Chapter 7

Temple Heritage of a Chinese Migrant Community: Movement, Connectivity, and Identity in the Maritime World

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The research for this essay started in a small temple dedicated to the Ruan and Liang buddhas built by the Cantonese community in an iconic building on Black Burn Lane in central Kolkata (Figure 7.1).[1] It became clear in the course of the research that the temple was part of the connected history of these immigrants from their origins in Sihui city 四會市 of Guangdong Province in the present-day People's Republic of China to their settlements in the Malay Peninsula and Kolkata in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The essay examines the unique Ruan-Liang temples built by this group of migrants in several towns of Malaysia and in Kolkata in the wider contexts of mobility, the localization of religious beliefs, and the emergence of mixed identities and heritages. It attempts to explain the ways in which these migrants came to terms with their local surroundings, made efforts to preserve their distinct sub-regional/speech group identity among the other Chinese settlers, and addressed their need for divine protection and spiritual support. With each move, the new heritage produced by the migrants sought a 'recourse to the past',[2] was adjusted to the present and forged new linkages to shape the future. All this involved engaging with local circumstances, sustaining imaginary connections to the ancestral homeland and fulfilling the otherworldly needs of the members of the migrant community. The mixed heritages produced by these migrants eventually became entangled with the present-day circumstances of their

[1] This temple was first studied by Zhang (2014).

[2] Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1995: 369–79).

ancestral homeland, which, in turn, has had to come to terms with the experiences and expectations of its overseas communities. As a consequence, it is argued, the heritage of Sihui city has also become a mixture of local and overseas experiences and expectations.

Figure 7.1 Huining Huiguan in Kolkata (photo: T. Sen)

The issues discussed in this chapter pertain to some of the key concerns related to mobility and heritage detailed in the introduction to this volume. First, the chapter illustrates the circulatory nature of mobility, which entailed the intertwined flows and counter-flows of people, materials, historical memories and heritage (re-)making across transnational spaces. Secondly, it underscores the importance of heritage production and preservation in sustaining 'solidarity' among a minority migrant group that is trying to survive in foreign lands. Thirdly, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's (1995: 369–79) dictum invoked throughout this volume that

'heritage produces something new in the present that has recourse in the past'[3] is aptly modified in the introduction to stress the multiplicity of the 'pasts'. In the case study presented here, the 'pasts' are not of a singular entity (the city of Sihui or the migrant group) but of several entangled entities – localized Buddhism, Sihui city, migrants from the area now residing in Malaysia and Kolkata, etc. – and their manifold histories. In addition, the backdrop to the chapter is the connectivities and movements across the maritime spaces of the South China Sea and the Bay of Bengal fostered by networks of Chinese traders and European colonial powers.

The essay more broadly engages with connected/entangled/transregional/transcultural history.[4] Pertinent here is the related framework of 'circulatory history', which Prasenjit Duara (2015: 73) defines as a mode 'in which ideas, practices and texts enter society or locale as one kind of thing and emerge from it considerable transformed to travel elsewhere even as it refers back, often narratively, to the initiating moment'. The formation of the Ruan-Liang heritage in Sihui, the travel and transformation of this heritage by the Sihui emigrant groups

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[3] It should be noted that Richard Handler and Jocelyn Linnekin (1984) made a similar argument with regard to the concept of 'tradition', which they contend must be understood 'as a symbolic process that both presupposes past symbolisms and creatively reinterprets them. In other words, tradition is not a bounded entity made up of bounded constituent parts, but a process of interpretation, attributing meaning in the present though making reference to the past' (Handler and Linnekin 1984: 287).

[4] Several of these topics are analyzed in the books published under the series 'Transcultural Research: Heidelberg Studies on Asia and Europe in a Global Context'. See, in particular, Herren, Rüesch, and Sibille (2012) and Ben-Canaan, Grüner, and Prodöhl (2014). The idea of connected history has been examined in detail by Subrahmanyam (1997; 2005; and 2005a).

settling in the towns of the Malay Peninsula and Kolkata, and the reconnections established between the migrant communities and their ancestral homeland through these Ruan-Liang temples in the twentieth century are illustrations of circulatory history. This circulatory history of the transregional Sihui heritage complicates the concepts of 'contact zones',[5] 'border crossing', and challenges the employment of categories such as 'Chinese' in the study of global movements of people as part of transcultural history.[6] Despite settling in the 'contact zone' of the Malay Peninsula and Kolkata, the Sihui migrants rarely 'entangled' with the local population or even with the other migrant groups from China. Rather, as the study of the Ruan-Liang temples in this essay demonstrates, the aim of this specific migrant community was to preserve its own heritage at the same time as it selectively incorporated local elements from the places they settled. The temples they built were exclusive to the Sihui migrants intended to preserve the Sihui identity and heritage that they imagined. These temples were not spaces of entanglement with the other migrant communities or the local population. As such, the 'pasts', the mobility, and the heritage produced by the Sihui migrants were distinct from the other migrant groups from China. All of these peculiarities and distinctiveness get blurred when categories such as 'Chinese' and 'Buddhism' are employed in studies that attempt to connect transcultural and transregional spaces. The examination of the Sihui emigrants and their unique Ruan-Liang heritage suggests the importance of studying less known sites, minority migrant groups, and the movement of localized beliefs in the history of connectivities across space and time.

