prohibition on emigration. This was accepted by the Zongli Yamen who said emigrants were welcome to return and would be treated equally to other Chinese. It also said that all Chinese 'who have crossed the seas' will be acknowledged as 'children of the Empire', thereby retaining a claim on all ethnic Chinese living across the world.[96] In this respect, China began to adopt a racialised and nationalised approach to statehood which sought out the participation of overseas Chinese even before the 1911 revolution took place. These Qing policies opened new routes for greater Straits Chinese inclusion in the Empire by giving them a political role in China by virtue of their heritage.

25 While, as Shao Dan argues, the 1909 Qing nationality law was meant to force a perpetual legal allegiance to the Qing *state*, it had the unintentional side effect of promoting a racialised notion of the Chinese *nation* by defining subjects by blood.[97] This was already evident in the Qing response to the boycott as they attempted to enter and engage with the international system as an equal player. In turn they had to accept, to some degree, the racial terms that allowed mobility to be marked in the first place.[98] Both Han Chinese ethnonationalists and Manchu rulers were satisfied with the new law and its possibility to be read as the basis for a multi-ethnic empire led by the Qing or a nascent Han Chinese nation-state. For example, Sun Yat-sen argued that the 'Chinese belong to the yellow race because they come from the blood stock of the yellow race' and that was the basis of the Chinese nation.[99] Sun was drawing on a racialised conception of Chineseness that was formed in part out of an appropriation of Western ideas about race and in part out of the West's own insistence on Chinese racial difference.[100] The 1909 law, promulgated by the Qing and carried over by the Republican state, laid the basis for a deterritorialised vision of China that encompassed those with Chinese blood all over the world, including the Straits Chinese. Through this law, the regulation of mobility, and international diplomacy, the Chinese state, especially in its more nationalised post-1911 form, sought to make the 'messy social reality' of the diaspora into a 'legible and governable' category.[101] These anxieties over race and belonging as well as the ability of the state to define interiority and exteriority were symptomatic of the tightening of the hyphen between nationality and the state.

26 The Straits Chinese were especially concerned with nationality law because it affected their ability to legally solidify their identity as British subjects with Chinese blood. But because blood meant Chinese subject, we find numerous instances of disputes over the official nationality of Straits-born Chinese with questions regarding their true

allegiances and proper documentation. In the 1900s, the Straits Chinese British Association complained at length to the government of the Dutch East Indies that Straits-born Chinese travelling in the colony were being treated as Chinese nationals, not British, and that the only way they could get protection was by producing documents from the British consular authorities that would normally be unnecessary.[102] While the SCBA spent years negotiating with the Dutch hoping to achieve equality with Europeans and Japanese as British subjects, they had little success, nor support from Britain. By contrast, such disputes had formed the basis of Qing nationality law and in the last months of the Empire's existence a commission was sent to the Dutch East Indies to seek protection for the ill-treated Chinese there who it claimed as subjects, signalling the changing nature of diaspora-Chinese relations.[103] A similar incident occurred in 1897 in Amoy (discussed in more detail later), when a Straits Chinese was arrested in China and denied the consular protection that was his right as a British subject.[104] This prompted Song Ong Siang to write an article in the *Straits Chinese Magazine* clarifying the legal aspects of Straits-born nationality for Chinese who 'intend to find a resting place for their bones in our soil.'[105] He insisted, as the SCBA would continue to do, that under the 1867 Naturalisation Ordinance, the Straits government must 'be bound to uphold our contention that every child born in this colony, irrespective of the nationality of its parents, is a natural born British subject, and entitled to enjoy all the privileges which British nationality confers.' Babas complained that the passports given by the Straits authorities to natural-born British subjects visiting China required too much paperwork to be convenient or were rejected by China and put them at risk of being placed under Chinese jurisdiction.[106] Song Ong Siang continued to push on this issue, saying as late as the 1920s that 'the proofs of loyalty and patriotism and the service in numerous forms to the British Empire... should justify the British Imperial Government in putting an end to diplomatic uncertainty and claiming the right to protect, by the issue of unqualified British passports, every Chinese born in the Colony, because he is a naturalised British subject, whether travelling to China or elsewhere.'[107] As a result, we can see how British nationality law was unevenly applied even as it became more important to international mobility.

27 Here we also see Song falling prey to the slippage between Chinese as a race and a nationality. This was a common question which the Straits Chinese had to clarify to others. The Government Gazette, when announcing the naturalisation of Chinese, would specify that 'these Chinese, while still of Chinese race, are no longer of Chinese nationality, but have become British subjects.'[108] However, Britishers and mainland Chinese still frequently forgot or equated the two. For example, before arguing in favour of reforms to English language education in the colony, Lim Boon Keng had to correct the Governor who had repeated the common misconception that children of aliens born in the colony were not British subjects.[109] The British themselves usually only made this specification when it suited their claims vis-à-vis China. In 1894, for instance, a new Qing decree allowed the Chinese Consul-General in Singapore to sell a kind of passport to Chinese wanting to return to China which was allegedly also offered to Chinese British subjects. The Straits government saw this a violation of their sovereignty and told the Consul-General it must relegate itself to commercial matters and no longer interfere in matters of English law.[110] As one paper later stated, 'there can be no hybrid political condition here or anywhere else.'[111] Around this time, nationality law was being crafted in many new nation-states specifically to avoid the

possibility of split allegiances during wartime and other ‘hybrid political conditions’. Just before the First World War, Italy, for example, concerned with Italian emigration, stopped short of allowing dual nationality for fear of losing out on vital manpower in the event of war.[112] In a similar fashion, the question ‘who would you fight for if war broke out?’ was raised on numerous occasions in the Straits Settlements papers, suggesting that military service was the ultimate test of national identity.[113] Many Straits Chinese rejected this logic. For instance, one Mr. Lim Cheng Ean argued that ‘that nationality was merely a political status entirely different from the race. A Chinese could be a British subject and yet could cultivate in him the culture, custom and manners of the Chinese race’ and this was not ‘conflicting nor contradictory’.[114] While they were willing to serve Britain in the First World War, they felt it was unlikely a war would break out between Britain and China and so it was a moot point.[115]

28 Although Britain’s more liberal nationality law did recognise dual nationality, it was evidently a constant point of concern. British residents of the Straits had difficulty coming to terms with the idea of identifying with the Chinese race but being a British subject, believing it implied either a cunning ploy by the Chinese to get the best of both worlds or an allegiance to two imperial states that was problematic in the event of conflict between the two. The *Pinang Gazette*, for example, responded to this issue with an editorial entitled ‘Straits-Born Celestials Desire a Dual Nationality’, and thought it bizarre that Straits Chinese who may have been there for several generations try ‘to be at once an English Dr. Jekyll and a Chinese Mr. Hyde’.[116] The British could not reconcile the notion of British imperial subjecthood as a form of nationality (a terminal identity) with the lived reality of cosmopolitan Singapore and its hybridised communities such as the Straits-born who also made claims to being Chinese. This was made more complicated by the commonplace assumption among Europeans that race, nationality, and citizenship were the same thing, and the fact that Chinese nationality law officially made this equation of blood and nationality. The belief that race defined nationality (usually also meaning citizenship) and the knowledge that Chinese nationality law also operated under this assumption meant the allegiance of the Straits Chinese was questioned from both sides during this period. Caught in the middle, the Straits Chinese were forced into trying to square a circle that had not previously existed. The cosmopolitan habitus that both empires had allowed for was being overridden by the growing affiliation of nation and state in China and Britain.

29 There is a postscript to this story which demonstrates the potential for violence inherent to the blurred lines between race and nationality. The dangers of this slippage became most visible and most significant at the moment of decolonisation, although the roots were laid decades earlier. The ascendence of a Chinese nation-state, fractured again on political lines, out of war with the Japanese, plus the anticolonial movement in Malaya and British negotiations for decolonisation, all structured the common classification of the overseas Chinese as Chinese nationals. The Straits Chinese were not immune from this classificatory project seen as a precursor to decolonisation. Tan Cheng Lock is a good example. Born in Malacca in 1883 to a Straits Chinese family dating back to the eighteenth century, Tan was educated at Raffles Institution, entered the Municipal Commission, received a CBE in 1933 and was official representative of the Straits Settlements to the Coronation of King George VI in London in 1937. Growing up around 1900, Tan was also caught up in the Straits Chinese reform movement and remained very conscious of his Chinese heritage, later being dubbed the ‘Sage of Malacca’, a term with Chinese connotations, specifically for his ‘thorough knowledge of

Chinese history, culture and philosophy and coupled with his knowledge of Western culture.'[117] He founded the Malayan Chinese Association and was recognised as one of the main political leaders in favour of unifying Malays and Chinese in a more racially harmonious federation. At his death in 1960, we see how his being 'Chinese' obscured the nature of his belonging. Tunku Abdul Rahman, for example, praised him because 'he refused to identify himself with China' but noted 'he was also proud to be a Chinese and a Malayan.'[118] Cheah Toon Look, president of the Malayan Chinese Association in Penang, described him as a 'great Malayan leader and patriot whose death last night has cast a gloom over every Chinese household.'[119] Being Chinese as an ethnic category was therefore not always carefully delimited from Chinese as a national category. One could be Chinese ethnically but not Chinese nationally (Chinese but not Chinese). Though being one but not the other was a source of praise in Tan's case given the context of the Emergency and the foundation of the People's Republic of China, the lexical confusion the term 'Chinese' (in English at least) created with the added alignment of Malays with Malaya/Malaysia meant the Chinese were always at risk of having their identity defined for them by the various actors involved.[120] The blurred lines between the two allowed for violence. One could be transformed from ethnically Chinese to nationally Chinese (and therefore a Communist threat) at the discretion of the state or simply a crowd. As a result, this 'bound seriality' as Anderson calls it, was 'unbound', and Chinese residents of the Straits became caught up in the ethnic 'unmixing of peoples' that accompanied decolonisation.[121] Thus, the deportation of thousands of Chinese, many of whom were born in the Straits Settlements, in the post-war period, and the creation of a legal mechanism by which individuals had to 'choose' a nationality, represents the dark end-point to the marking of citizenship and its fixation to the state.[122] Consequently, the Straits Chinese status as in-betweeners marked them out for exclusion from both mainland China and post-colonial Malaya.

FOOTNOTES

1. For an overview of Chinese emigration to Southeast Asia see, Anthony Reid, "Flows and Seepages in the Long-term Chinese Interaction with Southeast Asia", in *Sojourners and Settlers: Histories of Southeast China and the Chinese*, ed. Anthony Reid (St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1996) and Philip A. Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others: Emigration in Modern Times* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009).

2. See, John Shepherd, "Some demographic characteristics of Chinese immigrant populations: lessons for the study of Taiwan's population history," in *Maritime China in Transition 1750-1850*, eds. Wang Gungwu and Ng Chin-Keong (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz Verlag, 2004) and J.W. Cushman and A.C. Milner, "Eighteenth and Nineteenth-Century Chinese Accounts of the Malay Peninsula," *Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 52, no. 1 (1979): 1-56, "The Straits-born Chinese," *Straits Times*, February 5, 1914.

3. On these mechanisms of connection see, Elizabeth Sinn, "Xin Xi Guxiang: A Study of Regional Associations as a Bonding Mechanism in the Chinese Diaspora. The Hong Kong Experience," *Modern Asian Studies* 31, no. 2 (1997): 375-397, Patricia Ebrey, "Surnames and Han Chinese

Identity," in *Negotiating Ethnicities in China and Taiwan*, ed. Melissa Brown (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), Lawrence W. Crissman, "The Segmentary Structure of Urban Overseas Chinese Communities," *Man* 2, no. 2 (1967): 185-204, G. William Skinner, "Creolized Chinese Societies in Southeast Asia," in *Sojourners and Settlers,* Lane J. Harris, "Overseas Chinese Remittance Firms, the Limits of State Sovereignty, and Transnational Capitalism in East and Southeast Asia, 1850s-1930s," *Journal of Asian Studies* 74, no. 1 (2015): 129-151.

4. George Windsor Earl, *The Eastern Seas* (London: W. M. Hallen, 1837), 363.

5. Mark Ravinder Frost, "*Emporium in Imperio*: Nanyang Networks and the Straits Chinese in Singapore, 1819-1914," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 36, no. 1 (2005): 29-66.

6. It is sometimes suggested that Baba, Straits Chinese and Straits-born should not be used interchangeably as they represent differences of degree. See, Png Poh-Seng, "The Straits Chinese in Singapore: A Case of Local Identity and Socio-Cultural Accommodation," *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 10, no. 1 (1969): 99.

7. "The Straits-born Chinese," *Straits Times*, February 5, 1914.

8. "Chinese Emigration and Colonisation," *The Examiner*, September 9, 1854.

9. Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native* (London: Frank Cass, 1977). Not all agreed however, with John Dill Ross, a ship captain and sometime writer, feeling that those born and raised in the Straits were capable of becoming "a sleek, contended and pleasant creature, highly intelligent, and gifted with nerves as sensitive as could be wished... A little strain of Malay blood seems to vastly improve the Chinaman." John Dill Ross, *The Capital of a Little Empire: A Description Study of a British Crown Colony in the Far East* (Singapore: Singapore Free Press, 1898), 69.

10. Chen Da, *Chinese Migrations, with Special Reference to Labor Conditions* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1923), 62. For more on Baba, non-Baba relations see Tan Chee-Beng, "Baba Chinese, Non-Baba Chinese and Malays: A Note on Ethnic Interaction in Malacca," *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science* 7, no. 1/2 (1979): 20-29.

11. "Public Health in Singapore," *Singapore Free Press*, January 10, 1901.

12. Earl, *The Eastern Seas*, 363.

13. J.D. Vaughan, *The Manners and Customs of the Chinese* (Singapore: Mission Press, 1879), 42.

14. "Locke on Sanitation," *Straits Times*, September 17, 1909.

