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## **The patriarchy of diaspora: Race fantasy and gender blindness in Chen Da's studies of the Nanyang Chinese**

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## The patriarchy of diaspora: Race fantasy and gender blindness in Chen Da's studies of the Nanyang Chinese

*This paper critically appraises the earliest sociological investigations of Nanyang Chinese communities by the sociologist Chen Da (1892-1975). By exploring Chen's corpus of work and highlighting systemic blindspots of race and gender, it reveals the normative rather than empirical quality of his sociological elaboration of the huaqiao. Tracing the genesis of his research, and his travels through Southeast Asia, it shows how, at each stage, Chen's investigations, academic networks, connections he made with his local informants, and even his collaborations with his principal translator, offered an understanding of the world beyond a patriarchal, patriotic Chinese diaspora that he declined to explore fully. The paper thus offers an intimate window into the historically contingent conceptual work that went into constructing the Chinese 'diaspora', and highlights the need to exercise caution in making ahistorical use of social science studies of overseas Chinese.*

Keywords: huaqiao, sociology, gender, race, diaspora, Nanyang, knowledge production

Chen Da 陈达 (1892-1975) was, and is still considered, an eminent sociologist of labour and population in China, with a long and illustrious career association with the founding of sociology at Qinghua University in Beijing.<sup>1</sup> He is the 'Chen' of the pithy saying often trundled out when discussing Chinese sociology: 'Bei Chen Nan Sun', or 'In the north there is Chen, and in the South there is Sun', the latter a reference to Chen's equally famous contemporary Sun Benwen 孫本文

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1 Biographical accounts include Wang Renze, 'Chen Da', in *Minguo renwu zhuan* [Biographies of People in the Republic of China], vol. 9 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997), 385-391; Wen Xiang, 'Chen Da, Pan Guangdan yu shehuixue de "Qinghua xuepai"' [Chen Da, Pan Guangdan and the "Qinghua school" of sociology], *Xueshu jiaoliu* (2016), 155-159. The banning of sociology in China after 1952 complicates this history somewhat, see below.

(1891–1979) in Nanjing.<sup>2</sup> Both of them were part of a first generation of US-trained Chinese sociologists who were calling in various ways for the sinicization of sociology and for the production of sociological work by Chinese social scientists based on Chinese realities.<sup>3</sup> Both of them were also representatives of what Zheng Hangsheng identified as the ‘syncretic (*zonghe*) school of sociology’, whose associates were influenced by their American training and association with contemporary sociologists like Robert Park at Chicago, and especially William Ogburn and Franklin Giddings at Columbia, and who sought to look beyond Marxist materialism to emphasize cultural and psychological factors in their social analyses.<sup>4</sup>

Chen is perhaps best known in China for his monumental 1934 study *Renkou wenti*, a study of demography, labour and overpopulation.<sup>5</sup> After an educational sojourn in the United States under a Boxer Indemnity funded scholarship between 1916-1923, during which time he took three degrees and witnessed China’s entry into World War I, the Russian Revolution and the May Fourth movement from abroad, he returned to China and into Tsinghua University. Over the next twenty years, he moved between academia and government work, conducting both sociological research and practical work for the Nationalist government into the wartime period, investigating problems of labour and administering population survey projects which then fed back into his academic work. Chen can thus be understood as part of a broader, global history of social scientists as ‘world-makers’, embedded in

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2 Fang Yuan & Weitian Quan, ‘Shehui xuejia Chen Da’ [Sociologist Chen Da], *Shehuixue yanjiu* (1980), p. 128

3 Others include Fei Xiaotong and Pan Guangdan, the latter of whom was especially close with Chen Da, and took over leadership of the Tsinghua sociology department after Chen stepped down in 1943. Of all the pioneering sociologists of this generation, Chen was the only one who conducted research into the overseas Chinese.

4 Zheng Hangsheng, *Zhongguo shehuixue shi xinbian* [A new compilation of the history of Chinese sociology] (Beijing: Higher Education Press, 2000); Arif Dirlik, ‘Zhongguohua: Worlding China’, in Arif Dirlik (ed.), *Sociology and Anthropology in Twentieth-Century China: Between Universalism and Indigenism* (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2012), 1-39; Ana Maria Candela, ‘Sociology in Times of Crisis: Chen Da, National Salvation and the Indigenization of Knowledge’, *Journal of World-Systems Research*, 21 (2015), 362-386; Yung-chen Chiang, *Social engineering and the social sciences in China, 1919-1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Contemporaries recognized Giddings’ influence in particular on the early development of Chinese sociology; see e.g. Chih Meng, ‘The American Returned Students of China’, *Pacific Affairs*, 4 (1931), 1-16.

5 Chen Da, *Renkou wenti* [Problems of population] (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1934)

passionate projects of collecting and inventing facts for national and imperial purposes.<sup>6</sup>

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2 *Renkou wenti*, however, is bookended by two major studies of Chinese migration, one in 1923, and a  
3  
4 second in 1938, which at least one of Chen's students has regarded as the more important of his  
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6 works.<sup>7</sup> These have been frequently used ever since, as references, principally mined for their rich  
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8 empirical detail and the rarity of their scope as perhaps the only studies of prewar 'emigrant districts'  
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10 (*huaqiao shequ*, or *qiaoxiang*), Guangdong and Fujian, in relation to Chinese communities in  
11  
12 Southeast Asia. But they are not well understood as contingent products of particular personal,  
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14 national and global histories and circumstances. In this article I seek to take a critical approach to  
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16 Chen Da's putatively empirical sociology of the Nanyang Chinese, showing how the conditions of  
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18 his social scientific world-making have baked in deep racial and gendered assumptions about the  
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20 *huaqiao*.<sup>8</sup> To do so, I draw not only on his corpus of sociological publications on emigrant Chinese  
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22 communities, but also on his little-used travel and fieldwork diaries from his mid-1930s' travels in  
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24 the Nanyang, as well as highlighting some of the unexplored omissions and divergent interpretations  
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26 of his data which emerge from field study to collaboration, publication and translation. I show how,  
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28 at each stage of his research into Chinese emigrant communities, his investigations, academic  
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30 networks and the connections he made with his local informants offered an understanding of the  
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32 world beyond a patriarchal, patriotic Chinese diaspora that he constantly declined to explore fully.  
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43 6 Jeremy Adelman, ed. *Empire and the Social Sciences: Global Histories of Knowledge*  
44 (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019); Tong Lam, *A Passion for Facts: Social Surveys and the*  
45 *Construction of the Chinese Nation State, 1900-1949* (Berkeley: University of California Press,  
46 2011).

47 7 This student was Han Mingmo, whom Chen taught in Lianda during the wartime years, and  
48 who later became a professor of sociology in Peking University. The works in question are Ta Chen  
49 (Chen Da), *Chinese migrations, with special reference to labor conditions* (Washington DC: US  
50 Government Printing Office, 1923), henceforth CM1923; Chen Da, *Nanyang huaqiao yu minyue*  
51 *shehui* [South Seas Chinese and social conditions in Guangdong and Fujian] (Shanghai: Shangwu  
52 yinshu guan, 1938), henceforth NYHQ1938. The latter was translated into English in 1940 as Chen  
53 Da, *Emigrant communities in south China: A study of overseas migration and its influence on the*  
54 *standard of living and social change* (New York: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1940), henceforth  
55 EC1940.  
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57 8 For a similar critical appraisal of sociology in the field of British history, see Jon Lawrence,  
58 'Social-science encounters and the negotiation of difference in early 1960s England', *History*  
59 *Workshop Journal* 77 (2014), 215-239. I am grateful to Lucy Delap for this suggestion.  
60

The world which Chen moved in, carefully gathering social facts, was resolutely male, and in spite of the region's ethnic complexity, resolutely Chinese. The patriotism of the *huaqiao* concept has been relatively well established in the literature, and yet still too little attention has been paid to the gender of this patriotism, and to the struggle of Chinese racial theorizing in the ethnically heterogeneous South Seas.<sup>9</sup> Chen's sociology of the *huaqiao*, I argue, laid the foundations not only for a patriotic Sinocentrism of the diaspora, but also for an unassailable patriarchalism of the concept of Chinese diaspora which, even today, largely goes unremarked.