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[5] 'Contact zones' has been defined by Pratt (2008: 7) as 'social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination – such as colonialism and slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today'.

[6] This problem is evident, for example, in the work of Conrad and Mühlhahn (2007).

Sihui and Its Emigrants

Located about seventy kilometres from the Guangdong provincial capital Guangzhou (also known as Canton), Sihui was designated a 'city' in 1993. It is currently under the administrative jurisdiction of the larger Zhaoqing city 肇慶市 and has a population of almost five million people. Sihui is known for its tangerines and jade-processing industry, and is one of the 'hometowns of sojourners' (*qiaoxiang* 僑鄉) in southern China.[7] Two important historical personalities likely traversed Sihui and its vicinity: Huineng 慧能 (638–713?), the Sixth Patriarch of Chan Buddhism; and Matteo Ricci (1552–1610), one of the earliest Jesuit missionaries in Qing China.[8] Emigration from the region took place during the second half of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, with ports and towns in the Malay Peninsula as the main destinations. Today, there is also a site in Zhaoqing, known as the Dawang Overseas Chinese Farming Village (Zhaoqing shi Dawang Huiqiao nongchang 肇慶市大旺華僑農場), where several hundred 'overseas returnees' (*guiqiao* 歸僑) reside.[9] However, in the overall history of Chinese migration and religions, Sihui is almost a forgotten place.

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[7] The history and connotation of *qiaoxiang*, particularly in their relevance to Guangdong Province, is examined by Yow (2013).

[8] See below on Huineng's association with the Sihui region. As for Matteo Ricci, this Jesuit missionary lived in Zhaoqing city, which he calls Sciauquin, and he visited the temple of Huineng in Shaoguan. See Gallagher (1953: 200–39).

[9] These are mostly ethnic Chinese who had settled in Southeast Asia but 'returned' to China due to political persecutions. There are also 'returnees' from India among these, who were deported during the India-China War of 1962. The lives and memories of Indian 'returnees' in Sihui are examined by Zhang (2015: 248–50).

The emigrants from Sihui are an overlooked group among the millions of Chinese who settled in Southeast Asia and elsewhere. According to the most recent gazetteer of Sihui, published in 1996, there are 145,081 migrants from Sihui living in 35 countries.[10] These numbers are miniscule compared to other migrant groups from Guangdong Province: the Siyi (Sze Yap), the Chaozhou (Teochew), and the Hakka. These three more prominent groups have been examined in detail by modern scholars, especially because of their influential roles in the places where they settled and the transnational networks they have established. Although originating from the same province, these migrants speak distinct topolects:[11] the Siyi communicate in a sub-topolect of Cantonese known as the Siyi topolect, the Chaozhou converse in a Southern Min topolect, and the Hakka have their own Hakka topolect. The Sihui migrants use yet another sub-topolect of Cantonese known as the Guangfu topolect (Map 7.1). Migrants from Siyi and the Sihui are often subsumed under the 'Cantonese' category, thus blurring their distinctions with regard to places of origin and sub-topolect identities. This is true in Malaysia and India, the two sites discussed in this chapter, where the Sihui migrants are lumped together with the other Cantonese-speaking people.

Map 7.1: Sub-topolects of Cantonese in Guangdong Province

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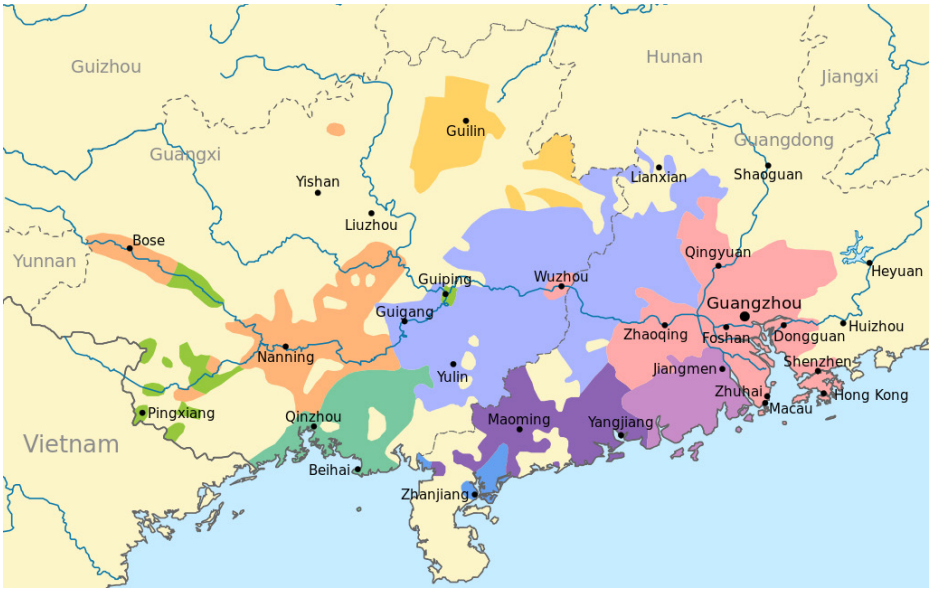
[10] *Sihui xianzhi* (1996: 912). It is not clear how these numbers were compiled. The report of 3,301 Sihui migrants living in India reported in this work is certainly an exaggeration as the total population of the ethnic Chinese in the city may not exceed 3,000.