15. See, for example, Barbara Bush, "Gender and Empire: The Twentieth Century," in *Gender and Empire*, ed. Philippa Levine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 86-98.

16. "Sanitation and Nationality," *Straits Times*, September 18, 1909, "Mens Sana in Corpora Sano," *Straits Times*, November 25, 1909.

17. Kwa Chong Guan, et al. *Great Peranakans: Fifty Remarkable Lives* (Singapore: Asian Civilisations Museum, 2015), 154. Quoted in *Straits Times*, February 5, 1909. Discussed further in Karen M. Teoh, *Schooling Diaspora: Women, Education, and the Overseas Chinese in British Malaya and Singapore, 1850s-1960s*," (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 81.

18. Lim Boon Keng quoted in Song Ong Siang, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore* (London: John Murray, 1923), 4.

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20. Rev. W. Murray, "Some Reminiscences and Reflections," *Straits Chinese Annual* (Singapore: 1930), 44.

21. *Straits Settlements: Report for 1906* (London: Darling and Sons, 1907), 29.

22. *Census of the Straits Settlements, 3rd April 1881* (Singapore) and J.R. Innes, *Report on the Census of the Straits Settlements taken on 1st March 1901* (Singapore: 1901).

23. Benedict Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparison: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World* (London: Verso, 1998), ch 1.

24. "Chinese at Hotel Bars," *Straits Times*, September 17, 1909.

25. "Treatment of Straits Chinese Babas in Prison," *Daily Advertiser*, March 3, 1894.
26. "Chinese Babas," *Daily Advertiser*, March 5, 1894.
27. See, for example, Charles W. Mills, *Black Rights/White Wrongs: The Critique of Racial Liberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), Cheryl I. Harris, "Whiteness as Property," *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (1993): 1707-1791, Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of Our Government Segregated America* (New York: Liveright, 2017), Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), Karuna Mantena, *Alibis of Empire: Henry Maine and the Ends of Liberal Imperialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).
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29. See, for example, Gary Wilder, *Freedom Time: Negritude, Decolonization, and the Future of the World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).
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32. Chunilal Lallubhai Parekh, ed., *Essays, Speeches, Addresses and Writings, (on Indian Politics,) of the Hon'ble Dadabhai Naoroji* (Bombay: Caxton, 1887).
33. *Eighth Report of Her Majesty's Civil Service Commissioners* (London: George E. Eyre and William Spottiswoode, 1863), 349.
34. Stanley A. Wolpert, *India*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 57-8. Niraja Gopal Jayal, *Citizenship and its Discontent: An Indian History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 36-8.
35. Uday Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999). Also Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).
36. "Hong Kong and Straits Settlements," House of Commons, Volume 35, March 13, 1912, 1082.
37. "Colonial Civil Service," House of Commons, Volume 35, March 20, 1912, 1864-1865.
38. "Colonial Civil and Police Services," House of Commons, Volume 36, March 27, 1912, 421.
39. Ibid. and "Colonial Civil Service," House of Commons, Volume 36, April 3, 1912, 1161-2. Wu Lien-teh is now famous as one of the inventors the medical face mask.
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49. For example, "'Freedom' in Hongkong," *Straits Times*, September 12, 1905, and "Give the Devil his Due," *Eastern Daily Mail*, September 16, 1905.
50. "Chinese Versus Americans," *Eastern Daily Mail*, December 15, 1905.
51. Wong Sin Kiong, "The Chinese Boycott," 239.

52. "A Singapore Dock Boycott," *Singapore Free Press*, December 21, 1905.
53. "Strike at Tanjong Pagar," *Singapore Free Press*, December 21, 1905.
54. "Chinese Versus Americans," *Eastern Daily Mail*, December 15, 1905.
55. "Boycott Originator Honoured," *Eastern Daily Mail*, December 1, 1905, and, Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 2006), 35.
56. Quoting Walter Benjamin, Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 25.
57. Edward J.M. Rhoads, *China's Republican Revolution: The Case of Kwangtung, 1895-1913* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 88, and, "The Anti-American Boycott," *Straits Times*, December 21, 1905.
58. "American Boycott," *Eastern Daily Mail*, November 27, 1905.
59. Shih-shan H. Ts'ai, "Reaction to Exclusion," 96.
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62. "Chinese Versus Americans," *Eastern Daily Mail*, December 15, 1905.
63. "The Basis of the Boycott," *Eastern Daily Mail*, December 20, 1905.
64. "To Juggernaut," *Singapore Free Press*, July 6, 1905.
65. "The Anti-American Boycott," *Straits Times*, December 21, 1905.
66. "The United States and China," *Straits Times Weekly Issue*, April 12, 1892.
67. "The Possibilities of Chinese Emigration," *Straits Times Weekly Issue*, October 15, 1890. See also, "The "White Australian" Fanatic," *Singapore Free Press*, July 14, 1922.
68. "Chinese Emigration to the Straits," *Straits Times Weekly Issue*, May 20, 1891.
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70. "The True "Yellow Peril,"" *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, November 10, 1898.
71. Burbank and Cooper, "Beyond "identity,"" 15.
72. Ross Terrill discusses China's claims on overseas Chinese in his book, Ross Terrill, *The New Chinese Empire: And What It Means for the United States* (New York: Basic Books, 2003).
73. Brubaker, "Migration, Membership, and the Modern Nation-State," 64.
74. McKeown, *Melancholy Order*, 1.
75. Eric C. Han, "The nationality law and entry restrictions of 1899: constructing Japanese identity between China and the West," *Japan Forum* 30, no. 4 (2018): 521-542.
76. John Torpey, *The Invention of the Passport: Surveillance, Citizenship and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), ch 4.
77. Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism Between the Two World Wars* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 39.
78. Quoted in, "British Citizenship," *Malaya Tribune*, April 20, 1914.
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80. Radhika Mongia, *Indian Migration and Empire: A Colonial Genealogy of the Modern State* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), ch 4, David Atkinson, *The Burden of White Supremacy: Containing Asian Migration in the British Empire and the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016). See also, Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
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82. Andrew Baker, "Divided sovereignty: Empire and nation in the making of modern Britain," *International Politics* 46, no. 6 (2009): 691-711.
83. Tsai Chutung, "Chinese Nationality Law, 1909," *American Journal of International Law* 4, no. 2 (1910): 404-5.
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86. For the full text of the law see, "Law on the Acquisition and Loss of Chinese Nationality," *American Journal of International Law* 4, no. 2 (1910): 160-166.

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89. For more on Chinese newspapers in Singapore see, Chen Mong Hock, *The Early Chinese Newspapers of Singapore, 1881-1912* (Singapore: University of Malaya Press, 1967).

90. Yen Ching-hwang, *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya, 1800-1911* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1986), 288.

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92. Yen Ching-hwang, *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya, 1800-1911* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1986), 288.

93. Song Ong Siang, *One Hundred Years*, 273.

94. C.F. Yong and R.B. McKenna, *The Kuomintang Movement in British Malaya, 1912-1949* (Singapore: NUS Press, 1990), 18.

95. Yen Ching-hwang, *A Social History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya*, 289.

96. Song Ong Siang, *One Hundred Years*, 279.

97. Shao Dan, "Chinese by Definition: Nationality Law, Jus Sanguinis, and State Succession, 1909-1980," *Twentieth-Century China* 35, no. 1 (2009): 12-19.

98. For further elaboration on how the Qing and Chinese elite reformers engaged with this question see, McKeown, *Melancholy Order*, ch 4.

99. Sun Yat-sen, *San Min Chu I: The Three Principles of the People*, trans. Frank W. Pierce (Vancouver: Soul Care Publishing, 2011), 5.

100. For more on Chinese racial thinking see Frank Dikötter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1992).

101. Ana Maria Candela, "Sociology in Times of Crisis: Chen Da, National Salvation and the Indigenization of Knowledge," *Journal of World-Systems Research* 21, no. 2 (2015): 371.

102. Song Ong Siang, *One Hundred Years*, 489. As further testimony of the difference in treatment across the water see, John Coming Chinaman, *Bright Celestials: The Chinaman at Home and Abroad* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1894), 158-165.

103. "China and the Dutch East Indies," *Weekly Sun*, June 24, 1911.

104. "The Amoy Incident," *Straits Times*, December 8, 1897.

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106. "Chinese British Subjects," *Straits Telegraph and Daily Advertiser*, May 6, 1899

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108. *Singapore Free Press*, December 13, 1911.

109. "Legislative Council," *Straits Times*, January 22, 1902.

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112. Torpey, *The Invention of the Passport*, 129.

113. See, for example, "The Duties and Privileges of a Chinese British Subject," *Eastern Daily Mail*, February 28, 1906, "Both British and Chinese," *Straits Times*, February 11, 1908. And for a later period, Chua Ai Lin, "Nation, Race, and Language: Discussing transnational identities in colonial Singapore, circa 1930," *Modern Asian Studies* 46, no. 2 (2012): 283-302.

114. "The Straits-Born Chinese," *Malaya Tribune*, February 12, 1931.

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116. "Both British and Chinese," *Straits Times*, February 11, 1908.

117. Thomas R. P. Dawson, ed. *"The Sage of Malacca:" A Brief Memoir* (Life Printers: Kuala Lumpur, 1966), 12.

118. Ibid., 14.

119. Ibid., 25.

120. The Chinese language distinguishes between people belonging to the Chinese state (or Middle Kingdom) and those of Han ethnicity.

121. Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons*, ch 1, Rogers Brubaker, "Aftermaths of Empire and the Unmixing of Peoples," in *After Empire: Multiethnic Societies and Nation-Building*, eds. Karen Barkey and Mark von Hagen (Oxford: Westview Press, 1997).

122. For a study of deportation in this context see Low Choo Chin, "The repatriation of the Chinese as a counter-insurgency policy during the Malayan Emergency," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 45, no. 3 (2014): 363-392, and, Karl Hack, "Detention, Deportation and Resettlement: British Counterinsurgency and Malaya's Rural Chinese, 1948-60," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 43, no. 4 (2015): 611-640. "Choice-making" is how Malayan nationality law was phrased by a British legal scholar at the time, F. G. Carnell, "Malayan Citizenship Legislation," *International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 1, no. 4 (1952): 515.

3. The Social and Cultural World of the Straits Chinese

1 As John Berger writes ‘it is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world.’[1] Peoples’ interaction with the colonial environment cannot only be understood through what they wrote but also by looking at what they saw. This is no more a reconstructive act than poring over the archives for fragments of texts out of which we also build a picture of the time. In seeking to understand the politics of a place (and of place), intellectual and political histories could benefit from a greater attention to the actual social and cultural worlds that their subjects of study inhabited. Again, John Berger: ‘Our vision is continually active, continually moving, continually holding things in a circle around itself, constituting what is present to us as we are.’[2] To account for the spatial dimension of the Straits Chinese and their positioning between worlds, I therefore want to highlight the social world they inhabited and its material cultures to demonstrate how these enabled and encouraged a certain kind of cosmopolitan posturing relative to Britain, China and the Straits. In the socio-cultural realm the Straits Chinese also began to differentiate themselves and carve out a unique space in the colonial environment, albeit one that was also contested on all sides.

2 Like Judith Butler’s idea of gender, being Straits Chinese was also ‘an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts.’[3] This included things like dress, speech, hairstyling, and decoration as well as many other behaviours under scrutiny by the dominant colonial class who controlled the gates to acceptance as British. While abstract legal definitions were of course important, performativity defined the reality of their application on the ground. The ability to ‘act’ as British or Chinese or Straits Chinese when it suited them was threatening to imperial categories and nationalist logics. Understandings of the Straits Chinese, by themselves and others, were filtered through lenses of race and gender and their performative aspects. Thus, how they were seen and how they presented themselves reflected important aspects of their identity and its constraints. Since this was intimately connected to the increasing links between nation and state, contestations over Straits Chinese subjectivities reflected wider negotiations between cosmopolitanism and nationalism. I am therefore interested in the social and cultural background that made a city into a ‘cosmopolitan thought zone’, a space where conversations could take place ‘across lines of difference’.[4] This was

especially so for the elite classes who shared a 'symbolic environment', which, to some extent, superseded their different backgrounds.[5] At the same time, the point to emphasise here is that neither Anglicisation nor Sinification were the obvious outcomes of the social world of the Straits and rather that the Straits Chinese sought to form their own community by navigating through and building on both.