### **Sociology and the making of the *huaqiao***

It is worth elaborating briefly here on Chen Da's use of the term *huaqiao*, which as many studies have shown, was under conceptual construction in the late Qing and early Republic.<sup>10</sup> Chen's studies were curiously untethered from the proliferation of studies of Nanyang *huaqiao* being conducted almost simultaneously by a circle of intellectuals around Jinan University and its Department of Nanyang Cultural and Educational Affairs, including Liu Shimu 刘士木 (1889-1952), Yao Nan 姚楠 (1912-1996), Su Qianying 苏乾英 (1910-1996) and especially Li Changfu 李长傅 (1899-1966), who was perhaps the most prolific writer on the Nanyang Chinese in the Nanjing era.<sup>11</sup> Li

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9 For accounts which make clear the male domination of accounts of Chinese diasporic intellectuals and revolutionaries, but lack critical reflection on this matter, see Soon Keong Ong, "'Chinese, but not quite': Huaqiao and the Marginalization of the Overseas Chinese', *Journal of Chinese Overseas*, 9 (2013), 1-32; Huang Jianli, 'Umbilical ties: The framing of the Overseas Chinese as the Mother of the Revolution', *Frontiers of History in China*, 6 (2011), 183-228; Shelly Chan, *Diaspora's Homeland: Modern China in the Age of Global Migration* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), chs. 2-3. For examples of work that consider Chinese theorization about southern racial complexity from a literary perspective, see Cheow-Thia Chan, 'The Poetics and Politics of Li Yongping's Transregional Chinese Literary Production', *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, 30 (2018), 63-86; Emma Teng, *Taiwan's imagined geography: Chinese colonial travel writing and pictures, 1683-1895* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004).

10 See e.g. Zhuang Guotu, *Huaqiao huaren yu Zhongguo de guanxi* [Overseas Chinese and their relationship with China] (Guangzhou: Guangdong Higher Education Publishing House, 2001); Wang Gungwu, 'Southeast Asian hua-ch'iao in Chinese history-writing', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 12 (1981), 1-14.

11 His works include early statements on the meaning of 'huaqiao': Li Changfu, "Shijie de Huaqiao" [Overseas Chinese across the world], in Li Changfu, *Li Changfu xiansheng lunwen xuanji* [Anthology of the writings of Li Changfu] (Guangzhou: Jinan daxue chubanshe, 2001). Perhaps his most famous work is Li Changfu, *Zhongguo zhimin shi* [A History of Chinese colonialism]

Changfu's interest in the overseas Chinese was actually provoked by reading Harley Farnsworth MacNair's *Chinese Abroad*, as he laments in the introduction to his 1927 study *Huaqiao*: 'The study of *huaqiao* was not started by Chinese people but by foreigners; this is a great shame to Chinese academia.' He took *huaqiao* to mean 'all *hua* people (short for *Zhonghua* people) who sojourn and live abroad' ( 华者，中华之简称，侨者，旅寓之意，凡我国人旅寓于国外者，皆可称之曰华侨).<sup>12</sup> Li's educational sojourn was to Japan rather than America -- he spent a short stint at Waseda University between 1929-31 -- and perhaps influenced by Japanese ideas of colonization as 'people planting' (*shokumin* 植民), his writings exhibit an understanding of Chinese migration to the Nanyang as a form of developmental colonization, or settler development (*tuozhi*), along with the civilizational benefits that implied.<sup>13</sup> He specifically viewed China's colonization (*zhimin*) of the Nanyang as a developmental process, of 'leaving the motherland for a relatively undeveloped country' to settle permanently and participate in economic activities, while maintaining political relations with the motherland -- though he was careful to distinguish this from European colonialism, which he viewed as having greater state support.<sup>14</sup> Like many northern Chinese intellectuals -- Li was a Jiangsu

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(Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1937), and various studies of Nanyang history and geography, e.g. *Nanyang shi gangyao* [Outline of the History of the Nanyang] (Shanghai: Shanghai Commercial Press, 1936) and *Nanyang dili* [Nanyang geography] (Kunming: Zhonghua shuju, 1940). For an overview of studies of *huaqiao* published in the KMT period, Li Anshan, 'Zhonghua minguo shiqi Nanyang yanjiu shuping' [Overseas Chinese studies during the Chinese Republican era], *Jindaishi yanjiu*, 4 (2002), 290-314.

12 Li Changfu, *Huaqiao* (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1927), 1. The work he refers to is Harley Farnsworth MacNair, *The Chinese abroad* (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1924).

13 Others associated with the Jinan school also expressed similar views; see for example Liu Jixuan & Shu Shicheng, *Zhonghua minzu tuozhi Nanyang shi* [The history of Chinese peoples' development of the Nanyang] (Zhengzhou: Henan renmin chubanshe, 2016). For further studies, see Zhao Canpeng, 'Jinan daxue Nanyang wenhua shiye bu de lishi yanjiu [The historical development of the Nanyang Cultural Affairs Department at Jinan University]', *Dongnanya yanjiu*, 6 (2007), 5-12; Leander Seah, 'Between East Asia and Southeast Asia: Nanyang Studies, Chinese Migration, and National Jinan University, 1927-1940', *Translocal Chinese: East Asian Perspectives*, 11 (2017), 30-56; Chan, *Diaspora's Homeland*, ch. 2.

14 For an appraisal of *shokumin* particularly through the writings and teachings of Nitobe Inazo at Tokyo University, see Alexis Dudden, 'Nitobe Inazo and the diffusion of a knowledgeable empire', in Jeremy Adelman, ed., *Empire and the Social Sciences: Global Histories of Knowledge* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 111-122.

1 native -- he also subscribed to stereotypes about the nature of the southern peoples that would push  
 2 them to do such un-Confucian things as travel away from their family burial grounds. The southern  
 3 coastal residents, he thought, were piratical by nature, and ‘late bloomers’ in the adoption of  
 4 Confucian norms, and so while they were no doubt bettering even less developed lands in the southern  
 5 seas, they were themselves far less civilized than their northern counterparts, who would not have  
 6 sojourned at all.  
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13 On this matter, Chen’s approach to the *huaqiao* was diametrically opposed. He seems never to have  
 14 cited works on the Nanyang from the Jinan scholars, nor did he engage with their usages of the term  
 15 *huaqiao*, although his work was certainly known at least later on to some within the Jinan circle,<sup>15</sup>  
 16 and he did interact with Liu Shimu in conceptualizing his 1938 study, though I have not been able to  
 17 ascertain the extent of this exchange.<sup>16</sup> Unlike the Jinan scholars, Chen made a distinction between  
 18 two types of emigrant Chinese with ‘different natures and different outlooks on life’: those who  
 19 migrated out of China, *qianmin* (literally, people who moved 迁) and those who grew up in the South  
 20 Seas, *qiaomin* (literally, people who lived abroad 侨). He considered *huaqiao* to be a ‘common name’  
 21 (*sucheng*) or an umbrella term for *haiwai zhongguoren*, a category which for him included both  
 22 *qianmin* and *qiaomin*.<sup>17</sup> And rather than regarding mainlanders as civilizing the less developed  
 23 southern Nanyang lands, his work came to express in effect the view that emigrant Chinese  
 24 constituted an ‘element of social change’ (*shehui bianqian de yige yuansu*) for the emigrant districts  
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 47 15 He is mentioned for example by Yao Nan, one of the founding members of the Nanyang  
 48 South Seas society: Yao Nan, ‘Zhongguo dui dongnanya shi de yanjiu’ [Chinese research on  
 49 Southeast Asia], in Yao Nan, *Xingyun yeyu ji* [Stars, coconut trees and rain: A Singaporean  
 50 collection] (Singapore: Xinjiapo xinwen yu chuban youxian gongsi, 1984).

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 52 16 NYHQ1938. Liu Shimu’s understanding of *huaqiao* was also very different from Chen’s; he  
 53 thought that *huaqiao* was a simple abbreviation of *zhonghua qiaomin*, or Chinese people who lived  
 54 in foreign countries, and like Li Changfu, tended towards a settler colonial conception of Chinese  
 55 migration. See Liu Shimu & Xu Zhigui, *Huaqiao gaiguan* [Huaqiao survey] (Shanghai: Zhonghua  
 56 shuju, 1935), 1-4.