3.1 Quotidian Cosmopolitanism

3 Everyday life in the Straits Settlements was far less segregated than top-down urban plans would have us believe. Compared to Hong Kong and Shanghai, visitors were surprised by the relative degree of freedom with which the Chinese went about the city, going to tiffin at the same hotels or chatting with Europeans at the museum.[6] Travelogues and novels well attest to this fact and often consist of lengthy descriptions of one race jostling another in the busy streets of the port cities.[7] More so than jostling, however, the inhabitants of these cities recorded various times and spaces of interaction that allowed for what I call a quotidian cosmopolitanism. In different aspects of everyday life, the Straits Chinese embodied a cosmopolitanism in customs and habits that fits with how we most commonly use the word in everyday speech. As one article described the cosmopolitan, 'determined to have the best of the good things of the world, he encourages their culture by adopting from each and every nation whatever in art, literature, music is most pleasing, adding thereto the delights of luxurious living and good cooking.'[8] The hospitality that small-scale spaces of interaction like cities allowed for, if embraced, was significant in the development of a cosmopolitan habitus which pervaded Straits Chinese society perhaps more than any other community of the Settlements. It is this social-cultural background which is somewhat missing in Leela Gandhi's idea of 'affective communities' that disrupt the 'barren space of colonial division'.[9] The Manicheanism embodied both in the colonial difference and the world of nation-states was unwoven by cosmopolitan cities such as Singapore which offered, on the initiative of its populace more than the state, possibilities for identities that could be overlapping rather than mutually exclusive. In this world, one could more easily be British and Chinese and Straits-born. Instead of the 'categorical kinship between the political economy of nationhood and nativist cultural projects' which nationalism later in the century tended towards, asserting a collective identity fixed in place, the nationalisms of the Straits' diverse diasporic peoples were moderated by its quotidian cosmopolitanism, encouraging nationalism and cosmopolitanism to exist side by side, even within the same individual.[10]

4 The Straits Chinese arguably had privileged access to European society which resulted from their racial differentiation from China-born Chinese, argued above, of which their class was a significant part. Furthermore, their embrace of various aspects of what was considered British culture, while simultaneously retaining and adjusting to influences from China and Malaya, allowed the Straits Chinese to move more smoothly between worlds and craft a space of their own in the region. As one colonial newspaper wrote, 'they are educated, they go into everything that is European, such as sports, balls, social gatherings etc.'[11] As early as 1852, Baba Tan Kim Seng held an extravagant but quintessentially Straits reception that was recorded in *Household Words*, a London paper edited by Charles Dickens, in which the Straits Chinese were recognised for bringing together Chinese, Indians, Europeans, Muslims, Jews, Parsis and Eurasians together at

social events.[12] Their interactions extended to the emulation of the social club, an institution that is typically seen as emblematic of colonial segregation on racial (and gendered) lines.[13] This racial exclusivity was challenged by the rise of a local elite who held British citizenship, went to English schools and often adopted the Christian faith. Social organisations such as the Straits Chinese Recreation Club founded in 1884, mirrored the European Tanglin Club and competed frequently with it in sports.[14] More significantly, the Straits Chinese went to English-medium schools with Europeans. At the first annual dinner of Old Raffles Boys in June 1911, A.W. Still gave a toast praising Raffles School for representing the blend of 'East and West' of Singapore and having sent numerous 'pupils of Asiatic parentage' to the West 'where they had proved themselves the equals of the best that the West could produce.'[15] Given the diversity of the student population and the reformist push for greater instruction on China in and out of school, we should not assume this resulted in the creation of zealous John Bulls. Rather, here we see how, as Tim Harper argues, 'there existed a world of sociability between the colonial élite and local society, a sphere in which the strict racial hierarchies became more ambivalent.'[16]

5 Formal colonial social events enforced a greater racial division than daily life. For example, in 1886 a major celebration was held for the centenary of Penang's foundation by Sir Francis Light which, at least from the newspaper descriptions, seemed to enthral the whole population. Different communities organised their own events, such as the Chinese who conducted their own regattas and firework shows.[17] The British reported that the Chinese also excluded Malays, who ended up holding their own race of fishing boats and sampans, as did Indians who had their own 'Kling' race.[18] Later, when the city gathered to watch the fireworks, the Chinese, mistakenly it would seem, occupied the Esplanade leaving the Europeans to find somewhere else to watch.[19] Nevertheless, the lines between communities were still somewhat blurred, not least because many of these physical spaces were shared, as evidenced by the confusion on the open Esplanade. While 'natives' peered into the Cricket Club Pavilion to watch the European sports, at other occasions Europeans, Chinese, Malays and Indians seem to have mingled quite freely, especially those of high status. At the centenary fancy dress ball, for example, the Sultan of Johore was present along with a long list of leading Babas and China-born Chinese.[20] At another ball, the main speeches were given by Babas such as Koh Cheng Sean whose family had been resident on the island since before the Union Jack was raised.[21] The horse races and other sporting events were likewise attended by important non-European locals such as Seah Song Seah from a famous Straits Chinese family, and one race was presented by the local Anglo-Chinese Reading Club.[22] Thus, descriptions of colonial society which split life into European and native suggested a divide that was more imagined than real.

6 The construction of Victoria Memorial Hall and its commemoration in 1905 serves as another valuable example. After Queen Victoria's death, a committee was formed for a public hall memorial which included not only some of the most prominent British names but also several non-Europeans such as Lim Boon Keng, Seah Liang Seah, Tan Jiak Kim, Tungku Ali, Syed Mohomed Alsagoff, B.P. de Silva, Alagappa Chitty and others.[23] The Settlements created a large public fund which, according to the Governor John Anderson, was truly 'international' and was 'contributed to by every section of the community comprising all the nationalities, denominations and creeds, of which our somewhat cosmopolitan population is constituted.'[24] This, and the celebration of its unveiling, was taken as a sign of unity in the colony and a shared sense of duty to

Empire exemplified by the Queen. The idealist cosmopolitan vision of Empire was thus embodied in the Memorial itself, situated at 'a site so central and conspicuous that every one in the Settlement must pass or see it.'[25] As events in the Straits would soon show, this unity was fragile and as yet little tested by the growing forces of anti-imperialism, but nevertheless, we should not disregard the symbolism of such events and the genuine potential for combining across lines of difference in specific urban contexts. These events were central to the cultivation of British subjecthood out of the diversity of the urban environment and unsettled the division between nationalism and cosmopolitanism under the framework of empire. While the cosmopolitan possibilities available at this turning point were evidently constrained by the formation of nation-states and the realities of racial hierarchies, the social world of the Straits still offered glimpses of a more fluid society that was emblematic of a global bourgeoisie in formation not solely along European lines.[26]

7 The availability of shared social events made it possible to push political matters. For example, at one fancy dress party hosted by the Chinese Weekly Entertainment Club with several European guests, Lim Boon Keng, who came dressed as a Huntsman, 'waived aside' all distinctions of the Empire's component parts and argued that Asiatic British subjects in the colony should be allowed to form a volunteer corps, 'for, he argued, if they could not be trusted, they should be excluded from the British Empire.'[27] In 1901, after much negotiation, a company of Straits-born Chinese was formed in Singapore serving alongside but formed separately from the European corps.[28] Through hospitality and friendship as the basis of cosmopolitanism in Kantian fashion, the Straits Chinese could make claims to equality as citizens of the same empire, an equality that was evidenced, even if only partially, by the very fact of their shared social spaces, even as tensions clearly remained. Lim turned this point into a jokey remark at the end of his speech: 'In the name of the Club, he asked the European guests to overlook all shortcomings in the programme of the evening. It was the desire of the Club to do their best: if they failed, it was the duty of the Europeans to show them how to do better.'[29] By shifting the terms of debate away from top-down studies of residential patterns and government serialities, or even high-level political treatises, we are better able to see the social environments that were productive of cosmopolitanism as a 'way of being in the world'.

8 While these examples should not be taken prima facie as evidence of racial harmony, they do point to colonial urban environments in particular as places where a shared social environment and a mutual interest in each other's cultures (especially among the elite), however superficial this may have been, engendered a cosmopolitan lifestyle. As Lynn Hollen Lees has argued, this urban-rural divide in colonial Malaya was crucial in making different subjectivities available to people.[30] Compared to the plantation and mining dominated interior, or the white settler colonies for that matter, the port city space of Southeast Asia appeared to offer a less segregated social world in which those of the right social class could move quite freely. As Su Lin Lewis writes, cities were 'sites where emerging citizens contest and slip through hierarchies and disciplinary categories', and consequently 'interactions between the city's diverse inhabitants stimulated the evolution of shared and complex notions of identity, solidifying both communal and inter-communal ties.'[31] It is notable that the Straits Chinese enjoyed a privileged position in this world. Partly the result of British racial prejudice and partly the result of the Straits Chinese own posturing, Babas were able to enter and engage with European high society in a way that we more typically associate with the early

days of colonialism when arriving Europeans relied on local grandees.[32] In our case, the relationship appeared to be more mutualistic and encouraged the bifurcation of the Straits Chinese from their Chinese roots, although, as we have seen, they would continue to be labelled as such. If citizenship was marked by race as I have argued above, then this social world in which the Straits Chinese held a great deal of currency enabled a kind of whitening that brought them into the British fold. At the same time, we should not forget that the Straits Chinese continued, in large part, to maintain their own social world that was more closely attached to the Malay (especially on the women's side) and Chinese cultures with which they were associated.

3.2 Language

9 A superficial understanding of nationalism might have us believe that without a shared language there can be no nation, and therefore a nationalism of the Straits Settlements or Malaya would always be fragmented on linguistic lines. However, as John Edwards has written, 'the visible "content" of both ethnicity and nationalism is eminently mutable; what is immutable is the feeling of groupness.'[33] Language is one of those things which has been historically mutable. In a multilingual city such as Singapore, language could be both a line of difference and a point of communality. Inhabitants of port cities in Southeast Asia had long been accustomed to the use of lingua francas and the Straits Settlements were no different. In this sense, the use of English and Malay as lingua francas between Malaya's different communities was and still is an obvious example of their cosmopolitanism.

10 Historiographically speaking, there has been a tendency to associate vernacular languages with nationalism, and lingua francas (including shared imperial languages and pidgins) with cosmopolitanism. For example, Nile Green pushes back against recent literature on Indian Ocean cosmopolitanism which focuses heavily on travelling elites writing and communicating with each other in a shared colonial language and argues instead for a 'heterotopic' account that looks to vernacular sources to better understand the fragmentation, discord and division that also characterises the period.[34] While this is a useful corrective, Green's article remains problematic for its assumption that non-elites could not share in this cosmopolitanism through their own use of lingua francas, pidgins and creoles. And, more importantly, he and those he writes against ignore the possibilities of multilingualism. By describing vernacular and lingua franca as an either/or, just like nationality, Green and others miss out on the contextual and contingent nature of language use and its consequences for identity.

11 My arguments here are threefold. First, we should consider English itself a language which became disconnected from its European and colonial roots as it was adopted proactively by colonial subjects and transformed as a result. This helped remove it from its Eurocentric origins. Second, people such as the Straits Chinese were able to actively move between different languages or use them simultaneously in communicating with others. In this sense, the Straits was a translanguaging society as much as a multilingual one, a term in linguistics that refers to the use of various languages in one unified and intelligible communication system.[35] Following François Grosjean, we ought to understand bi- or multilingualism and its translingual dimensions as a holistic 'linguistic configuration', a kind of language in its own right rather than two separate languages that arise dependant on the context.[36] Baba Malay,

the language of many Straits Chinese, well reflects this. Third, the cosmopolitan possibilities these features allowed for were mitigated by the increasing congruency of nation, people and language which meant that creole communities such as the Straits Chinese found themselves an anomaly as the century wore on. Being labelled as Chinese without being able to speak the language was a contradiction that many Straits Chinese and others struggled with. In this sense, the language politics of the Straits Settlements corresponds to the larger historical trajectories I am tracing in this paper.

12 First of all, we might want to think of English as less clearly linked to the territory and culture of England than anti-colonial writings (often written in English) would have us believe. Polish writer Olga Tokarczuk, reflecting on the pervasiveness of English in her book *Flights*, notes that English speakers must feel lost in a world that is entirely expressed in their language: 'They don't have anything to fall back on... Wherever they are, people have unlimited access to them - they are accessible to everyone and everything!'[37] This accessibility has been one of the main features behind the cosmopolitanism of the English language. However, by virtue of its accessibility, English is also increasingly divorced from its roots as it becomes a universal language. Thus, we should not attribute its rise in the Straits to the Empire alone, but local appropriation and adaptation as well. This may help us follow a decolonial approach advocated by Walter Mignolo which 'delinks' English from its standardised form and makes it more (but perhaps not entirely) culturally neutral as a result.[38] Similarly, the prevalence of translanguaging in cosmopolitan society, for instance as English was mixed with Malay and Hokkien in everyday speech, even by Europeans, can be read as a decolonial practice that helped dissociate English (and other languages) from its standardised, hegemonic variety.[39] Thus, as it was adopted and reshaped by others and alongside other languages, English could be considered as part of a cosmopolitan identity rather than a strictly national one.

13 English educated colonial elites at this time rarely saw a contradiction in using what was nominally a 'colonial' language that did not belong to them to write about their own countries and cultures. The *Indo-Chinese Patriot*, for example, a paper which appeared in 1895 in Penang and 1900 in Singapore and explicitly addressed itself at both the Indian and Chinese communities, made easy use of English, saying 'English is eminently the speech of the Modern.'[40] Following the pan-Asianist logics of the time, the paper did not question using a language theoretically arising in the West to connect two of Asia's ancient civilisations which had long been, as the paper insisted, interconnected.[41] Indeed, the history of Indo-European languages demonstrates an even wider historical connectivity. This was made more obvious in the urban fabric of the Straits where the descendants of those peoples joined together again. For the Straits Chinese, this also matched up with a growing push to promote English in China for its modern, rational connotations more so than its Western origins.[42]

14 The other main language of the Straits Chinese, Baba Malay, was a linguistic manifestation of their creole background and identity which combined several languages in one. This phenomenon has been less remarked upon in Southeast Asia than Latin America. Gloria E. Anzaldúa, for example, prods and probes the traditional boundaries of scholarly writing by weaving English and Spanish together in the same text mimicking a long-standing practice of code-switching found in Latin American society.[43] The effect of this linguistic unorthodoxy on the monolingual reader is dramatic and serves to replicate the feeling of exteriority felt by many creole

communities who are denied a place in a world that prioritises the binary. In contrast to Ezra Pound's famous code-switching in *Cantos*, however, Anzaldúa performs this act of linguistic miscegenation to critique claims of linguistic purity which, in their assertion of an authentic philological origin, foreclose any possibility of creoles being recognised as equals.[44] This is an important aspect of her idea of 'Nepantla' coming from Nahuatl, which describes an in-betweenness that best encapsulated her experience as a Chicana woman: 'Nepantleras are threshold people; they move within and among multiple, often conflicting, worlds and refuse to align themselves exclusively with any single individual, group, or belief system.'[45]

15 The Straits Chinese, like the 'Nepantleras' Anzaldúa describes, similarly mixed multiple languages to the point of forming a speech that was uniquely their own. In the main multiethnic paper, Baba writer Lee Liang gave one example of a possible sentence spoken in a Straits Chinese household which illustrates the commonplace practice of translanguaging conducted in the private sphere: '*gua punya teacher banyak homia*' where '*gua* is Hokkien for 'I', *punya* is Malay for 'ownership', teacher is an English word; *banyak* is Malay for 'quantity, much'; and *homia* is Hokkien for 'fortunate', the whole sentence being translated as 'My teacher is very fortunate.'[46] Their distinct language reflected (and possibly still reflects) the hybridity of their identity as a transnational community in Southeast Asia. Baba Malay, as it was and still is called, made use of Hokkien, Malay, English, Tamil, Dutch and Portuguese grammar and vocabulary and formed over several generations of Chinese settlement in the Nanyang (other varieties existed throughout the region).[47] More so than English, Malay or Chinese (in its written form), all of which have served as lingua francas, Baba Malay was a product of global migration. Over the long run of human history, this is not unusual, however its relatively recent formation makes it stand out from its three main sources as a language that resulted specifically from the practice of translanguaging. Baba Malay as its own language was thus the direct result of this very practice, and perhaps its designation as a language distracts from its similarity to the creole varieties that members of all different Malayan communities must have spoken when interacting with one other, especially in centuries past. Consequently, although Baba Malay may have been the outcome of translanguaging, its creation also did not remove the need for the continuation of this practice in the Babel of the Straits. The *trans* aspect of this, like 'passing' in dress, speaks to the performative nature of Straits Chinese identity, and its *trans*gressive possibilities for states that prefer fixity and homogeneity and even for historians who have tended to overemphasise monolingual subjectivities.

16 The complex language politics of Malaya continued to pose a problem later in the century as nationalist forces promoted the use of either one common language to join linguistic communities together, or their own vernacular at the expense of others.[48] However, the colonial exigency of cosmopolitan language use in Singapore (to a greater extent than Malaysia) has since become an important part of its identity as a nation-state. Part of this is due to Lee Kuan Yew's own experiences of language learning. Lee Kuan Yew's personal life well attests to the role of language in the upbringing of many Straits Chinese and how this changed over the course of the first half of the twentieth century. As a fourth generation Peranakan, Lee's first language was English, with both his parents having attended English-medium schools. His anglophile family members encouraged English not only because it provided better job opportunities (a rationale behind many Straits Chinese going to English-medium schools even after the greater promotion of Mandarin), but also because they felt a close attachment to the British

Empire as a cosmopolitan construct.[49] Indeed Lee Kuan Yew was given the English name 'Harry', as with many other elite Straits Chinese at the time. Like lots of colonial subjects however, Lee's change of heart came as a direct result of his experience in the metropole where he was forced to come to terms with the fact of his less-than-Britishness. As he recalls it 'people there saw me as a Chinese, and so I became a Chinese.'[50] Despite being a British subject, his racial distinction from white Englishmen disrupted his claims to equality under the Empire. His wife went through the same experience. 'We were like hundreds of Raffles College graduates, not well-tutored in their own Asian cultures, yet not part of British culture either.'[51] As a result, Lee became a 'born-again Chinese' and set out to learn Mandarin as an adult, what Lee's English compatriots believed was his true 'own' language, thereby attempting to move out of the liminal space between Britain and Chinese.[52] Lee, his wife, and countless other colonial subjects thus realised the problems of subjecthood/citizenship in the British Empire. By contrast, Singapore has tried to reduce this sense of having to make a choice between languages and Lee's experiences proved formative to the state policy of bilingualism and biculturalism.

3.3 Sartorial Politics

17 Clothing is another aspect of material culture that came into special focus in the tumultuous period of the early twentieth century revealing the intimate connection between performativity and national belonging. The clothes we wear not only reflect our individual identities but also the social context in which we live. Since every act of clothing oneself involves a series of choices—expanded and limited by various factors such as the fabrics, styles and brands available, cost, sumptuary laws, and social custom, most notably in the form of religion—dress is thus deeply political. Clothing acts as an abbreviation of the individual, the outward visual impression of who a person is. Thanks to its complex set of signs and subtexts, Alison Lurie famously suggested we think of clothing as a language with its own grammar and vocabulary, dialects and expressions.[53] Given its visual and textured nature, clothing is a unique language; one that leaves an impression on others without the need for words or speech. As Bayart writes, 'practices of dress are rites of everyday life, both material and symbolic, through which the individual situates himself in society, and through which society is, ultimately, established.'[54] In the fabric of the city, clothing, as much as architecture, gives colour to the image of the street and an instant representation of both the individuals and communities that inhabit it. Given this quality, past clothing still *speaks* to us. And we would do well to try and listen. In a world where choice of clothing is forever scrutinised, studying such choices and reactions to them therefore reveals a great deal about the politics of the time. The Straits Settlements were not absent from these debates, nor were they untouched by the debates taking place elsewhere. In this sense, the sartorial politics of the Straits Settlements were very much informed by its global predicament. Given the uncertainties around identity that the Straits Chinese were facing in this period, it is unsurprising that clothing became an important topic of discussion among them. At the same time, other groups put pressure on, and questioned the decisions Straits Chinese made regarding their clothing. Thus, debates about clothing mirrored the overarching narratives about the position of the Straits Chinese between cultures.

The Amoy Incident

18 A particularly telling event in the history of Singapore's sartorial politics was the so-called 'Amoy incident' of 1897 when a Straits Chinese man named Khun Yiong was arrested in China.[55] As a British subject holding a passport signed by the Governor of the Straits Settlements, Khun Yiong was outraged when the British Minister refused to intervene on his behalf as was his due as a British subject in China. In response, he petitioned the government and the case became a lingering point of discussion in Hong Kong and the Straits Settlements where large numbers of British subjects of Chinese descent resided. While this case is interesting for demonstrating how British subject status was marked by race and held tenuously by non-Europeans, it also shows how without strong state enforcement, more open possibilities existed for people to play with the categories created for them, switching identities when moving between countries.

19 What I want to focus on here is the fact that Khun's choice of dress was one of the reasons behind the British Minister's refusal to interfere. The press uncovered an 1868 notification issued by Sir Rutherford Alcock (the Minister to China at the time) which observed that 'serious difficult exists in distinguishing such British subjects from natives amenable to Chinese laws only', and therefore claimed that those 'electing to sink their British nationality and reside or travel as Chinese among Chinese… cannot claim any exemption from the jurisdiction and laws of the country they adopt of their own free will and after due notice of the consequences.'[56] The regulation suggested that ethnic Chinese British subjects could not get protection in China unless 'he discarded his Chinese dress.' Since Khun had not done so and was allegedly presenting himself sartorially as a Chinese subject of the Emperor, the Minister had elected not to intervene.

20 The public response in the Straits and Hong Kong to the Minister's actions was hostile, with the European press pointing out that this regulation was highly impractical and not evenly enforced and had not been recently republished.[57] Referencing the contemporaneous Lüders affair wherein a German citizen born in Haiti of a local mother who was arrested by the Haitian government prompted the arrival of two German warships and an ultimatum, they also noted the British failure in not rushing to the defence of a British subject in a Chinese prison.[58] More importantly, the Chinese in Singapore were recorded as believing the Minister should have intervened once he was made aware of Khun Yiong's British subject status regardless of his choice of clothing.[59]

21 This incident revealed to many in the Straits Chinese community that passing as British was as important in terms of dress as it was language, loyalty, religion and so forth in order to carry the same rights as a white British subject. Indeed to 'pass' was the term used by many at the time.[60] In the American context, 'passing' was historically used to connote an act of transgression whereby Blacks posed as Whites to gain fraudulent advantages.[61] We see a similar kind of hostility here, albeit going the opposite way, in the British response. Charles Walter Sneyd-Kynnersley, later the acting Colonial Secretary of the Straits Settlements, repeated a common trope found in British writings of the time when he replied to Khun Yiong's petition saying 'Her Majesty's Government cannot allow persons of Chinese race born in this Colony to

enjoy the benefits of a double nationality', and that these privileges were reserved to British subjects who 'have consistently from their birth conducted themselves and been registered as British subjects.'[62] Referring to the requirement that British Chinese subjects dress in European costume and register at the Consulate, something the papers pointed out that few European British subjects did, Kynnersley gave British subjecthood a performative quality ('conduct themselves') that rejected more hybrid forms of identity which may have materialised in choice of clothing. Pickering was another firm believer in the idea that the Straits Chinese were 'trying to make the best of both worlds' and claimed they would not wear British dress or cut the queue for fear of being disadvantaged in China.[63] It was not enough for them to legally be British, the Straits Chinese had to alter one of the most common forms of personal identification: their dress. What exactly counted as British dress or whether Ming (instead of Qing) dress would be acceptable was never clearly stated, as some Chinese pointed out.[64] Furthermore, performativity could only go so far, as was the case in the Dutch East Indies where Straits Chinese who 'had adopted anglicised names and the Western style of dress' were still treated as Chinese under Dutch law.[65] The limits of British subjecthood and abstract legal norms were consequently revealed by Straits Chinese's choice of dress.

22 Since passing is first of all an issue of visual appearance, clothing is an obvious way of aligning oneself with a certain image of who a national subject is. Not pursuing this image in China was an affront to white British subjects who felt the liberality of their legal code was being undermined by subjects that they were holding to higher standards than themselves. The ability of the state to see and recognise a British subject as their own was more important than abstract declarations of equality would have us believe. As Linda Schlossberg writes, 'passing [or choosing not to pass] can be understood at the most basic level as an attempt to control the process of signification itself.'[66] If states need to see in order to know, then passing/not-passing was a significant, yet always unstable, act of resistance in itself.[67] In China the act of not-passing was as much a political choice as passing was for Peranakans in the Straits and reflected the desire of the Straits Chinese to bestride Britishness and Chineseness simultaneously. By altering their dress, Straits Chinese British subjects were not only reconfiguring their identity but also playing with the imperial category of British subject and its legal application in China. On top of this, the Qing decree formally allowing Chinese emigrants to return specified that 'they must not represent themselves to be of foreign nationality'.[68] As a claim of sovereignty over all ethnic Chinese, it also suggested that performative aspects such as appearance could not distract from the permanence of their Chinese nationality and were dissuaded on the mainland under threat of punishment. Thus, the Amoy incident encapsulated the problems of sitting in-between two nationalising empires.

The Towchang Question

23 This incident and events like it prompted a great deal of further discussion about appropriate dress for the Straits Chinese as part of their cultural reform movement. More specifically, the Straits Chinese community became embroiled in a debate about whether to keep the famous pigtail that was associated with subjecthood of the Qing. By the nineteenth century, this hairstyle had broadened into a cultural and ethnic marker of difference. Its removal was therefore not only a sign of rebellion against the

Qing but also a significant break with Han Chinese, thus distinguishing anyone who did so from the masses of Chinese men who did not. The issue of whether the Straits Chinese should cut it was known as the towchang question, named so for the Hokkien reading of 辮子 meaning queue. Until 1898, few Straits Chinese had cut their queues; Song Ong Siang and Lee Ah Yan had both done so while in England but Lim Boon Keng had not or grew it back.[69] Although doubtlessly much discussed in private, the towchang question became the talk of the town from late January 1898 with the *Straits Times* conducting an interview with the major figures involved, both for and against.[70] By May, the *Malay Mail* could report that 'a year or two ago the Babas would have scoffed at the idea. Now they are openly discussing the advisability or otherwise of doing so.'[71] It would linger on until the 1911 Revolution which, on the global front, represented a unique moment in the history of hairstyling when hundreds of thousands of Chinese cut off their queues.[72] As an important pillar of the overall Straits cultural reform programme that coincided with similar pressures in mainland China, the towchang question demonstrates how the Straits Chinese navigated competing civilisational claims to carve out a unique cosmopolitan identity for themselves that took elements from the two but was derivative of neither.

24 Staunch supporters of the idea framed the question as one of Straits Chinese identity under threat. In February, a letter was sent to the *Singapore Free Press* by 'Reformer' which stated, 'it is now high time for the Babas to reform themselves.'[73] Calling the towchang a 'badge of slavery', the 'Reformer' said it indicates that the wearer is 'the basest of mankind' and must be cut off. That the author remained anonymous and was likely the same anonymous interviewee in a later piece signals the unpopularity of queue cutting at this time.[74] This anonymous leading Chinese called the queue 'an impediment to physical progress', a sign of inferiority not just in political terms of servicing the Qing, but also racial terms. Others concurred with this racialised understanding of the queue as a biological problem. For instance, several opponents of the queue pointed out it harboured filth and disease, thus giving the queue pathological significance.[75] Like the question of Chinese dress, these reformers wished to differentiate the Straits Chinese from the Chinese masses by more outwardly embracing British standards of clothing, hairstyling and consequently even hygiene.

25 Building on the towchang question, Lim Boon Keng made the case for a more distinctive approach to dress that was neither solely Western nor Chinese. In this sense, modernisation of Straits Chinese dress, as it was framed, cannot be read as simply westernisation. In the March and June 1899 issues of the *Straits Chinese Magazine* he argued that 'we must prove by the lives and conduct and works our people that we are deserving of the citizenship of the British Empire.'[76] This was a powerful claim on a citizenship that was not always readily forthcoming, demonstrating the tensions that arose from the fusion of nation and state in the imperial context. Working through the discourses of nationality provided by Britain and China, Lim was attempting to negotiate a place for the Straits Chinese between the two. This was made all the more evident in his second piece in the same series where Lim argued for a special kind of dress that was unique to the Straits Chinese, drawing on European, Chinese and Malay elements: 'Let us have a genuine product of the Straits Chinese—a dress evolved out of our own ideas, making free use of all articles, European or Chinese, which are now in use.'[77] While he recognised that European dress was on the rise, he said 'we should not be in a hurry to exchange our present... dress for the better fitting European clothes.'[78]

His programme was not simply encouraging 'hybridity', in fact Lim Boon Keng rejected a hybrid dress as ugly, but rather something new and unique to the Straits Chinese arising out of, and thereby becoming separate from, their mixed roots. Cultural change among the Straits Chinese should therefore be understood as a political fashioning vis-à-vis the British and Chinese Empires.