57 17 On *sucheng*, see Zheng Jiancheng, “‘Sucheng’ yu ‘huncheng’: Chen Da lun ‘huaqiao’  
 58 gainian” [‘Sucheng’ and ‘huncheng’: Chen Da on the concept of ‘huaqiao’], *Huaqiao huaren wenku*  
 59 *xuekan*, (2017), 109-116.  
 60

of Guangdong and Fujian. In other words, rather than China civilizing the barbaric Nanyang periphery, the *huaqiao* of the Nanyang were, in fact, sources of modernization for a more backward China. Emigrants, the study concludes, tend to stimulate social change in China: materially, they remitted money home and transformed the economic base of sending provinces; and beyond the material, they also brought different practices and values back to the emigrant districts. Across the realms of livelihood and work, food, clothing and shelter, family structure, education, health habits and religion, emigrants were a major stimulus of change and transformation. They had the cumulative effect of disintegrating the family structures of ‘traditional society’ (*chuantong shehui*), and of fundamentally changing and improving the ‘mode of living’ (*shenghuo fangshi*), or ‘standard of living’ (*shenghuo chengdu*) of families in emigrant districts.<sup>18</sup>

One of the reasons for Chen’s discursive isolation from the Jinan circles may be his study’s genesis in a research agenda established by the American-based Institute for Pacific Relations (IPR), an international non-governmental research organization with roots in missionary activism and Wilsonian internationalism. Though largely forgotten today, the IPR had a remarkable influence on public knowledge and both elite and popular discourse about the Asia-Pacific region prior to World War II.<sup>19</sup> At a time when the US government was investing heavily in its domestic white middle classes through the New Deal, the IPR was uniquely committed to a broader mission of fostering transracial and international understanding and communication, beyond state politics and official government policies, around issues concerning China, Japan and the broader Asia-Pacific region: China, in particular, consumed more of its research budget in the 1930s than all other countries combined. Owing no doubt to his networks in the US established while he was a student, Chen was

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18 In his writing Chen explicitly comments that he regards his ‘mode of living’ (*fangshi*) and ‘standard of living’ (*chengdu*) to be roughly equivalent in meaning *if* one subscribed, as he did, to a broader understanding of ‘standard of living’ than merely an economic one that encompassed solely the ‘cost of living’. For his commentary on this see NYHQ1938, pp. 8-10.

19 Some studies include John N. Thomas, *The Institute of Pacific Relations: Asian Scholars and American Politics* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1974); Tomoko Akami, *Internationalizing the Pacific: The United States, Japan and the Institute of Pacific Relations, 1919-1945* (New York: Routledge, 2003) On its connection with Rockefeller Foundation and its research into rural reconstruction, see Chiang, *Social engineering*.



invited to its inaugural conference in Honolulu in 1925 as an expert on Chinese migration, the subject of his PhD dissertation and first monograph publication.<sup>20</sup> What became his 1938 study was developed in conversation with a research agenda agreed at a major IPR conference in Banff in 1933, which resolved to ‘concentrate new research projects in the next biennial period to the subjects of Standards of Living and Cultural Relations’.<sup>21</sup> In particular it was intended to speak to a set of research questions about comparative standards of living between East and West, including a specific question about how far migration has affected standards of living in Pacific communities.<sup>22</sup>

Chen’s initial research fieldwork plan, drafted in 1934, was sent for comment to a wide range of academics within the broad networks of the IPR, from Robert E. Park of Chicago and Romano Adams of Hawaii, to Tao Menghe 陶孟和 (1887-1960) of Nanjing Academia Sinica and Wu Wenzao 吴文藻 (1901-1985) of Yenching University, as well as Liu Shimu from the Nanyang Department at Jinan. Among the most directly involved in the project was undoubtedly Bruno Lasker (1880-1965), the secretary of the IPR and a social scientist with wide-ranging interests in unemployment, public health, social legislation, labour and slavery.<sup>23</sup> Lasker was instrumental at the research design stage, travelled part of the way to Southeast Asia with Chen in early 1935, and remained in close cooperation with him throughout, even furnishing him with notes and ‘literary excerpts’ Lasker himself had collected independently when he visited major Chinese settlements in the Dutch East Indies, Saigon, Singapore and Manila.<sup>24</sup> He was also responsible for overseeing and editing the 1940 English translation of Chen’s 1938 study, and it is in the divergence between the two

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20 CM1923.

21 Bruno Lasker & W. Holland, *Problems of the Pacific: Proceedings of the fifth conference of the Institute of Pacific Relations, Banff, Canada, 14-26 August, 1933* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1934), 476-477.

22 See list of questions at Lasker & Holland, *Problems*, 476-477.

23 Lasker travelled with Chen to Xiamen to meet with Lim Boon Keng. Xiamen University formed the initial base for the assembling of Chen’s research teams, with Wu Ruilin (Lingnan), Fu Shanglin (Sun Yat-sen University) and Xu Shengjin (Xiamen) in consultancy. Chen Da, *Langji shinian* (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1946), ch. 1; henceforth LJSN1946.

24 As acknowledged in EC1940, 10 although not in NYHQ1938.

that a moment of contingent discourse formation can be discerned.

In comparing the original and translation, it is clear that there was a kind of intellectual tussle at play, centered directly around argumentation and the question of the extent and centrality of Nanyang *huaqiao* influence on Chinese emigrant districts. The structure of the English translation differed in small but critical ways from that of the Chinese original. Lasker's translation laid out an introduction and 10 chapters that more or less followed the sequence of Chen's chapters, though with the creation of a few extra chapter divisions. Chen's Chinese original, however, distributes all its chapters into just two major parts: Part I, '*Huaqiao* districts: Traditional lifestyle and its changes', and Part II, 'An element of social change: The influence of migrants (*yimin*)'. Lasker commented on this explicitly in his editorial foreword: 'The Chinese author in the present case has enviable mastery of the English language; nevertheless certain passages of the text required further elucidation, or changes in phraseology to make clear their intended meaning. Moreover the order of the report had to be changed because it made too great a demand on Western students who are accustomed to a different sequence of statement in the presentation of a given body of social information.'<sup>25</sup>

The arrangement of Chen's chapters and parts makes clear his argumentative intention: that of all the factors that were changing China at the time, he considered emigrants to be the *principal* one, and he says so explicitly in his introduction:

闽粤的华侨社区，有它的生活方式（mode of living）如本书各章所叙述的。这种生活方式的形成与变迁，当然有许多元素，但南洋的迁民实是主要原动力之一。

The *huaqiao* districts in Guangdong and Fujian have their own specific modes of living, as the chapters of this book will elaborate. There are, of course, many elements (*yuansu*) which contribute to the formation and transformation of their modes of living, but the Nanyang *qianmin* are actually **one of the principal (*zhuyao*) driving forces**.

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25 See Bruno Lasker's editorial foreword in EC1940.

However, this section is translated by Lasker as:

1  
2 The emigrant communities in East Guangdong and South Fujian have a mode of living -- if  
3  
4 here we may briefly anticipate the findings given in subsequent chapters -- readily  
5  
6 distinguishable from that of other rural areas in China. Among the forces motivating social  
7  
8 change the influence of the overseas Chinese from the Nanyang is, of course, **only one, but**  
9  
10 **it is striking and unmistakable.**<sup>26</sup>  
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14 Their intellectual tussle takes place in the argumentative gap between ‘one of the principal driving  
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16 forces’ and ‘only one, but striking and unmistakable’. In fact Lasker circulated a separate interim  
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18 report of his own on Chen’s project in March 1935 among a limited number of IPR members, which  
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20 was intended to comment on Chen’s project in view of its relevance to the broader IPR programme  
21  
22 of research into comparative standards of living.<sup>27</sup> On this point, Lasker’s report demonstrated a  
23  
24 definite divergence from Chen’s arguments. In compiling this report, Lasker had access to the reams  
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26 of letters and field reports that were being channelled to Chen from his platoon of research assistants  
27  
28 stationed in the field sites under study between 1934 and 1935, and was thus able to draw his own  
29  
30 conclusions. Lasker frequently cited reports from Kenneth Chun (Chen Guansheng 陈观胜, ?-?), a  
31  
32 former student at the University of Hawaii and one of Chen’s researchers, whom Chen had likely  
33  
34 come to know while he was stationed in Honolulu as a visiting Carnegie Professor of International  
35  
36 Relations in 1930, and whom Lasker likely also met at that time.<sup>28</sup> Contrary to Chen, Lasker thought  
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38 that ‘remittances enlarge, but do not materially change the standard of living’, and he cited Kenneth  
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40 Chun’s field reports:  
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52 26 EC1940, 11.

53 27 Bruno Lasker, *Changing standards of living in South China as affected by Overseas*  
54 *Migration* (Honolulu: Institute for Pacific Relations, 1935).