26 Opponents to the idea of cutting the queue were not necessarily opposed to reform either. Rather, they argued for a more expansive reform programme which maintained the queue and other aspects of Chinese culture as important traditions while prioritising modernisation in other areas. Tan Jiak Kim, for example, once a member of the Legislative Council and well embedded in British colonial society, thought cutting the queue was totally unnecessary. He argued, following a statement that was repeated various times by like-minded Straits Chinese of the older generation, 'that a Straits-born Chinaman, with a towchang and a thorough understanding of the English language, would be a better man than a Straits-born Chinaman who cut his hair in the English fashion and understood but a little English and a little Chinese.'[79] It was perhaps no coincidence that a pamphlet published by Tan Jiak Kim and others during World War I said 'British subjects of all races to-day are in the enjoyment of manifold blessings under the Union Jack... without having had to shed a hair.'[80] Indeed, Tan Jiak Kim kept the towchang until his death in 1917.

27 It was perhaps due to the supposed superficiality of queue cutting that only a handful of Straits Chinese actually went through with it before 1911, despite most Babas recognising its many problems. Nonetheless, as we have seen in the case of Khun Yiong, superficial elements such as dress could make a big difference in the politics of empire. Denying its political significance as a symbol of fealty to the Manchu, opponents of queue cutting among the Straits Chinese such as Tan Jiak Kim, who was clearly committed to being a British subject, saw it as a cultural symbol to be maintained for the traditions it supposedly represented. Another reformer said it was ridiculous that the British distrusted queue-wearing Babas and said they 'might as well tell us that a Straits-born Malay is a subject of Turkey, and a Straits-born Siamese a subject of Siam because the one wears the Stamboul cap and the other a miniature elephant in the shape of a button or any other thing.'[81] Writing in 1906, after more Straits Chinese had cut their queues and the revolutionary movement was growing at home and abroad, one newspaper correspondent said those Chinese still wearing their queues were doing so mainly as a sign of distinction and 'obedience to the wishes of their parents' and ancestors.[82] For them, it no longer stood for slavery, but rather could be kept and situated alongside other reforms within the community. As the slippage between 'Chinese', 'Straits (born) Chinese', and 'Babas', in all these writings suggests, however, their claims were always at risk of being destabilised by the conventional connection of race, nationality and loyalty.

28 Just like clothing, hair styles 'condense the political'.[83] The towchang question contained within it the central issues of the cultural reform movement that it helped begin. In the decision to cut the queue and change their dress, the Straits Chinese built outwards from their Chinese, European and Malay roots in order to revitalise the community. In this process they asserted their belonging to the British Empire and China while remaining aloof to both. This was intimately linked to the racial politics of the time which connected performativity to citizenship. Lim Boon Keng even factored this into his own arguments for a reformed dress, worrying that without drawing on

'all the best, truest, highest and noblest which the new nations can teach us' the Straits Chinese would risk becoming 'Europeanised', 'Malayanised' or 'degenerate' as Chinese.[84] Consequently, the cultural reform movement perpetuated the racial link to China while trying to reconcile this with continued allegiance to Britain and a recognition of their Malay heritage. The paradox of this movement was that by encouraging self-identification with certain aspects of Chineseness, they consequently became further latched to the Chinese state in both Britain and China's eyes, despite what the Straits Chinese might have wished. This formed the backdrop for their interactions with Chinese reformers and revolutionaries in the same period.

FOOTNOTES

1. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 1972), 7.

2. Ibid., 9.

3. Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 519.

4. Kris Manjapra, "Introduction," in *Cosmopolitan Thought Zones: South Asia and the Global Circulation of Ideas*, eds. Kris Manjapra and Sugata Bose (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 1.

5. Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Malden: Blackwell, 1998), 417.

6. "A Comparison," *Straits Times*, March 26, 1902.

7. For example, Henry Norman, *The Peoples and Politics of the Far East*, 37-8, and, Rounsevelle Wildman, *The Panglima Muda: A Romance of Malaya* (San Francisco: Overland Monthly Publishing Company, 1894), 16-7.

8. "Nationality," *Singapore Free Press*, February 22, 1917.

9. Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 6.

10. Manu Goswami, *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 4.

11. "The Towchang Question," *Singapore Free Press*, February 1, 1898.

12. "A Chinaman's Ball," *Household Words*, no. 117 (June 19, 1852), 331-332.

13. See, Mrinalini Sinha, "Britishness, Clubbability, and the Colonial Public Sphere: The Genealogy of an Imperial Institution in Colonial India," *Journal of British Studies* 40, no. 4 (2001): 489-521.

14. For more see, Nick Aplin, "The slow contagion of Scottish example: association football in nineteenth-century colonial Singapore," in *Football in Asia: History, Culture and Business*, ed. Younghan Cho (London: Routledge, 2015): 10-25.

15. Song Ong Siang, *One Hundred Years*, 466-7.

16. Tim Harper, "Globalism and the Pursuit of Authenticity: The Making of a Diasporic Public Sphere in
Singapore," *Sojourn* 12, no. 2 (1997): 273.

17. "Penang, Monday, 16th August, 1886," *Straits Times Weekly Issue*, August 25, 1886.

18. "Penang, Thursday, 12th August, 1886," *Straits Times Weekly Issue*, August 25, 1886.

19. "Penang, Tuesday, 16th August, 1886," *Straits Times Weekly Issue*, August 25, 1886.

20. "Penang, Saturday, 14th August, 1886," *Straits Times Weekly Issue*, August 25, 1886.

21. "Penang, Monday, 16th August, 1886," *Straits Times Weekly Issue*, August 25, 1886.

22. Ibid.

23. "The Victoria Memorial Hall," *Singapore Free Press*, October 26, 1905 and "Penang Centenary Races," *Straits Times Weekly Issue*, August 25, 1886.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.

26. Christof Dejung, David Motadel and Jürgen Osterhammel, "Worlds of the Bourgeoisie," in *The Global Bourgeoisie*, eds. Christof Dejung, David Motadel and Jürgen Osterhammel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

27. "Chinese Fancy Dress Party," *Straits Times*, September 13, 1897.

28. *Straits Settlements: Report for 1901* (London: Darling & Son, 1902), 26-31.

29. "Chinese Fancy Dress Party," *Straits Times*, September 13, 1897.

30. Lees, *Planting Empire, Cultivating Subjects*

31. Lewis, *Cities in Motion*, 47-8.

32. For example, William Dalrymple, *White Mughals* (London: Penguin, 2002).

33. John Edwards, *Multilingualism* (London: Routledge, 1994), 132.

34. Nile Green, "The Waves of Heterotopia: Toward a Vernacular Intellectual History of the Indian Ocean," *American Historical Review* 123, no. 3 (2018): 846-874. In response to works such as Bose and Manjapra, eds. *Cosmopolitan Thought Zones* and Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2006).

35. Most notably argued by Ofelia García, see Ofelia García, *Bilingual Education in the 21st Century: A Global Perspective* (Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), and François Grosjean, "What is Translanguaging? An Interview with Ofelia García," *Psychology Today,* March 2, 2016, https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/life-bilingual/201603/what-is-translanguaging.

36. François Grosjean, "What Do Bilinguals and Hurdlers Have in Common? A holistic view of bilinguals," *Psychology Today*, July 27, 2012, https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/life-bilingual/201207/what-do-bilinguals-and-hurdlers-have-in-common and François Grosjean, "The bilingual as a competent but specific speaker-hearer," *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 6, no. 6 (1985): 467-477.

37. Olga Tokarczuk, *Flights*, trans. Jennifer Croft (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2017), 183.

38. Walter Mignolo, "Delinking: The rhetoric of modernity, the logic of coloniality and the grammar of de-coloniality," *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2 (2007): 449-514.

39. A presentist argument for this is made in Ellen Cushman, "Translingual and Decolonial Approaches to Meaning Making," *College English* 78, no. 2 (2016): 234-242. See also, for example, "English in the Straits," *Singapore Free Press*, October 13, 1898.

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41. "Ourselves," *Indo-Chinese Patriot,* August 1, 1900.

42. "Compulsory English in China," *Singapore Free Press*, July 23, 1910, "Language Divides China: Dr. John Fryer' Views," *Weekly Sun*, July 29, 1911.

43. See, for example, Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands, La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987) and Mariana Ortega, *In-Between: Latina Feminist Phenomenology, Multiplicity, and the Self* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2016), especially ch 1.

44. Pound was concerned with the degeneration of languages through their social expression. Victor P. H. Li, "Philology and Power: Ezra Pound and the Regulation of Language," *boundary 2* 15, no. 1/2 (1986-1987): 187-210.

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46. "Men of Three Worlds: Babas of Malaya," *Malaya Tribune*, July 1, 1949.

47. See, Rev W. G. Shellabear, "Baba Malay," *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, no. 65 (1913): 49-63, and W.G. Shellabear, *Malay-English Vocabulary*, 2nd ed. (Singapore: Methodist Publishing House, 1912).

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49. Yew, *My Lifelong Challenge*, 25.
50. Ibid., 33.
51. Ibid., 34.
52. Ibid., 33.
53. Alison Lurie, *The Language of Clothes* (London: Random House, 1981).
54. Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity,* 200.
55. For a recent discussion of this event see Siew-Min Sai, "Dressing Up Subjecthood: Straits Chinese, the Queue, and Contested Citizenship in Colonial Singapore," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth Studies* 47, no. 3 (2019): 446-473.
56. Quoted in "The Khun Yiong Case," *Singapore Free Press*, December 28, 1897.
57. "The Amoy Incident," *Straits Times*, December 8, 1897.
58. An article on both is found in the issue, *Straits Times*, December 8, 1897.
59. "The Amoy Incident," *Straits Times*, December 27, 1897.
60. For example, "The Amoy Incident," *Straits Times*, December 16, 1897, "The Khun Yiong Case," *Singapore Free Press*, December 28, 1897, "Chinese British Subjects," *Singapore Free Press,* January 26, 1898.
61. Elaine K. Ginsberg, "Introduction," in *Passing and the Fictions of Identity* ed. Elaine K. Ginsberg (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).
62. Quoted in "Briton or Chinaman," *Straits Times*, July 2, 1898.
63. "Chinese British Subjects," *Singapore Free Press*, January 26, 1898. That this was an enduring sentiment and not particular to this incident is evidenced by a 1905 article printed in Fuzhou and republished in the Straits that said, "Chinese British subjects in China should openly indicate their adopted nationality by wearing foreign costume." First appearing in the *Foochow Echo*, reprinted in "Chinese Reform: Should Chinese Foreign Subjects Wear Distinctive Garb," *Eastern Daily Mail*, October 13, 1905
64. Siew-Min Sai, "Dressing up Subjecthood," 461.
65. Song Ong Siang, *One Hundred Years*, 489.
66. Linda Schlossberg, "Introduction: Rites of Passing," in *Passing: Identity and Interpretation in Sexuality, Race, and Religion*, eds. Maria Carla Sanchez and Linda Schlossberg (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 3.
67. See, Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 200.
68. Song Ong Siang, *One Hundred Years*, 279.
69. Photos seem to show him without it earlier, but it was reported that he had not cut it. *Straits Times*, January 26, 1898.
70. "Reforming Babas," *Straits Times*, January 27, 1898.
71. "The Towchang," *Straits Times*, May 20, 1899.
72. For a description of the event in Singapore see, Song Ong Siang, *One Hundred Years*, 472.
73. "The Towchang Question," *Singapore Free Press*, February 1, 1898.
74. Song Ong Siang, *One Hundred Years*, 303.
75. "The Towchang Question," *Singapore Free Press*, February 1, 1898, "Reforming Babas," *Straits Times*, January 27, 1898.
76. Lim Boon Keng, "Straits Chinese Reform. I. The Queue Question," *Straits Chinese Magazine* 3, no. 9 (March 1899), 23.
77. Lim Boon Keng, "Straits Chinese Reform. II. Dress and Costume," *Straits Chinese Magazine* 3, no. 10 (June 1899), 58.
78. Lim Boon Keng, "The Queue Question," 24.
79. "Reforming Babas," *Straits Times*, January 27, 1898.

80. Straits Chinese British Association, *Duty to the British Empire*, ch 20.

81. "The Towchang Question," *Eastern Daily Mail*, May 22, 1906, and "Response to "Plain Talk about Touchangs," *Eastern Daily Mail*, May 17, 1906.

82. "The Towchang Question," *Eastern Daily Mail*, June 5, 1906. The same sentiment was found in Perak, "Queue Cutting," *Eastern Daily Mail*, November 2, 1906.

83. Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity,* 188.

84. Lim Boon Keng, "Dress and Costume" 59.

4. Reform and Revolution among the Straits Chinese

1 In the process of marking themselves out as a distinctive community within the colony, the Straits Chinese saw a way forward that combined ideas drawn from the West as well as preserving and reinventing aspects of their Chinese heritage that had been in decline. Like the reformers in China, the Straits Chinese made use of a 'staging of the world', inspired by events such as the Sino-Japanese war, the Spanish-American War and the South African War.[1] One reformer gave the programme the following description: '(1) patriotism, (2) love of freedom, (3) desire for progress, (4) love for the Chinese people.'[2] This was a 'discursive process' of identity making and remaking in relation to the three worlds they belonged to.[3] In combination with their worries about racial inferiority, their experience of the colour bar, their growing identification with the rest of the diaspora, and the stirrings of dramatic change in China, the Straits Chinese began their own reform movement that sought to improve the well-being of the community on many fronts, modernising it while also reconnecting with their Chinese roots, opening new 'corridors' to China after several generations of more independent development in the Nanyang, while also drawing on their own history of encounter with the West.[4] Through this movement, the Straits Chinese sought out a leading role in Chinese affairs more broadly while never fully divorcing themselves from the British Empire. This coincided with the growing movements for reform and revolution in China which interacted with and drew on the Babas' own experiences. Thus, the reform movement in the Straits became intertwined with the transformation of China in the first decades of the twentieth century, generating cosmopolitan ideas but tempering them with the growth of the state and its affixation to nation. This in turn meant that the Straits Chinese were never fully accepted back into the Chinese fold.