55 28 Kenneth Chun is mentioned frequently in *Ka Leo o Hawaii* (Voice of Hawaii), the  
56 university’s student newspaper; for reports on Chen Da’s semester course on international relations  
57 there, see *Voice of Hawaii* 13 December 1929, 14 February 1930, 28 February 1930, 7 March 1930  
58 and 25 April 1930. Bruno Lasker was also in Hawaii at the time; see *Voice of Hawaii* 14 February  
59 1930.  
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1 Change in food and clothing are usually in quantity and quality, but very seldom in kind or  
2 style. It is true, some of the returned emigrants have brought Western clothes back with them;  
3  
4 but they wear these only on special occasions. We have not seen a single woman here wearing  
5  
6 anything other than the Chinese styles. However, the gains in quantity and quality are  
7  
8 considerable.... This is also true of food... There are no visible changes in the eating habits of  
9  
10 the returned emigrants. They still stick to Chinese bowls, chopsticks, and food. However,  
11  
12 there are improvements to the quantity and quality of the food [...]

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16 The wasteful superstitious practices are still rampant...marriages are still concluded without  
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18 the consent of those to be married. One young man who favoured a 'liberal' marriage,  
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20 nevertheless went through the old-fashioned marriage ceremony and, when he was asked why  
21  
22 he permitted it, said he could not fight against the combined opinion of home and community.  
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24 Quite a few of the young returned emigrants have expressed themselves in the same vein --  
25  
26 that it is futile to battle against the dead weight of traditional authority.  
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30 The changes enumerated in previous paragraphs represent only a small portion of the emigrant  
31  
32 families. Our experience in Zhanglin has shown us that, in the great majority of them, the  
33  
34 returned member does not exert any discernible influence at all.<sup>29</sup>  
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38 This direction of critique of Chen's conclusions can also be found in a subsequent review of the  
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40 published book by Francis Hsu 许烺光 (1909-1999), a Malinowski-trained anthropologist and  
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42 specialist on Yunnan magic and science, who wrote critically of Chen's study, rejecting his  
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44 conclusions and stating bluntly that in his scrutiny of the very same facts that Chen made available  
45  
46 in his study, he had nonetheless drawn completely opposite conclusions. 'South Seas emigration  
47  
48 has...not only had no effects opposed to the traditional ways of life, but has caused them to be  
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50 expressed with greater clarity and force', he insisted, and furthermore, 'wealth acquired through  
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60 <sup>29</sup> Lasker, *Changing standards*, 9, 23.

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emigration has in most cases merely added oil to the lamp of age-old tradition.<sup>30</sup> It is possible that this struggle was partly in the minds of IPR researchers after the war. Having spent most of the wartime years in Kunming doing meticulous census work and labour research for the Nationalist government, Chen wrote in 1947 to the IPR to request funding for publishing something out of these investigations, one of the proposed studies of which was on the urbanization of Kunming through the modernizing efforts of migrants. His request was politely declined after some internal discussion: ‘I am [not sure],’ one reviewer wrote privately to William Holland, the IPR research secretary, ‘that he has enough flexibility to undertake work on the topic you suggest.’<sup>31</sup> Chen’s marshalling of social facts into an argumentative theory about the positive, modernizing influence of emigrants on China, part of a developmentalist drive that ran in an opposite direction from his Jinan contemporaries, seems to have been a stubborn interpretation from pre-existing convictions about the value of emigrants to China. He had not, perhaps, heeded enough Lasker’s comment in Honolulu in 1930: ‘A sociologist must be like a child. Otherwise he loses the significance of the facts. If one goes to a place with set theories, he is likely to gather only those facts which suit his theories.’<sup>32</sup>

### **Between fact and theory: Chen Da’s travels in the Nanyang**

Although the bulk of the ground-level fieldwork for the book was done by his research teams,<sup>33</sup> Chen Da did visit the places that appear in his final study, and he recorded his travels in a book published a decade later, called *Notes from ten years of roaming (Langji shinian)* (1946). Part travelogue, part

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30 Francis L.K. Hsu, ‘Influence of South-Seas Emigration on Certain Chinese Provinces’, *Journal of Asian Studies*, 5 (1945), 48, 57.

31 Letter from Notestein to William Holland, 3 Jan 1948, IPR Papers, Box 315, File on Chen Da.

32 ‘Bruno Lasker finds Hawaii very romantic’, *Voice of Hawaii* 14 February 1930.

33 NYHQ1938 sought to compare two emigrant districts with one non-emigrant districts in South China, along with the communities abroad with which the former were in contact. He designated three districts for specific investigation: one in northeast of Amoy, another in northwest of Amoy, and a third in northeast Swatow. At each place, 4-7 investigators spent 4-10 weeks collecting general data from a total of 1,348 families who had either returned from or had members in South Seas.

autobiography and part research notebook, Chen described this volume as a kind of unsystematic *aide memoire* or what he called ‘casual writing’ (*suibian de wenbi*) as part of the practice of empirical sociology (*shizheng shehuixue*).<sup>34</sup> He explained that he sought nothing more than to jot down noteworthy observations for the purposes of furnishing a basis later for argument. As he explained:

A large part of human life is made up of trivial matters, such as food, clothing, shelter and daily activities. For these events, we should observe (*guan cha*) with all our five senses, and seek to reduce errors when observing. Secondly, we should record our observations at the time of observation... If [we do not do so], there are many things that will pass before our eyes like clouds, leaving no trace, and no chance to study them in the future. If the memory is not detailed, there will be no reliable basis for narrative or argument. Third, we should seek to understand the meaning of these observations, and be able to explain the observed phenomena and the recorded facts.

The places he travelled to were determined by the areas of concentration overseas of emigrants from the Southern Chinese districts at the center of his study, and thus for three months in early 1935 he travelled across the Dutch East Indies, British Malaya, Siam and French Indochina. ‘The aim,’ he wrote, ‘was less that of securing data for comparison of living conditions at home and abroad as it was to study those factors in the overseas Chinese community which contribute to the *particular kind of influence* which it exerts on the mode of living in the home communities of its members in South China.’<sup>35</sup> In the following sections, I elaborate firstly on the racially complex milieu of Chen’s encounters and how he persistently reconciled and resolved them into a fantasy of Chineseness that supported his emigrant theories; and secondly, on the persistent masculinity of the world in which he moved, and how that shaped his theories about the role of women in emigrant societies.

*Beyond biology and culture: Fantasies of Chineseness in the Malay world*

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34 LJSN1946, preface.

35 EC1940, 10 (Lasker trans., italics mine).

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2 Unlike his Jinan contemporaries, as outlined earlier, Chen distinguished clearly between *qianmin* and  
3 *qiaomin*, and in the course of his writing did not often use the term *huaqiao* without this  
4 qualification.<sup>36</sup> For Chen, the principal distinction between them was racial, and secondarily,  
5 jurisdictional. *Qiaomin* were mostly mixed race, usually born of a father who had emigrated from  
6 China and a mother who was a local native woman (*dangdi de turen nüzi*). *Qianmin* were  
7 straightforwardly people of Chinese blood who sojourned. This, he thought, mapped onto a further  
8 jurisdictional difference: China's consulates would consider *qianmin* as falling within their sphere of  
9 interests and protection, while European colonial governments considered *qiaomin* to be under their  
10 jurisdiction. *Qiaomin*, Chen said, were 'mostly mixed race (*hunjue'er*); they do not speak Chinese  
11 and do not know Chinese history or geography'.<sup>37</sup>

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Chen's ideas about race are discernible in development from his earliest work, in particular his MA  
research while a student at Columbia in 1920, and his subsequent 1923 monograph from his PhD, on  
Chinese migration. His M. A. dissertation in political science, on birth control, illustrates his early  
inculcation in widespread ideas about biological race and evolution that marked so many Chinese  
intellectuals of that era.<sup>38</sup> Steeped in eugenic discourses of the age, he developed an early set of  
convictions which he would carry throughout his work across the KMT and CCP regimes, that birth  
control or 'volitional limitation of the family' was the only possible check on the 'inevitable evils of  
unlimited propagation',<sup>39</sup> which he saw as the root cause of Chinese poverty. For Chen, birth control  
was the only way to guarantee the constant improvement of the quality of the race, since having large  
families was incompatible with 'leisure', and leisure time was crucial for self-cultivation and  
civilization.<sup>40</sup> He was greatly taken with Margaret Sanger's work, and played a role in introducing

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36 These distinctions were not made in the English-language version of NYHQ1938.

37 LJSN1946, 8-9.

38 Chen Da, *Practical Eugenics in the United States: Birth Control*, M. A. diss., Columbia University (1920), henceforth BC1920.

39 BC1920, 17, 51. Chen helped organize the Maternal and Child Health Association in Beijing in 1932, and also set up a guidance center as well as a periodical, *Renkou fukan* [Population supplement] to advocate birth control and late marriage. See Wang, 'Chen Da'.

40 An idea which appears in BC1920, and is repeated in CM1923.

her to other May Fourth intellectuals and arranging her visit to China in 1920.<sup>41</sup> In his direct contrasting of ‘volitional selection’ as being more beneficial for racial improvement than ‘natural selection’,<sup>42</sup> his views were also exemplary of the attractiveness of Spencerian ‘eugenic control-fantasies’ rather than the impersonal and unmanipulable Darwinian laws of evolution to intellectuals of this period.<sup>43</sup> Racial improvement, in short, could be managed through carefully chosen human action. In his personal life, he practiced what he preached: as an advocate of ‘equal replacement’ of the population (*duideng de gengti*), he believed that a couple should have no more than two children, and as far as I can tell, had only two children himself, about whom very little can be found, owing no doubt to his difficult trajectory through the Maoist era.<sup>44</sup>

There is little specifically about birth control in his study of Chinese migration several years later, but he brought to this study his ideas about active racial improvement. Chen’s 1923 study was based primarily on library research rather than fieldwork, canvassing official documents of Chinese, European and American governments, secondary journal and periodical literature, and Western (though not Chinese) studies of Chinese emigrants.<sup>45</sup> In this work he dealt for the first time with the issue of racial mixing and intermarriage, and perhaps surprisingly, was inclined to view

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41 See Chen Da, ‘For a birth control league in China’, *China Critic*, 21 August 1930.

42 BC1920, 27-28.

43 Christian Geulen, ‘The Common Grounds of Conflict: Racial Visions of World Order 1880–1940’, in Sebastian Conrad & Dominic Sachsenmaier, eds., *Competing visions of world order* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 69. Chen had certainly read Spencer, and refers to his work in CM1923.

44 Chen’s views on birth control and late marriage became fatefully politicized during the policy fluctuations between pro- and anti-natalism over the 1950s. His long-standing advocacy for population control, reaffirmed in an essay published during the Hundred Flowers campaign in spring 1957, placed him on the wrong side of Mao’s view that demographic power was strength (*ren duo lilian da*): ‘the more people there are, the more, faster, better and thriftier we can build socialism’. Along with many anti-natalist social scientists including the famous president of Beijing University Ma Yinchu (1882-1982), Chen was censured as a rightist during the anti-Rightist movement of 1957 and eventually deposed; unlike Ma, he was rehabilitated only posthumously. For Chen’s offending essay, see Chen Da, ‘Jieyu, wanhun yu xin Zhongguo renkou wenti’, *Xin jianshe* vol. 5 (1957), 1-15. For background on population debates of the 1950s, see Penny Kane, *The Second Billion: Population and Family Planning in China* (London: Penguin, 1987); Thomas Scharping, *Birth Control in China 1949-2000: Population Policy and Demographic Development* (London: Routledge, 2005).

45 See chapter bibliographies in CM1923.



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miscegenation in a positive light, as one of the active mechanisms by which a race might be improved. Though his conclusions remain tentative, chiefly held back by ‘the paucity of statistical material on racial amalgamation’, one of the main overall conclusions of his study was that ‘there has been evidence to show the eugenic benefits of miscegenation between the Chinese and other nationals’.<sup>46</sup> He cites various American and European studies which suggested that Chinese blood had an improving and permanent effect on non-Chinese peoples, but also those which suggested that mixed Chinese races might be superior to ‘pure’ ones. He drew, for example, on Ernest J. Reece’s study of racial mixing in Hawaii, which asserted that ‘the Chinese Hawaiian is far superior to both of the elements in his make-up’, and was also superior to the Caucasian-Hawaiian,<sup>47</sup> and elsewhere observed that ‘white blood does not persist in the mestizos....the Chinese is the only race that implants permanent characteristics upon mestizo offspring.’<sup>48</sup> From James Brook’s journal he noted that ‘the mixed breed of the Chinese with the Malays or the Dyaks are a good looking and industrious race... This mainly arises from education and early formed habits which are altogether Chinese; and in religion and customs they likewise follow, in a good measure, the paternal stock. The race is worthy of attention, as the future possessors of Borneo.’<sup>49</sup> This early attention to mixed-race Chinese groups and his more extensive use of American and European sources may have been a stimulus to his *qiaomin/qianmin* distinction, disposing him to view miscegenation in a far more benign light than his Japan-influenced contemporaries.

From his field travels a decade later, however, Chen was presented with quite a different set of realities. Throughout his travels he met community leaders who had largely maintained connections with China or represented Chinese interests, which naturally had a self-selecting effect: those with whom he spoke regularly expressed the opinion that racial mixing between Chinese and non-Chinese would not have improving effects, but rather that the mixing of non-Chinese with Chinese blood

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56 46 CM1923, 2-3.

57 47 CM1923, 126-127.

58 48 CM1923, 109.

59 49 CM1923, 77.

would result in the latter becoming degraded. On 4 February 1935 he recorded a conversation with a Surabayan Chinese man named Lin Huiye 林徽业 (?-?) who conveyed a typically troubling sentiment: ‘Mixed race people think that Chinese people are no good...but in the past hundred years, mixed race populations have been waning. The native people (*turen*) have a simplistic culture, and are famous for being lazy. They don’t understand hygiene (*weisheng*), and when Chinese people mix with them, they degrade the quality of the race.’<sup>50</sup> In Singapore, probably owing to the doors opened by letters from Lim Boon Keng, he was able to meet with major community leaders of both Chinese and Straits Chinese, including Tan Kah Kee 陈嘉庚 (1874-1961) and Tan Cheng Lock 陈祯禄 (1883-1960), and he had a particularly extensive conversation with the former, who conveyed to him similar racially-charged sentiments about the intrinsic laziness of Malay peoples. As Chen records Tan Kah Kee’s words, ‘The reason *huaren* were able to open up Malaya is really because the *turen* lacked ambition and physical strength. Not a single one among Malaya’s *turen* could have built up a 100-acre rubber plantation. But the laziest *huagong* can set up a rubber plantation four times that size.’<sup>51</sup> Perhaps most disturbingly for him, the *qiaomin* he encountered in Java and Siam seemed to have vanished altogether from visible Chineseness: ‘It is sometimes difficult to identify whether *qiaomin* who have assimilated (*tonghua*) with natives are Chinese (*zhongguoren*) or not’.<sup>52</sup>

These social facts presented him with an interpretive problem: how were emigrant communities meant to be an element of positive social change if intermarriage either ‘degraded’ the Chinese race or caused them to become indistinguishable from the *turen*? His solution was to privilege the cultural over the material and biological, in a kind of wishful fantasy of racial thinking. For example, he observed of the mixed-race children he saw in Zhanglin, Shantou, that ‘while the physique (*tizhi*) of mixed-race boys is sometimes distinguishable, the differences are not very significant,’ and that the

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50 Chen’s conversation with Lin Huiye, LJSN1946, 44-45.

51 Conversation with Chen Jiageng, LJSN1946, 91-94.

52 LJSN1946, 27.

most important of them lay in ‘language and living habits (*yuyan yu shenghuo xiguan*).’<sup>53</sup> Of still greater significance, beyond culture, was what was in their hearts: despite their physical assimilation, ‘many [*qiaomin*] still love the motherland, and express a strong sympathy for it’.<sup>54</sup> From his conversation with H. H. Kan (1881-1951), he recorded an idea of Chinese *xinling*, which transcended blood:

On the surface, some habits of the *qiaomin* resemble those of natives, while others resemble those of Europeans -- but when you investigate (*zhencha*, rather than *guancha*) his heart, he is still a Chinese person. *Qiaomin* can take natives as wives, but all children born to them still have the *xinling* of Chinese children.<sup>55</sup>

Chen’s idea of *xinling* (mind, mentality, or perhaps soul or spirit) echoes the influence of his teacher Franklin Giddings, whose emphasis on culture and social psychology had produced the heuristic of the ‘social mind’ to assess collective social phenomena.<sup>56</sup> Chen’s conclusion -- that even if Chineseness were to be biologically lost through racial mixing, it could nonetheless transmit through a metaphysical *xinling* -- was also a contingent ideological formation, produced out of the creative adaptations of prevailing discourses of biological race with ‘the expectation that culture would gradually displace race as the dominant hermeneutic of national unity’ in China.<sup>57</sup> Thus, while noting that in Siam ‘three-quarters of the Siamese Chinese have been “Siamized” (*xianhua*)’,<sup>58</sup> that ‘the degree of Siamization of the *qiaomin* is very high’ in Siam,<sup>59</sup> in Zhanglin, Shantou, he was able to recuperate his vanishing countrymen: that the Siamese-Chinese were the most likely to maintain close business and educational connections with their emigrant districts, and that despite their mixed

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53 LJSN1946, 12.