4.1 Reform and Revolution in China and the Straits

2 One problem with the literature on the reform movement in China has been its constriction by methodological nationalism, meaning its global dimensions are rarely mentioned. And yet, the leading reformers, Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao, spent a

significant amount of time abroad. Not only did their ideas often derive from these experiences, but they also played an active role in shaping the politics of overseas communities. In Canada, for example, which Kang Youwei visited after he was rejected from entering the US on racial grounds, he won over the local Chinese to the cause of reform, politicising the community and tying it in to events in China far more closely than before.[5] With the establishment of Protect the Emperor Societies wherever he went, eventually amounting to over 70,000 members, the overseas Chinese consequently became united on transnational political grounds, being drawn back to the politics of the mainland. The 1905 Boycott, which received support from both Kang and Liang, was organised through the Protect the Emperor Society in various parts of the globe.[6] In what would become a common theme, Liang spoke out against the idea that the 'Chinese are just like loose sand who cannot easily be gathered together.'[7] Sun Yat-sen made this sand metaphor famous in his argument for the first principle of the people, *minzu*.[8] Liang, like Sun, saw the 1905 boycott as a sign that the diaspora, no matter where they were born, had a shared connection to China which could be mobilised in favour of reform. He himself had benefited from time abroad and like many other leaders at the time, was generating a political thought that was deeply affected by changing international conditions.[9] In this sense, the reform movement cannot be understood separately from the Chinese diaspora.

3 Sun Yat-sen was similarly of an international background which shaped not only the revolutions he carried out before success in 1911, but also informed his political ideas more generally. In 1879, Sun went to Honolulu with his mother where he entered Anglican missionary school and eventually graduated from Oahu college.[10] Afterwards he went to the Government Central School in Hong Kong and became a doctor in the colony, also converting to Christianity despite his brother's wishes. This would suggest a certain degree of similarity with the Straits Chinese who were raised in close proximity to British ideas and institutions and indeed Sun had many Western friends, some of whom even aided in him in the revolution.[11] After a failed uprising in 1895 led by his own Revive China Society, Sun would spend most of the subsequent years up to 1911 travelling the world in exile, meeting with other Asians also pursuing nationalist objectives. This and other organisations were 'essentially Overseas Chinese organisations' and gave the diaspora a role in crafting the revolution that would eventually overthrow the Qing.[12] Building on the 'loose sand' metaphor, Sun said, 'If we are to resist foreign oppression in the future, we must overcome individual freedom and join together as a firm unit, just as one adds water and cement to loose gravel to produce something as solid as rock.'[13] It was thanks to their contributions to the movement that Sun labelled the overseas Chinese as the 'Mother of the Revolution'.[14]

4 The creation of a Chinese nation-state in 1911 should not be seen as the eclipse of cosmopolitanism and deterritorialism in China history. The political thought of Kang Youwei in particular contained traces of cosmopolitanism that are relevant to this study and which were born out of changing global conditions and his own encounter with the diaspora. Most significant was his reformulation of the Confucian idea of *da tong* (大同) or Great Unity (alternatively translated as Universal Commonwealth). Rather than simply reviving an ancient idea, Kang's reformulated *da tong* as part of a stadial vision of history in which it represented an ideal future utopia where there would be no nations, only locally elected central and regional governments organised in a quasi-federal fashion.[15] This idea informed Kang's advice to the Guangxu Emperor

in the Hundred Days Reform. Kang explained to him, 'The present is a time in which countries exist side by side; the world is no longer a unified one. The laws and governmental system [as they now exist in China] are institutions of a unified empire. It is these that have made China weak and will ruin her.'[16] In other words, the political institutions of China were still designed for a world resembling *da tong*, not the contemporary world of nation-states in which China appeared as an anachronism. China no longer existed as a 'world in herself', and so could not govern in a cosmopolitan imperial fashion, it had to adopt the trappings of a nation-state before it could once again achieve *da tong*.[17]

5 Despite their differences, Sun Yat-sen appeared to adopt a similar line of thinking regarding cosmopolitanism and the Chinese Empire as a universal state. Sun saw cosmopolitanism in opposition to nationalism, one of his three principles of the people. Comparing cosmopolitanism to a world-state much like in Kang's idea of *da tong*, Sun believed that ancient China had functioned as a cosmopolitan world-state under the umbrella of *tianxia* or 'all under heaven'. In simple terms, this form of Chinese cosmopolitanism made 'no distinction between barbarian and *huaxia*', (华夏) a term referring to the Chinese people.[18] It was due to this lack of distinction that the Chinese state was susceptible to imperialism since foreign barbarians were readily absorbed into the body politic. However, this did not mean Sun rejected cosmopolitanism. Rather, like Kang, Sun argued that China should first work through nationalism to regain its sovereignty and then once again take up the mantle of cosmopolitanism to create *da tong*.[19] Here there are shades of Giuseppe Mazzini who argued that 'in labouring according to the true principle for our Country we are labouring for Humanity; our Country is the fulcrum of the lever which we have to wield for the common good.'[20] In this conception, nationalism and cosmopolitanism were not so much mutually exclusive as successive stages of development. Indeed, this is how the term *da tong* appears in the National Anthem written by Sun Yat-sen, 'Three Principles of the People, from this our aim shall be to establish a Republic, and advance into a state of *da tong.*'[21] From this we can better understand his commitment both to Chinese nationalism and anti-imperialist internationalism.[22] As he remarked: 'when Might is overthrown and the selfishly ambitious have disappeared, then we may talk about cosmopolitanism.'[23] Rejecting a world of imperialist empires of the Western fashion and seeing nation-states as a temporary solution, Sun Yat-sen embraced a forward-looking cosmopolitanism even as he advanced nationalism on the ground. Thus, Sun and Kang both crafted an alternative vision of world order that defined empire in very different terms to the racial ones being used to circumscribe citizenship in the British Empire or to the internationalism represented by the League of Nations in which the world was still divided into separate nation-states. This more closely matched up with the cosmopolitan expectations of the Straits Chinese than the nationalisms that would come to dominate in the 1920s and 30s and which through Kang in particular, influenced Lim's own ideas about Confucianism.[24]

'Forget not your old country'

6 What is more important in this study is how the Straits Chinese interacted with the growing push for dramatic change in China, whether this be of a reformist or revolutionary variety. When visiting Penang around 1900, Kang Youwei is said to have inscribed the words 'Forget not your old country' on a boulder at the Kek Lok Si temple.

[25] While the Straits Chinese had never forgotten their Chinese roots, the turn of the century signalled a significant shift in their relationship to China. Not only did the Qing, reformers, and revolutionaries all court the overseas Chinese, the Straits Chinese also found themselves identified with ethnic Chinese whether they liked it or not. With their potential for advancement within the British Empire limited by racial restrictions, the Straits Chinese took an important role in the nascent nationalist movements in China, self-consciously adopting the label Chinese but tempering it with their different background and the benefits this supposedly involved.

7 Their role as leaders derived from their unique background compared to other Chinese. In one of his first articles on reform, Lim said that subjects of the Qing in China proper must first overthrow their oppressors before they could hope to achieve real reform and so addressed his concerns to the 'free men' of the Straits instead.[26] To prove themselves worthy of the rights that this freedom came with, Lim argued that the Straits Chinese had to alter their culture and break free from the conservatism of their forefathers. At the same time, he rejected the proposition that 'we wish to renounce our race', as 'a Chinese always remains a Chinese however he may dress and wherever he may live.'[27] Lim believed that their unchangeable physical features should not prevent a thoroughgoing reform within the community that drew on this difference. If the Straits Chinese wanted to contribute to the 'awakening' of China or maintain their privileged position in the colony, they had to first reform themselves. From this, the Straits Chinese could adopt a vanguard position in the reform movement of China as well. As Lim said in an article on the role of the Babas in the development of China, 'when the Straits-born Chinese with proper qualifications arrives in China he finds that he is the sort of individual destined by nature to reconcile the great Chinese Nation to the ways of the great world beyond China.'[28] Recognised in China as almost equals (and this distinction would be important), they could enact the changes China required to advance. Lim finished his piece with the remarks, 'while every son of man is trying to get whatever good is to be got, why should you Straits Chinese remain contented at home? Why should you not go forth and take your fair share of the heritage that belongs to the sons of Han?' With opportunities limited in the British Empire and potentially endless in a transforming China, even the most staunchly anglophile of the Straits Chinese were racially bound, from within and without, to the nascent Chinese nation.

8 Following Lim's call to action and their own interest in the winds of change blowing in China, many Straits Chinese became engaged in the reformist and revolutionary movements, some more directly than others. For example, Lim Boon Keng briefly served as personal secretary to Sun Yat-sen and worked on the new Republic's Board of Health.[29] When the Guomindang was officially registered in Singapore in December 1912, the British counted 16 out of 123 office holders as British subjects, including Lim Boon Keng as one of the presidents.[30] He would then, at significant personal risk, leave Singapore behind and work at the new Amoy University founded by Tan Kah Kee from 1921.[31] Kung Tian Cheng, who was born and raised in the Straits and India and worked in the colonial administration, moved to China in 1910, becoming an editor of a republican newspaper and then working directly for Yuan Shi Kai.[32] Wu Lien-the, one of those cited by MacCallum Scott as an exemplary British subject, joined the Medical College under Yuan Shikai in 1908 and went on to lead in several Chinese public health functions.[33] Khoo Teck Him (also known as Khoo Seok Wan) entertained both Kang and

Sun during their time in Singapore and liaised with Babas to garner their support.[34] When Sun visited Singapore again in December 1911 en route to China, more local Chinese met him including Tan Boo Liat, part of the Straits contingent to the coronation of Edward VII, and Teo Eng Hock, the son of one of the first Chinese born in the new colony of Singapore in 1833.[35] Teo was also one of the founding members of the Singapore branch of the Tongmenghui in 1906, Sun Yat-sen's political organisation that grew out of his previous societies.[36] Through this institution, money, supplies and even volunteers were gathered to support several uprisings including the successful one in 1911. While much of this support came from China-born Chinese, the Straits-born were clearly active members of the movement. Many offered more passive contributions such as donating money and other behind-the-scenes support but were perhaps less brazen than their China-born comrades as subjects of a government which nominally propped up the Qing.[37] Wang Gungwu concludes that Sun's travels and the support he garnered for the revolutionary movement in the Nanyang had the effect of offsetting any 'babaisation' that may have occurred among the immigrant Chinese, however, I would argue that this process had already begun with Qing overtures to wealthy overseas Chinese and the racial problems facing all Chinese in the colonies.[38] Either way, Straits Chinese support for the reformers and revolutionaries represented a decisive shift towards China and one that was further legitimated by the success of the revolution in 1911.

4.2 World War I and its Aftermath

9 While their contributions to the reformist and revolutionary movements in China were important, we should not read this as also a shift *away* from Britain. Indeed, even though many leading Straits Chinese joined the revolutionary movement and even relocated to China, they still retained their British affiliation, difference in perspective, and subject status. This is especially obvious if we look at their role in supporting the British war effort. In their support we see the Babas' constant assertion of their identification as both Chinese and British subjects. Consequently, we should not take their shift to China as a capitulation in the cause of imperial citizenship. Rather, the First World War offered the Straits Chinese, and many other colonial subjects across the world, an opportunity to prove their worth as equals deserving of the same rights and privileges in the Empire. Indeed, Lim Boon Keng and others continued to make overtures towards Imperial Federation simultaneously with their support for the new Republic in China, fusing *da tong* with empire.[39] However, by asserting their continued loyalty to the British Empire alongside their sanguine attachment to the Chinese Republic, the Straits Chinese were holding on to an increasingly tenuous position.

10 When the First World War broke out, the Straits Chinese were among the largest contributors to and instigators of public funds to support the war effort. Since subscriptions were published in the newspapers listing by name and amount those who contributed, we have a very detailed record of Straits Chinese commitment to the allied forces in the war. Among these funds were the Belgium Relief Fund, Prince of Wales Relief Fund and the King Albert's Civilian Hospital Fund.[40] Many of the contributions came from Straits Chinese social organisations such as the Tennis Club.[41] The wealthiest, such as Eu Tong Sen and Tan Jiak Kim, donated aeroplanes.[42] This also served as an opportunity for Straits Chinese women to engage in politics in the public

sphere, with several appearing in the subscription lists and organising the fundraisers.[43] The historiography of wartime relief efforts has been overwhelmingly focused on metropolitan Europe and the United States with very little attention to the voluntary financial contributions made by imperial subjects, however, as these records show, vast sums of money were also raised in the colonies.[44] This is in keeping with the argument that many colonial subjects used the First World War as an opportunity to prove their loyalty and therefore readiness for self-government.

11 In 1915, under the auspices of the Straits Chinese British Association, Tan Jiak Kim, Lim Boon Keng and Song Ong Siang, wrote a lengthy guide directed at the Straits Chinese and their 'Duty to the British Empire during the Great War'.[45] It explained the causes of the war and outlined the rights and privileges of a British subject as the underlying basis for their duty to the Empire.[46] They were sure to distinguish themselves from others who were Chinese in both race and nationality. The authors placed special emphasis on equality granted under English law, making appeals to the idea of *civis brittanicus sum* and specifying that they would not discriminate 'with regard to colour or creed' in the services they hoped to provide.[47] The same patriotic sentiment appeared in 1900 after the capture of Pretoria brought on spontaneous processions in support of the Empire which was interpreted as a sign that its subjects recognised 'the legal privileges, which no mere national rule —Chinese, Malay or Indian—could ever assure to the individual.'[48] It is notable in this regard that the pamphleteers took special offence to the German notion of a Pan-Germanic League which they believed targeted only those of Germanic race and therefore did not follow the same universalistic ideals that the Straits Chinese read into the British Empire.[49] Similarly, Song said in a speech in Malacca that naturalised British subjects of German descent had given the category of 'naturalised British subjects' a bad name.[50] On the surface, then, this was a clear alignment with a cosmopolitan reading of the British Empire.