54 LJSN1946, 9.

55 LJSN1946, 32.

56 For an introductory appraisal, James J. Chriss, ‘Giddings and the social mind’, *Journal of Classical Sociology*, 6 (2006), 123-144.

57 On this point, James Leibold, ‘Searching for Han’, in *Critical Han Studies: the History, Representation, and Identity of China’s Majority* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), p. 233

58 LJSN1946, notes on his visit to Zhonghua Zhongxue, 18 February 1935.

59 LJSN1946, conversation with Chen Daosheng.

1 backgrounds, they were, after all, retrievable into Chineseness: ‘After living in Zhanglin for a long  
2 time, [Siamese mixed-race boys] are all sinicized (*hanhua*), and if no one specifically points them  
3 out, it is not possible to tell who is mixed.’<sup>60</sup>

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7 In Chen’s travelogues and studies of emigrant Chinese, we catch a glimpse of the ways in which, as  
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9 Frank Dikötter, James Leibold and others have shown, Republican-era elites at the time were  
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11 grappling with multiple meanings of racial Chineseness, as ‘Chinese elites negotiated their way  
12 through myriad indigenous categories as well as the globally circulating norms of Western modernity  
13 to fashion an authentic, meaningful and practical form of identity’.<sup>61</sup> Republican intellectuals from  
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15 Liang Qichao and Gu Jiegang to Lin Huixiang and Zhang Xuguang, in addressing similar issues  
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17 around how to historicize the political unity of China’s current geobody with its racial heterogeneity,  
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19 contemplated at least two competing paradigms. Some made use of Western racial theory to posit a  
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21 homogenous single Han race progenitor, and called for the maintenance of racial Han purity. Others  
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23 argued that it was precisely China’s lineage diversity that served as an ancient source of strength  
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25 throughout its long history of physical interactions between Central Plains Han peoples and the  
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27 ‘nomadic, seminomadic and swidden communities of the periphery’, and called for the ‘infusion of  
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29 fresh blood’ (*xin xuetong de hunru*) to continue to strengthen the Han core in the face of Japanese  
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31 aggression and other threats to the Chinese geopolity.<sup>62</sup>

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39 A genealogical appraisal of Chen’s writings demonstrate how the problem was further complicated  
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41 in considering the *huaqiao*, since it had to encompass populations living in ‘peripheries’ beyond  
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43 China’s territorial geobody. As Chen observed, in the South Seas, and unlike within China,  
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45 intermarriage could (and historically did) result in the peripheral vanishing rather than the  
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47 improvement of the Chinese racial center. Chen’s theorizing of the persistence of Chinese  
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49 characteristics despite the facts he ‘observed’ in his travels -- their adoption of a great range of diverse  
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56 60 LJSN1946, 12.

57 61 Leibold, ‘Searching for Han’, 218; Frank Dikötter, *The discourse of race in modern China*  
58 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

59 62 Leibold, ‘Searching for Han’, 233.  
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1 cultural practices, their physical indistinguishability from *turen*, their ignorance of the Chinese  
2 language -- enabled him to posit the continued benefits of emigrant Chinese for China, by connecting  
3 their beneficial qualities to something beyond biology, and even beyond culture. Though he theorized  
4 a category, *qiaomin*, which specifically differentiated these mixed-race communities from ‘pure’  
5 Chinese, he nonetheless drew them into a fantasy of Chineseness that was able to account for the  
6 attenuation of nearly every biological and cultural characteristic -- ‘miscegenation’, changes in food  
7 habits, clothing and shelter habits, and even the loss or rejection of Chinese culture and language --  
8 and still claim them as part of his central thesis: that they were ‘elements’ of positive social change  
9 and improvement for the Chinese core. It is worth noting too, finally, that Chen’s *qiaomin* category  
10 elides what would increasingly become a more salient distinction for Chinese emigrant communities  
11 in the South Seas, namely the distinction between local-born ‘mixed-race’ Chinese on the one hand,  
12 and local-born ‘pure’ Chinese on the other: those who had not intermarried with *turen*, but who  
13 nonetheless had, and wanted, little to do with China.<sup>63</sup>

### 32 *Factmaking and the male gaze*

34 As an intellectual of the May Fourth generation, Chen was typically progressive in his views on  
35 women, and a significant proportion of his early research focused on women in the labour force and  
36 the social changes that were enabling their fuller participation.<sup>64</sup> During his time in government  
37 service for the KMT, he witnessed the promulgation of its new civil code (1929-30), which promoted  
38 marriage reform and particularly emphasized the need for monogamy and free choice in marital  
39 partners for women; indeed Chen explicitly viewed the Nationalist government as a source of  
40 ‘modern influence’ with regard to marriage.<sup>65</sup> In his 1938 study, one of the central components of  
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54 63 An insightful account of this transition is Fujio Hara, *Malayan Chinese and China: conversion in identity consciousness, 1945-1957* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2003).

55 64 See Ta Chen, “Woman and Child Labor,” *Monthly Labor Review* 15(6), 142-149.

56 65 EC1940, 140. On Republican developments in matters concerning marriage and divorce, see Susan Glosser, *Chinese visions of family and state, 1915-1953* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

his theory that emigrants were ‘elements of social change’ was specifically gendered, namely that he regarded the social progress of women in emigrant districts as resulting from migrant influences. It is with regard to women that Chen makes the distinction he does not with the *qiaomin* category, namely that he distinguishes between Chinese girls (*Zhongguo furen*) and foreign-born Chinese girls (*Nanyang, Xianluo* etc. *nüzi* or *qiaosheng de Zhongguo nüzi*), who were, he suggested, more progressive in their outlook. Chen argued that these changes were largely owed to ‘the attitude which the foreign-born Chinese daughter-in-law assumes toward her place in the household. She has either had a school education or has had experience of earning money as a girl. In either case, she has developed her personality in ways not accessible as a rule to girls in the Chinese village.’<sup>66</sup> The ‘great majority’ of rural women in China, Chen said, ‘have neither attended a modern school nor been overseas...socially, they are deemed inferior to men; and this inferiority is accepted by most women without protest.’<sup>67</sup> Nanyang girls, he concluded, were more equal and free in their relations with Chinese men than the great majority of rural women in China, which gave them ‘a spirit of greater independence in the subsequent marriage relation.’<sup>68</sup> This, Chen added, sometimes brought about crises within a family, citing a case of a man introducing his foreign-born Chinese wife to the village family, who balked at her ‘clothes of a modern cut’, the fact that she had been to school, but perhaps most appallingly, that she had persuaded her husband to divide up the family property in China against customary practice.<sup>69</sup>

One clear differentiating factor which went largely unstated by Chen was that he was, in effect, contrasting urban Nanyang women with rural South Chinese women.<sup>70</sup> This progressive, urban-biased view sits uneasily alongside what is perhaps the more lasting and influential aspect of his 1938 study, which is the principal exposition of the phenomenon of the *liangtoujia* (‘dual-headed family’ or ‘dual-headed household’). Chen’s study outlines the *liangtoujia* system as a system of transnational

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66 LJSN1946, 146.

67 EC1940, 129. The order of this and the above statements is different in the Chinese original.

68 EC1940, 145.

69 EC1940, 146.

70 I am grateful to both Penny Kane and Stephen Miles for pressing, separately, this point.

polygamy in which a male emigrant keeps wives and families in both sending village and host society, with principal, predominantly rural wives in the former, and either ‘foreign-born Chinese girls’ (*Nanyang qiaosheng nüzi*) or Nanyang native women (*Nanyang turen nüzi*), predominantly urban, in the latter.<sup>71</sup> This, Chen asserted, was a largely harmonious endeavour: ‘If the head of the family is staying abroad and intends to marry a concubine, his wife in the home village usually raises no objection’<sup>72</sup> as long as he satisfies his financial obligations to both households, and that on the whole, ‘mothers and wives in China often express themselves as entirely satisfied with the son’s or husband’s second matrimonial venture in the Nanyang’.<sup>73</sup> Chen himself recognized this tension with his sympathies toward modern monogamy, admitting in passing that ‘not all the influences in respect to marriage that come from the Nanyang are necessarily in the direction of progress’, since ‘the more influential emigrants tend to support concubinage and the dual marriage system’.<sup>74</sup>

The dissonance between these two views was also highlighted in Hsu’s critiques, who accused Chen of wilfully reading facts against what they said. Hsu pointed out that in his view, and based on his own research in Yunnan, successful returning migrants tended in fact to be even more traditional in their reinforcing of gender norms and roles of women. Even based on Chen’s own data, for all the distress that an overly-modern foreign-born Chinese daughter-in-law might create when they went to (rural) China, they remained in a small minority -- there were only 38 foreign-born among 846 marriage cases studied, which made his comments based on them little more than anecdotal.<sup>75</sup> Lasker’s citation of Kenneth Chun’s correspondences also suggests that Chen might have been overlooking data regarding the ‘harmoniousness’ of the transnational polygamous relationship. As Chun writes:

All too often, it is the chief breadwinner who has gone abroad, and he does not remit a single

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71 As famously elaborated in EC1940, chapter 6, or NYHQ1938, chapter 5. Lasker translates ‘Nanyang native’ as ‘Malay’, even though Chen clearly meant this category to include Siamese and other non-Chinese women; see EC1940, 141, versus NYHQ138, 156, and elsewhere.

72 EC1940, 130.

73 EC1940, 142.

74 EC1940, 140.

75 Hsu, ‘South-seas emigration’.

1 cent home. In such circumstances, the wife and children have to slave to keep body and soul  
2 together. Sometimes the emigrant is gone for many years without sending a word. Worse than  
3 that, he sometimes leaves a newly married wife in the village and then marries a native girl in  
4 the South Seas. Only God knows what mental anguish, forlorn hope, increased hardship these  
5 women have to undergo. In a number of cases, the women we interviewed broke down and  
6 wept. One of them begged us with tears to find her son for her.<sup>76</sup>

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14 These fieldnotes from Kenneth Chun reveal a key feature of Chen Da's research, which is that by and  
15 large, he did not conduct those interviews himself. Indeed, as is clear from his fieldnotes, Chen's  
16 travels did take him to the South Seas, but he seems to have engaged almost exclusively with men:  
17 Chinese consuls, community leaders, entrepreneurs, businessmen and teachers, as well as European  
18 colonial officials and missionaries, and at least one IPR contact, Victor Purcell. His interlocutors were  
19 also exclusively from non-labouring backgrounds. From the questions and conversations he recorded,  
20 it is clear that he was extremely interested in marriage practices in the Nanyang and polygamy among  
21 the *huaqiao*. He made careful notes on Chinese marriages to Siamese women, and how Siamese also  
22 practiced forms of polygamy, but in which women were also entitled to property.<sup>77</sup> From prominent  
23 Straits Chinese community members such as S. Q. Wong and Lim Cheng Ean, he learned about the  
24 contemporary legal battles about monogamy and Chinese customary marriage. He recorded notes on  
25 the infamous Six Widows case decided in 1908 in the Supreme Court, in which it was ruled that in  
26 the eyes of colonial law, polygamy was legal under Chinese 'customary law', and thus that Chinese  
27 could take concubines who might inherit property. He also noted a generational shift in attitudes,  
28 namely that 'the old acquiesced to this ruling, but the young opposed it', and furthermore that *qianmin*  
29 openly took concubines, while *qiaomin* might have them, but not openly.<sup>78</sup> In Penang and Singapore  
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56 76 As cited in Lasker, *Changing standards*, 7.

57 77 As noted in Chen's conversations with Cai Xueyu, Chen Yiru, Chen Daosheng, Zeng  
58 Dingsan, LJSN1946.

59 78 LJSN1946, notes on S. Q. Wong.  
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he noted the increase in ‘new-style marriages’,<sup>79</sup> in modern matchmaking practices,<sup>80</sup> and how Chinese women were becoming more social, and even enjoyed going out dancing.<sup>81</sup> In Solo, he met a peranakan Chinese writer, Tjan Tjoe Som 曾珠森 (1903-1968), who furnished him with a Malay-language article he had written on the challenges which modern, ‘individualistic’ Chinese women faced in marrying and finding jobs, and translated the gist of it for him. Chen copied all of it into his notebook and was so taken with Tjan that he sought him out again in London the following year whilst on his European sabbatical.<sup>82</sup> Thus typically for Chinese intellectuals of the era, Chen appraised the question of women’s advancement and liberation through overwhelmingly male eyes. The reliance on male testimony is especially problematic given that Chen’s travels coincided specifically with a time of escalating Chinese female labour migration, a phenomenon little touched upon in his empirical study. In 1931 Malaya’s Chinese female population was around 580,000, or roughly 34% of the whole Chinese population, followed by the second highest count in the region in Indonesia, at around 465,000.<sup>83</sup> In Siam in 1929, there were 131,500 women out of a total population of 445,000, a proportion of roughly 30%. W. L. Blythe estimated that the most intense period of Chinese female immigration was from 1934, when the quota was imposed, to 1938, when a limit was placed on female immigrants -- precisely the period when Chen was in the region.<sup>84</sup> A similar story can be told for Siam, where the number of women increased by nearly 70% between 1929 and 1937.<sup>85</sup> It should also be noted that the increase in Chinese female migrants was more than outweighed by

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79 LJSN1946, notes on He Baoren, Tan Cheng Lock and Lim Cheng Ean.

80 LJSN1946, notes on Huang Yankai.

81 LJSN1946, notes on A. L. Hoops.

82 LJSN1946, notes on Tjan Tjoe Som.

83 Fan Ruolan, *Yimin, xingbie yu huaren shehui: Malaiya huaren funu yanjiu 1929-1941* [Migrants, gender and Chinese society: Research into Malayan Chinese women, 1929-1941] (Shanghai: Zhongguo huaqiao chubanshe, 2005), 4-5

84 Wilfred Blythe, ‘Historical Sketch of Chinese Labour in Malaya’, *JMBRAS*, 20 (1947), 65; Tan, Liok Ee, ‘Locating Chinese Women in Malaysian History’, in Tan Liok Ee & Abu Talib Ahmad, eds., *New Terrains in Southeast Asian History* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003), 361.

85 Bao Jiemin, ‘The gendered biopolitics of marriage and immigration: A study of pre-1949 Chinese immigrants in Thailand’, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 34 (2003), 139. By contrast, the population of Chinese women in the whole of the United States was just over 15,000, and less than 2,000 in Australia. Fan, *Yimin*, 4.

the increase in local-born Chinese women. By 1921 local-born women already made up more than half the total number of Chinese females in Penang and Melaka, while in Kelantan they accounted for 90%. From 1931 onward ‘the trend was clearly a steady increase in the number and proportion of local-born Chinese females until, by 1957, they constituted a majority in all states’.<sup>86</sup>

However, despite Chen’s consistent and progressive attention to Chinese women’s labour, Chinese labouring women appear almost nowhere in Chen’s fieldwork diaries.<sup>87</sup> Instead, in addition to male testimony gathered from fieldwork, Chen’s 1938 study (as well as his 1923 study) relied heavily on the use of district and prefectural gazetteers of Fujian and Guangdong as sources of information about Chinese family practices and norms concerning women, labouring or otherwise. Characteristic observations can be found in Chen’s sections on ‘culture traits’: in Quanzhou ‘peasant women wear straw slippers and carry burdens...the gentlemen are seldom quick-witted;’ in Chaozhou ‘girls and women are chiefly engaged in embroidery’ and are ‘seldom seen on the streets’, while ‘the gentlemen are simple in appearance and intelligent in spirit.’<sup>88</sup> As the historian Bao Jiemin has observed, gazetteers are best understood as morally didactic and deeply ideological texts, aimed at establishing norms of gendered behaviour, rather than accurately reflecting men and women’s lives: for example, in the way county gazetteers recorded cases of widow chastity and the filial piety displayed by ‘exemplary wives’ (*lienü*) towards their mothers-in-law when their emigrant husbands died.<sup>89</sup> Chen’s use of male fieldwork testimony might be understood as representing a modernized version of this practice, and in some respects was just as embedded in a particular moral universe as the compilers

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86 Tan, ‘Chinese women’, 363.