12 What is more interesting, however, in keeping with the arguments of this paper, is that there remained some ambiguity regarding their attitude to China. For example, their definition of patriotism was unclear as to whether it could apply to China as well as Britain. Lim Boon Keng said patriotism was not merely limited to love for the land of birth but also its non-territorial aspects like 'deep and sacred associations', and 'filial piety', things that could equally have brought Straits-born Chinese into patriotic support for China.[51] The authors also noted that they could follow Chinese customs and still remain British subjects.[52] This may have been an intentional ambiguity that did not reject the possibility of simultaneous patriotisms or a third way between the two. A similar tension appears in their treatment of race in the Empire. While giving credit to the British for supposedly granting equal rights through shared citizenship/subjecthood, the authors still outlined their struggle to be allowed to form a volunteer corps of Straits Chinese as the 1888 Ordinance allowed only European British subjects to do so. Although this was eventually granted in 1901 (Song Ong Siang and Lim Boon Keng were original members), Penang and Malacca had only recently been able to form their own, perhaps thanks to the pressure of the war (the German SMS *Emden* attacked Penang in 1914).[53] These tensions and ambiguities underlined the gap between the universal and the particular in the British Empire as well as the intermediate position of the Straits Chinese.

13 The 1915 Mutiny in Singapore of a regiment in the Indian army garrisoned in Singapore, part of the Ghadar movement, demonstrated the alternative possible

trajectories for transnational politics in the colonies. Although the Chinese had protested against Japan's 21 Demands just a few weeks before the mutiny and the Straits Chinese demonstrated a concern with a specific kind of imperialism represented by Germany and increasingly Japan, they still followed the prevalent liberal position at the time which contended that reform could be achieved within Empire.[54] Thus, the Straits Chinese were quick to condemn the attack which seemed to strike against the cosmopolitan possibilities that the Straits represented. Indeed, Song Ong Siang was promoted to captain for his service in the Chinese Company of the Singapore Volunteer Corps which helped suppress the mutiny.[55] In the Legislative Council, Lim Boon Keng used it as an example that the Straits Chinese ought to do even more for the war effort. [56] Meanwhile in Malacca, Tan Cheng Lock implored his fellow 'Straits Chinese' to contribute more to the war, pointing to the mutiny in Singapore as a reason why they should all sign up as volunteers in the local corps.[57] When the victims of the Mutiny were memorialised, the cosmopolitan nature of Empire was again emphasised, with the Memorial being placed in the City Hall instead of a religious building to symbolise the overarching imperial attachment that brought the city's inhabitants together.[58] Consequently, we can see how the Mutiny contrasted with the liberal ideology of the Straits Chinese and their perseverance in working through the British Empire.

May Fourth and the New Culture Movement

14 The end of the First World War made the liberal position an increasingly uncommon one. In its aftermath, we see the overseas Chinese becoming more and more active in nationalist struggles abroad, including the beginnings of anti-colonial activities. This was in part due to the failings of the new world order created in Versailles. Initially it seemed to offer a great deal of potential for cosmopolitanism. Kang Youwei, for example, interpreted the League of Nations and Wilson's ideals as a way of bridging East and West and helping to realise *da tong*.[59] This was a reading of internationalism triumphing over nationalism. During the Conference, the Chinese delegation received telegrams from Chinese organisations based all over the world with statements such as 'all oversea Chinese fully support your stand at the Conference' against the Japanese and that Wilson's Fourteen Points must be realised.[60] Inspired in part by ideas of Imperial Federation originating in Britain, it is no surprise that the League appeared, at first glance, to offer potential for the realisation on a world scale of what many Straits Chinese had been arguing for.[61] As Manu Goswami writes, 'What set colonial internationalist thought and practice apart was not just the insistence that the immediate present marked a potential transition to a new egalitarian world order. It was the way this temporal reckoning was mobilized to counter both the historicist orientation of cultural nationalism and a restored interwar imperialism.'[62] Kang Youwei and Sun Yat-sen's thought on *da tong* and cosmopolitanism well represents this style of 'internationalism', so it follows that they were excited by the prospect of a new world order that might arise from the League.

15 The reality of the League was much different to how it was first imagined by Asian subjects. Indeed, it seemed to underwrite the prevailing discourses of racism and nationalism with international backing following Smuts' and Wilson's architecture.[63] The global colour line remained and any possibility of an Imperial Federation, even though it had helped inspire the League itself, was still divided on racial and 'civilisational' lines. Consequently, numerous parts of the world saw a significant

backlash against the perceived failings of the Wilsonian moment.[64] The May Fourth Movement in China, for example, was prompted by the legitimation of Japanese imperialism on the mainland by the Treaty of Versailles. What is more interesting in our case, is how the May Fourth Movement percolated into the Straits Settlements. This both demonstrated the continued importance of the overseas Chinse to a deterritorialised China and their differences with the Straits Chinese. In June 1919, reports came in of disturbances in Penang and Singapore with Japanese products being destroyed and altercations with the police.[65] Martial law had to be declared in both cities. A notice in Phuket affirming the duties of the 'Chinese people' to support their country seemed to quote Sun Yat-sen, saying 'unable to combine we are scattered abroad like grains of sand.'[66] Nationalist and anti-imperialist activity would continue in the Straits in the following decades, however it was increasingly directed and managed by China-born Chinese and their institutions with close connections to the mainland, rather than through the autonomous energy of the Straits Chinese and their hybridised approach.[67] As a result, the Straits Chinese seemed to become alienated from the nationalist struggle in China and its fusion with the Republican state. They discovered that their racial connection was not enough to make them equals in thought and being to the China-born Chinese, despite being pushed and pulled in this direction over the previous few decades.

16 In contrast with the growth of nationalism and communism among the immigrant Chinese in the interwar years, the Straits Chinese continued to hold a liberal view of race, empire and cosmopolitanism that sought the realisation of much of the universal languages emanating from Britain as well Confucian ideals. For instance, in 1930, Lim Koon Teck argued that the harmony and unity felt between different 'nationalities' in Malaya (notice the continued slippage with race) was proof that 'world peace under a sort of league of nations is attainable.'[68] In typical Straits Chinese style, he cited Confucius' maxim that 'Within the Four Seas all are Brothers'. Similarly, Lim Boon Keng, when welcoming the new Governor Sir Laurence Guillemard in 1920, asked that he 'establish in our midst the beginnings of a small League of Nations of the British Empire', building on the cosmopolitanism of the Straits.[69] In the 1930s, in response to rising racial tensions and mounting criticisms of the Chinese population as a threat to stability, Lim Boon Keng continued to defend both Babas and immigrants as central to Malayan development and innocent of destroying race relations.[70] Indeed, the Chinese community writ large increasingly made claims to autochthony in the colony despite their immigrant background. For example, one Chinese writer claimed using language similar to 'son of the soil' that it 'is the earnest hope of every real son of Singapore' that British seamen are not replaced by 'foreigners'.[71] In 1931 Lim Cheng Ean, a Cambridge educated lawyer and legislative councillor, made a similar claim 'that the Chinese were entitled to be called part and parcel of this country which was their native land.'[72] They also wrote this into a longer genealogy of the colony. Written in the 1920s, Song Ong Siang's *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore* helped establish the Straits Chinese as a permanent feature of Straits life and labelled Teo Lee one of the first 'sons of the soil' in Singapore given his birth in the colony in 1833.[73] For Penang and Singapore, both largely settled after their acquisition by the British, these claims had a great deal of truth and help explain why, in the 1940s both Penang and Singapore began to diverge from Malaya as the country headed towards decolonisation.[74] Thus, their defence of a multiracial League of Nations, inspired by the local cosmopolitan example of the Straits, built on local claims of belonging and combined these with an

acknowledgement of their Chinese heritage. In this way, many Straits Chinese became increasingly wedded to the politics of Malaya over the narrower and more anti-colonial nationalism of China in the interwar years.

17 It is in this context that Lim Boon Keng became embroiled in a debate with Lu Xun, one of the premier figures in the New Culture Movement, signalling his difference from China-born Chinese despite his increasing identification with the Republic of China. In keeping with the modernist tendencies of the New Culture Movement, Lu Xun criticised Lim's Confucian teachings at the new university in Amoy in 1926-7.[75] Lu Xun called him a 'Chinese of British nationality who cannot open or shut his mouth without the word Confucius.'[76] Here we see how the Straits Chinese were not fully welcomed back into the new Chinese nation-state. This was in part due to Lim's difference as being a British subject which complicated his commitment to the nation. In fact, Lim often lectured in English, fearing that his Mandarin was not good enough for his Chinese students, although Lu Xun still recognised his being 'Chinese' in racial or ethnic terms.[77] In addition to this, the Straits Chinese approach to reform that had originated in the 1900s was already becoming anachronistic in the youth movements of 1920s China. In one of Lim's lectures while Lu Xun was present, he spoke out against the equation of Confucius' doctrine of 'respect the ruler' with 'imperialism' and instead argued that they should follow Mencius and 'value the common people' in order to achieve *da tong*.[78] Coupled with his Christianity and association with the British Empire, Lim's rejection of the stark anti-imperialist politics of many of China's cutting-edge intellectuals such as Lu Xun resulted in his uncomfortable reception into mainland politics. Consequently, we can see how the Straits Chinese and their unique views and background were never fully accepted into the increasingly narrow nationalisms of post-May Fourth China.

18 Their inability to fit in to a post-1911 Chinese nation-state was a lasting problem for the Straits Chinese. Maurice Freedman writes, 'as some of them have painfully discovered by going back to one of the two Chinas, many are so little Chinese in their outlook that they are foreigners in several senses in the land of their forefathers.'[79] Wang Gungwu's memoirs attest to a similar experience: 'Waiting to go to China and returning to Malaya shaped my life more than I realized. Now that I am old, I find so much of my life to be traceable to those places.... An image of Nanjing reminds me of what I seemed to be looking for several times in my life while Ipoh represents the world of multiple cultures that I lived with and learnt to love.'[80] The challenges of matching self-identification with the identification of others were partially resolved in his second memoirs with the title 'Home is Where We Are'.[81] Thus, Wang, like some other ethnic Chinese born and raised abroad, eventually found comfort in a pluralised and personalised understanding of 'home' which was built out of his Malayan experience, no longer awkwardly straddling places and spaces. It is this final acceptance which this paper hopes to underline as a cosmopolitan resolution to the problem of the transition from a world of empires to nation-states. In this way, Wang, like many of the Straits Chinese, challenged the liminality that the rise of the nation-state and its sorting of populations into citizen-subjects produced for cosmopolitan peoples.

FOOTNOTES

1. Rebecca Karl, *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), "Awakening of Chinese in Singapore," *Straits Times*, November 27, 1906.

2. Reforming Babas," *Straits Times*, January 27, 1898.

3. Tzu-hui Celina Hung, ""There Are No Chinamen in Singapore": Creolization and Self-Fashioning of the Straits Chinese in the Colonial Contact Zone," *Journal of Chinese Overseas* 5, no. 2 (2009): 263.

4. This is Philip Kuhn's preferred metaphor, Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others*, 168-9.

5. Zhongping Chen, "Kang Youwei's Activities in Canada and the Reformist Movement Among the Global Chinese Diaspora, 1899-1909," *Twentieth-Century China* 39, no. 1 (2014): 3-23.

6. Jane Leung Larson, "Articulating China's First Mass Movement: Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao, the Baohuanghui, and the 1905 Anti-American Boycott," *Twentieth-Century China* 33, no. 1 (2007): 4-26.

7. Ibid., 9.

8. Sun Yat-sen, *San Min Chu I*, 7.

9. Pankaj Mishra, *From the Ruins of Empire: The Revolt Against the West and the Remaking of Asia* (London: Penguin, 2013), ch 3.

10. Immanuel C. Y. Hsü, *The Rise of Modern China*, 2nd ed., (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 552-3.

11. Harold Z. Schiffrin, "The Enigma of Sun Yat-sen," in *China in Revolution*, ed. Mary Clabaugh Wright (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 450-2.

12. Mary Clabaugh Wright, "Introduction," in *China in Revolution*, 37.

13. Joseph W. Esherick, "Making Revolution in Twentieth-Century China," in *A Critical Introduction to Mao*, ed. Timothy Cheek (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 31.

14. The origins and applicability of the phrase are, however, disputed. See, Jianli Huang, "Umbilical Ties: The Framing of the Overseas Chinese as the Mother of the Revolution," *Frontier History of China* 6, no. 2 (2011): 183-228.

15. Hsü, *The Rise of Modern China*, 445-6. See also, Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 3rd edition (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2013), 245-6.

16. Hsü, *The Rise of Modern China*, 450.

17. Ibid., 453.

18. Sun Yat-sen, *San Min Chu I*, 44.

19. Ibid., 64.

20. Quoted in Cheah, "Introduction Part II: The Cosmopolitical—Today," 25.

21. Translated by the author, 三民主義，吾黨所宗，以建民國，以進大同. The common translation of *da tong* in the anthem to "world peace" distracts from its connection to Kang Youwei.

22. See, Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation*, 14.

23. Ibid., 49.

24. See, Yen Ching-Hwang, "The Confucian Revival Movement in Singapore and Malaya, 1899-1911," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 7, no. 1 (1976): 33-57.

25. Jean Elizabeth DeBernardi, *Penang: Rites of Belonging in a Malaysian Chinese Community* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2009), 24.