87 The lack of attention to women in Chen Da’s emigrant studies have furnished the departure point for several useful studies since: see e.g. Ye Wencheng, ‘Minnan qiaoxiang chuantong hunsu yu funü diwei’ [Traditional marriage customs and the position of women in traditional Fujianese qiaoxiang], in Ma Jianzhao, Qiao Jian, & Du Ruile, eds., *Huanan hunyin zhidu yu funü diwei* [Marriage systems and the position of women in South China] (Nanning: Guangxi minzu chubanshe, 1994); Li Minghuan, *Ouzhou huaqiao huaren shi* [History of overseas Chinese in Europe] (Beijing: Zhongguo huaqiao chubanshe, 2002), esp. 467-448; Huey Bin Teng, ‘Law, Gongqin and Transnational Polygamy: Family Matters in Fujian and British Malaya, 1855-1942’, in Philip Huang & Kathryn Bernhardt, eds., *Research from Archival Case Records: Law, Society and Culture in China* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 408-460.

88 EC1940, 30-31.

89 Bao, ‘Gendered biopolitics’.

of gazetteers were.

To take just one example, Chen's travel notes on Zhanglin and its women have a faint echo of the didactic, moralizing gazetteers:

The women in Zhanglin take care of housework at home and do all the physical labour outside, such as carrying burdens, removing grass, and cutting rice... Women seem to work harder than men. One reason is because many of the men of working age are already in the Nanyang, and another is because of local habits (*bendi de xiguan*)... The local women are natural-footed (*tianzu*)... *Huaqiao* families often have women who take care of household duties and assume various responsibilities.

There are few men residing in Zhanglin, and those who are there are usually the old and the young. Among them are...depraved elements, the lazy and the unambitious; these useless youths depend on remittances from the Nanyang, and had the bad habit of sitting in teahouses, gambling and smoking opium. These men do not work, and are often lazy; passing the years in a trance, they are generally unpromising people. As for the more ambitious and risk-taking men, they have largely crossed the sea to become *fanke*. Those who stay in the village are physically weak and mentally ill.<sup>90</sup>

These assertions updated China's moral universe according to Chen: exemplary emigrant families had strong, household-leading women who worked hard, while ambitious and risk-taking men went abroad and remitted money home. In addition, the new *lienü* were the exemplary women who stayed behind, the *fankeshen* (left-behind wife), who would be 'an intelligent younger woman [who] often fully appreciates why it is desirable or even necessary for her husband to have another wife overseas', or more rarely, might maintain household harmony and live in complete accord with a foreign wife brought back to the village by the returning husband.<sup>91</sup> But in reality, the highly idealized viewpoint expressed here, and woven by Chen into empirical social fact, obscured ground-level realities of

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90 LJSN1946, 13-14.

91 EC1940, 142-143.

women's actual lives, as the handful of subsequent studies of women's much-less-than-harmonious experiences of the *liangtougia* system have demonstrated. Instead, women's and girls' experiences of the *liangtougia* system ranged widely across complex and layered forms of servitude, child betrothal, marriage, concubinage, abandonment and estrangement, as well as a wide range of experiences of support and oppression within the larger in-law familial unit -- all of which was enormously complicated by the inadequacy of the legal mechanisms that governed those relations to the task of transnational protection.<sup>92</sup> Even at the time, the divergence between empirical realities and Chen's ideological viewpoint can be discerned in the slippages between what he wrote and what he (or rather his researchers) saw. To return to Kenneth Chun's reports, as quoted by Lasker:

Among those fortunate emigrants who have been able to accumulate sufficient savings for a new house, built and furnished partly in foreign style (*yanglou*), the women have the work done for them girl servants, while they themselves hobble around on their tiny feet.<sup>93</sup>

The layers of power relations within the intrafamilial unit, alluded to here by Chun, appear nowhere in Chen's study, and were, given Chen's methodology, likely either invisible to him during his travels among men, or which he deemed irrelevant to his objective of assessing the influence emigrants had on their home villages. In this respect, Chen's ideas about modern emigrant women and the transformation of the traditional family unit, were in the end, and much like his gazetteer-writing predecessors, deeply patriarchal in their assumptions, and more normative than empirical in their conclusions.

## Conclusion

Written from a mindset of what Ana Maria Candela has called the 'habitus of crisis' common to late

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<sup>92</sup> See Shen Huiwen, *China's left-behind wives: families of migrants from Fujian to Southeast Asia, 1930s-1950s* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2012); Teng, 'Transnational polygamy'; Rachel Leow, "'Do you own non-Chinese mui tsai?' Re-examining race and female servitude in Malaya and Hong Kong, 1919-1939', *Modern Asian Studies*, 46 (2012), 1736-1763.

<sup>93</sup> Lasker, *Changing standards*, 7. This is in direct contrast to Chen's earlier assertion that Zhanglin women were 'natural-footed'.

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Qing and Republican intellectuals, Chen Da's studies of emigrant communities in South China and the Nanyang inscribed the *huaqiao* into the Chinese geobody as elements of beneficial transformation, a contribution to the project of national salvation for a geopolitically beleaguered China. In doing so, Chen produced a gendered and racial formation that overlooked or theorized away differences in order to argue that, in the end:

as one surveys the totality of the new culture contacts and importations produced by emigration and the return of so many of the emigrants, one can only come to the conclusion that the net result is revolutionary in its implications. Just as the Chinese in the Nanyang have been among the chief carriers of the Republic in its early days, they may be expected to be among the chief carriers of cultural reformation when the time for that is ripe.<sup>94</sup>

This was thus, at its core, a normative project. In inscribing emigrant communities into the Chinese geobody, Chen was sociologically embedding into Chinese scholarship a fantasy about Chineseness that still has enormous contemporary purchase both in its essentialist assumptions about Chinese communities outside China, and in its reinforcement of gendered ideologies of the Chinese family. As I have shown in this essay, Chen's travels in the South Seas offered avenues for encounter with difference that he declined to pursue fully. Yet this is not to downplay his significant accomplishments as a social scientist, and as a product of what was undoubtedly an era of spectacularly rapid transition: like many intellectuals of these febrile times, in straining valiantly towards their most avant-garde values, he was, eventually, left behind by them.<sup>95</sup> But his notebooks remain exemplary records of his scholarly curiosity as well as his acuity and passion for research. In places, they contain observations that do more clearly reflect the complex world of social facts that he encountered in the South Seas, which, as my recovery of Lasker's, Hsu's and other contemporary critiques suggest, Chen might have interpreted differently. One amusing encounter Chen had with French border officials while he was in Indochina is suggestive of the way travel exposed mismatches

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94 EC1940, 257.

<sup>95</sup> I am grateful to Andrew Hardy and one of my anonymous reviewers for encouraging me to push this point more clearly.

between his own mental frameworks and those he was encountering in his own short sojourn:

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2 When I was preparing to leave Saigon, I was required by the shipping company to visit the  
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4 Asian Immigration Bureau to complete the necessary paperwork. At the Bureau, I saw that  
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6 the Chinese section was divided into five groups, namely Hainanese, Cantonese, Teochew,  
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8 Hakka and Hokkien. I handed in my passport and asked the border official: ‘Which group  
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10 does my China come under?’<sup>96</sup>  
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14 As a sociologist, Chen was frequently modest about what theories could be ascertained from facts,  
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16 and was said to have always insisted that ‘if you have one set of materials, you can make one set of  
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18 statements; if you have two sets of materials, you can make two sets of statements; if you have ten  
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20 sets of material, you can make nine sets of statements, but never eleven of them.’<sup>97</sup> Bruno Lasker, in  
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22 his editorial foreword, also says of Chen that ‘the author modestly abstains from building many  
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24 theories on the facts he has collected, but he provides social theorists with new, significant data.’<sup>98</sup>  
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26 Yet as I have suggested above, Chen’s empirical sociology, in the very act of fact-gathering and social  
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28 survey, seems to have smuggled in a theory, even an ideational fantasy, of Chineseness from the  
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30 South that went well beyond mere *guan*cha. Rather, battening its mental hatches against more  
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32 complex empirical realities, his studies disciplined the heterogeneity of the South Seas into a  
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34 patriarchal project oriented towards the transformation, improvement, and modernization of the  
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36 Chinese homeland.  
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#### 45 **Author bio:**

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48 Rachel Leow is Associate Professor in Modern East Asian History at the University of Cambridge.  
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50 Her first book, *Taming Babel: Language in the Making of Malaya*, dwelt on issues of knowledge  
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52 production, language, ethnicity and race-making among Malay and Chinese communities in colonial  
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57 96 LJSN1946, 152.

58 97 As quoted in Yuan & Quan, ‘Shehui xuejia Chen Da’, p. 131

59 98 Lasker, Foreword to EC1940, vi.  
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and postcolonial Malaysia. Her new research seeks to outline a critical social and intellectual history of Chinese communities in Southeast Asia, and the inadequacy of Sinocentric and ‘diasporic’ perspectives in understanding them.

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