26. Lim Boon Keng, "The Queue Question," 23.

27. Ibid., 25.
28. Lim Boon Keng, "The Role of the Babas in the Development of China," *Straits Chinese Magazine*, September 1903.
29. Chan, "The Case for Diaspora," 112.
30. This branch only lasted until 1914 due to splits in the movement. Yong and McKenna, *The Kuomintang Movement in British Malaya*, 27.
31. Ong Soon Keong, "Rebuilding Corridor, Preserving Prestige: Lim Boon Keng and Overseas Chinese-China Relations," *China and Asia* 2 (2020): 138-9.
32. Song Ong Siang, *One Hundred Years*, 511.
33. Wu was married to a daughter of Wong Nai Siong, one of the leaders of the revolutionary movement, as was Lim Boon Keng. Kam Hing Lee et al., "Dr Wu Lien-teh: modernizing post-1911 China's public health service," *Singapore Medical Journal* 55, no. 2 (2014): 99-102.
34. Song Ong Siang, *One Hundred Years*, 101.
35. Ibid., 33-4, 473.
36. Wang Gungwu, "Sun Yat-sen and Singapore," *Journal of the South Seas Society* 15, no. 2 (1959): 55-68.
37. *Singapore Free Press*, December 13, 1911, "The Straits-born Chinese," *Straits Times*, February 5, 1914.
38. Gungwu, "Sun Yat-sen and Singapore," 68.
39. Frost, "In Search of Cosmopolitan Discourse," 79-80.
40. For example, "Belgium Relief Fund," *Malaya Tribune*, October 31, 1914, "Prince of Wales Relief Fund," *Singapore Free Press*, December 4, 1914, "King Albert's Civilian Hospital Fund," *Malaya Tribune*, May 8, 1916, "Malacca Chinese Aircraft Fund," *Malaya Tribune*, September 17, 1915, "British War Loan," *Malaya Tribune*, October 16, 1915, "Malayan Aircraft: Malacca's Contribution to the Imperial Government," *Malaya Tribune*, February 17, 1916.
41. "Malacca Canton Relief Fund," *Malaya Tribune*, August 2, 1915, "Y.M.C.A. Special Building Fund," *Straits Times*, September 25, 1916.
42. Song Ong Siang, *One Hundred Years*, 519, 542.
43. See, Yu-Lin Ooi, "Philanthropy in Transition: An Exploratory Study of Asian Women and Philanthropy in Singapore, 1900-1945," *Philanthropy in Asia*, Working Paper No. 2, Asia Centre for Social Entrepreneurship & Philanthropy (May 2016).
44. For example, Jeffrey B. Miller, *Yanks behind the Lines: How the Commission for Relief in Belgium Save Millions from Starvation During World War I* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020).
45. Straits Chinese British Association, *Duty to the British Empire.* For more on their role in this period see Song Ong Siang, *One Hundred Years*, 524-528.
46. See especially, Straits Chinese British Association, *Duty to the British Empire*, ch 1-2.
47. *Duty to the British Empire*, ch 14.
48. "The Pretoria Procession," *Singapore Free Press*, June 14, 1900.
49. *Duty to the British Empire,* ch 2.
50. "Straits Born Chinese and the War," *Malaya Tribune*, December 3, 1915.
51. Straits Chinese British Association, *Duty to the British Empire*, ch 12.
52. Ibid., ch 10.
53. Song Ong Siang, *One Hundred Years*, 246. Asilatul Hanaa Abdullah, "The Impact of World War I on British Malaya: The Battle of Penang, 1914," *International Journal of West Asian Studies* 12 (2020): 61-75.
54. Harper, "Singapore, 1915, and the Birth of the Asian Underground," 1795.
55. "Straits Chinese V.C.," *Malaya Tribune*, January 11, 1916.
56. "Legislative Council," *Malaya Tribune*, October 16, 1915.
57. "Straits Chinese British Association," *Malaya Tribune*, December 3, 1915.

58. Song Ong Siang, *One Hundred Years*, 547. "The Singapore Mutiny," *Singapore Free Press*, September 29, 1917.

59. Erez Manela, "Imagining Woodrow Wilson in Asia: Dreams of East-West Harmony and the Revolt against Empire in 1919" *American Historical Review* 111, no. 5 (2006): 1342-3

60. "Telegrams received by the Chinese Delegation in support of their stand on the Shantung question" (Paris: Government publication, 1919).

61. Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea* (London: Penguin, 2012), 128-136.

62. Manu Goswami, "Imaginary Futures and Colonial Internationalisms," *American Historical Review* 117, no. 5 (2012): 1464.

63. Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

64. See, Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determinations and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Pres, 2007).

65. "Anti-Japanese Disturbances in Straits Settlements," Consular Report from Singapore, July 26, 1919, FO 628/35.

66. "Chinese Boycott and Japanese Goods," Consular Report from Phuket, June 29, 1919, FO 628/35.

67. See, David Kenley, *New Culture in a New World: The May Fourth Movement and the Chinese Diaspora in Singapore, 1919-1932* (London: Routledge, 2003).

68. Lim Koon Teck, "Sons of Malaya," *Straits Chinese Annual* (Singapore: 1930): 16.

69. "Chinese Community," *Straits Times*, March 19, 1920.

70. Lim Boon Keng, "The So-Called clash of Races in Malaya," *Straits Chinese Annual* (Singapore: 1930): 1-11.

71. "A White Ocean," *Straits Times*, May 2, 1905. The discourse of being "sons of the soil" has special purchase in Malaysia where it is used as justification for the bumiputera (literally meaning sons of the soil) affirmative action policy of special rights and privileges.

72. "The Straits-Born Chinese," *Malaya Tribune*, February 12, 1931.

73. Song Ong Siang, *One Hundred Years*, 33.

74. Penang tried to secede from the Federation, "Majority Support for Secession At Penang Meeting," *Straits Times*, December 14, 1948. See also, Clive Christie, *A Modern History of Southeast Asia: Decolonization, Nationalism and Separatism* (London: Tauris, 1996), 44-51

75. Wang Gungwu, *China and the Chinese Overseas* (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1991), 147.

76. Chan, "The Case for Diaspora," 114.

77. Gungwu, *China and the Overseas Chinese*, 150.

78. Ibid., 151.

79. Maurice Freedman, "The Chinese in Southeast Asia: A Longer View," in *The Study of Chinese Society: Essays by Maurice Freedman. Selected and Introduced by G. William Skinner*, eds. Maurice Freedman and G. William Skinner (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979), 20-21.

80. Wang Gungwu, *Home is Not Here* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2018), 19.

81. Wang Gungwu, *Home is Where We Are* (Singapore: Ridge Books, 2021).

5. Conclusion

Sou o intervalo entre o que desejo ser e os outros
me fizeram,
Ou metade desse intervalo, porque também há
vida...
Sou isso, enfim...
Fernando Pessoa (1944)[1]

1 In this poem, Fernando Pessoa's alter-ego Álvaro de Campos captures the spirit of a liminal existence. We only have a limited ability to define ourselves, the rest is filled in for us. As identity was bound to race and nation, occupying a liminal position became increasingly difficult. The Straits Chinese existed at the interval between empire and nation and between Britain, China and Malaya. Their in-betweenness emerged precisely in this moment and this space of transition, where East met West and empires became nation-states. Out of this position, the Straits Chinese articulated a cosmopolitanism that embraced multiple, layered identities while simultaneously negotiating a place for themselves in a potentially egalitarian British Empire and a deterritorialised Chinese nation. These processes were interlocked and grew out of each other. To underline this point one final time, I want to highlight three connected epilogues of this story for the Straits Chinese:

2 After the war and into the post-colonial period, the Babas suffered from an 'ambiguity of identity' that only began to be resolved by the rejuvenation of interest in Straits Chinese history and heritage, especially under the Singaporean state.[2] Of particular interest was the material and cultural history of the Straits Chinese rather than their connections to Empire suggested by their nickname the 'King's Chinese'. Thus, by the late 1970s, most discussion of Straits Chinese revolved around performative aspects such as dress, cooking, and design and less so their politics.[3] Indeed, the process of recovering Straits Chinese heritage highlights a notable absence in this study, the Nyonya. By focusing on the domestic sphere, the heritage industry has brought to life the world of the Nyonya much more so than the Baba who are often represented as they were seen at the time, British men in Chinese dress. As guardians of the private sphere and tradition, the focus on Nyonyas mirrored the Babas own interest in Nyonyas during the reform movement when they were targeted for improvement as wives, mothers and homemakers.[4]

3 This, however, ignores the role of women as active participants in the reform movement. For example, the fact that women were frequently blamed for gambling was the cause of consternation for one Nyonya who wrote to the *Straits Times* in 1907 saying that the success of Babas in business had derived from their wives' careful maintenance of the household purse.[5] Furthermore, she said, 'If the Babas want their wives to renounce gambling let them abjure it first, and keep clear of houses of ill-fame.' Those who replied to her avoided blaming Babas and emphasised that proper education was the ideal vector for improving Nyonyas.[6] Unhappy with this response, she resolved to 'come forward in defence of [her] sex' and noted that while education would be helpful, 'education is not a panacea for all ills.'[7] Rather, if gambling was to be stopped, 'any reformation on this line should commence with the young men themselves.' Reflecting their increasing politicisation, by the 1920s, some Chinese women in the Straits began to adopt the dress of the 'modern girl' and engage in transnational political activity.[8] In 1925, for example a young woman from Penang dressed in the 'new style' with 'bobbed hair' and a 'mannish demeanour' who spoke English and Malay, travelled from Hong Kong with 'anarchistic ideas' and set off a bomb at the office of the Chinese Protector in Kuala Lumpur.[9] Wong Sung was sentenced to a 10-year imprisonment for an act that seemed to signal the beginning of a new cosmopolitan anti-colonial politics in Malaya and which drew on communism and anarchism rather than British liberalism or Confucianism. This story, however, has been avoided in the heritage industry around the Nyonya. This serves as a reminder that the transition from empire to nation-state was a fragmented and incomplete process. A narrative of the Straits Chinese being squeezed out of the space they had carved for themselves misses out on the gendered nature of decolonisation and its failings for women.

4 Furthermore, and this is the second epilogue, as the Straits Chinese sought to make a home for themselves in a nationalising Malaya, they also emphasised the Malay side of their background, drawing on the Nyonya half and acknowledging this part of their culture more than before. This had always been there but was often seen negatively in line with the racial theories of the day. Lim Boon Keng, for example, despite his concerns about Malay blood, still spoke Malay with his family, had his sisters wear Nyonya dress, and could not have a meal without *sambal belacan* at the table.[10] In this sense, Straits Chinese positioning was always relational, emphasising and deemphasising certain aspects just as they did with their language. While I have focused mainly on the Chinese and British sides of this story, as we move further into the present, the Malay dimension took on greater importance for the Straits Chinese, especially in what became Malaysia. Through their emphasis on their Malay heritage rather than their more cosmopolitan background, many Peranakans tried to slot themselves into the logics of indigeneity and nationalism in post-colonial Malaya. As a result, their culture has been able to survive to this day in its reduced, gendered, and consumable form now considered national heritage.

5 At the same time, and this is the third epilogue, the Straits Chinese, now more commonly called Peranakans, are still struggling to find a fulfilling position in a world of nation-states. They have felt the nihilistic sense of longing of cosmopolitans whose 'roots would never go deep enough anywhere to make [themselves] a home.'[11] Around the time of Singapore's bicentennial, Singaporean author Josephine Chia wrote, 'For many years, as a Peranakan growing up in Kampong Potong Pasir, I was caught in an identity crisis. I was taunted with the acronym, OCBC, *Orang China Bukan China*

translated as Chinese person not Chinese.'[12] Like Lee Kuan Yew, she was dislocated by the identifications of others. As she says, 'Peranakans fall in between the cracks of our traditional notions of race.' This condition of liminality suggests a sitting on the fence, an inability to find a space. Decolonisation, the rise of the nation-state, and the sorting of populations into citizen-subjects of those states, have prevented the existence of any kind of political repository into which one can pour a cosmopolitan identity. Thus, this kind of transnational habitus must be *liminal*; it can only exist on the borders because it is intolerable to the state on the inside. Liminality is constantly contested by a state that desires legibility and congruency. At its most extreme, this renders people into Giorgio Agamben's 'bare life' who, lacking a state to call home, lack that very entity which grants supposedly universal human rights.[13] This is what happened to many Straits Chinese in the late 1940s and 1950s and was experienced even more violently by Peranakans in Indonesia. It is in this regard that the stateless person might be considered the epitome of the cosmopolitan individual in the modern world, the direct outcome of the 'opposing centripetal and centrifugal forces' of globalisation.[14] Thus, we should be careful not to privilege the comfortable autochthonous experience as the final outcome of a decolonisation telos and instead recognise the difficulties that a world of nation-states continues to pose for belonging today. While the Singaporean state has tried to incorporate Peranakans into their historical narrative, it remains the case that their racial and political focus on discrete identities (racial and national) push people like Josephine Chia back into the 'cracks'. Again, Ee Tiang Hong sums up this sense of emptiness:

6 They have succeeded
in changing the names
of things and places
as they pleased–
streets, bridges, monuments,
buildings, parks, playing fields,
whatever they deemed alien to our nationalism,
as they defined it.

7 *Tuan Munshi*,
as when you saw with your own eyes
the destruction of our Fort,
the blasting of an unyielding stone,
the pious licence with word and meaning,
I, too, could only watch,
dumbfounded.

8 Ee Tiang Hong, 'New Order'[15]

FOOTNOTES

1. Fernando Pessoa, *Poesia de Álvaro de Campos* (Lisbon: Assírio & Alvim, 2002), 433. It translates roughly as "I am the interval between what I want to be and what others have made of me, / Or half this interval, because there is also life . . . / That's me, after all..."

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