[11] The term 'topolect', indicating the speech pattern of a place, is employed here instead of the usual 'dialect', as used in some of the quotations below. Topolect not only reflects the correct rendering of the Chinese phrase *fangyan* 方言 (lit. 'speech of a place'), it is also free from the politics of the classification of regional languages in China. On the issue of terminology pertaining to China's regional languages, see Mair (1991).



Explaining the ‘ecologies of dialect groups’, Philp A. Kuhn (2007: 28–33) points out that a ‘shared dialect’ functioned as an ‘identity marker’, which he argues was ‘entwined with shared kinship and hometown’. Kuhn further clarifies this by noting that:

> Cohesion within dialect groups is a resource for community cohesion, mutual protection, and commercial integration. Occupationally, dialect group members can establish economic turf, essentially cartels that resist penetration by outsiders; this capacity for guildlike commercial behavior reduces intragroup competition and thus sustains profits for particular commodities and services. Same-dialect ties also identify compatriots at a distance and facilitate business networking. And shared dialect is a vector of chain migration. (Kuhn 2007: 29)

The ban on native Chinese traders undertaking foreign trade, instituted by the founding ruler of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) in the late fourteenth century, resulted in the first large-scale emigration of the people from two macro-regions of China known as Lingnan 嶺南 (‘south of the Ling ranges’, indicating much of present-day Guangdong Province) and Minnan 閩南 (‘south of the Min river’, largely the southern part of present-day Fujian

Province). The Hokkien from the latter macro-region may have been the first migrant group to have established extensive commercial networks and settlements in Southeast Asia. Palembang in Sumatra, the island of Java (both in present-day Indonesia) and Malacca (in present-day Malaysia) were among the main sites where the Hokkien and Lingnan migrants had settled by the mid-sixteenth century. Also important was the pattern of sojourning, where people constantly voyaged between the coastal regions of China and Southeast Asia, forming their own complex economic, social and cultural networks.[12]

The colonization of Southeast Asia by Europeans in the sixteenth century and the rapid expansion of the trade in tea and opium triggered further emigration from the Lingnan region in the eighteenth century. The emergence of Guangzhou as a site of global commercial activity provided an opportunity for some of these migrants to use the networks of the Dutch and the British to seek new opportunities and employment at colonial port cities, as well as in the hinterland areas of South and Southeast Asia. While the migrants and sojourners from the Minnan region made use of their own 'Chinese' shipping networks, the Lingnan migrants frequently travelled on ships belonging to foreign traders (Kuhn 2007: 37–38).

Emigration from the Lingnan and Minnan regions accelerated significantly in the aftermath of the Opium War of 1839–42. This increase was part of the unprecedented growth in Asian migration during the period between 1850 and 1930, which, as Sunil Amrith (2011: 18–19) explains, was due to the 'widespread political and economic transformation' associated with European expansion across the Indian Ocean. Around seven million people from Qing and Republican China settled in Southeast Asia during this period (Amrith 2011: 43). Here they encountered almost equal numbers of immigrants from India, as well as

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[12] A detailed study of the patterns of Chinese migration is Wang (2006). The migration of people from Guangdong is discussed in Yow (2013: 18–26).

Europeans and the so-called Peranakans, who were the descendants of the earlier migrant or sojourning Chinese men who had married local women.[13] To accommodate this large influx of migrants, new institutions and associations were established at the sites of settlements. For the Chinese, one of the central institutions was the *huiguan* (Native-Place Association), which provided lodging, occupational opportunities and funerary services to the migrants from the same places of origin. Some of the *huiguan*s later also established schools for migrants' children, where instruction took place in their specific topolect.

Huiguans often housed shrines dedicated to different deities and altars for ancestral worship. The temples and shrines discussed in this essay are often also found inside, or, if they are freestanding, are managed by the *huiguans*. Highlighting this important function of the *huiguans* as 'interlocking spheres of compatriotism, occupation, and ritual', Kuhn (2007: 45) writes:

> Integral to the *huiguan* were the community temples set up for the worship of regional deities. Such cults were readily transferred along trade routes by migrants who transported incense from the old temple to fill the censers of the new. Sometimes the deity to be worshipped was the patron saint of a particular trade, but the regional identity of the temple cult was usually quite plain because trades were commonly identified with migrants from particular regions. (Kuhn 2007: 44–45)

[13] For an excellent study of these migrations in a global context, see McKeown (2004). The Peranakans in Malaysia, specifically in Penang, are examined by Mareike Pampus in this volume.

Yow Cheun Hoe (2013) points to the segregations among the different Chinese migrant groups that were 'reinforced' by institutions such as the *huiguan*s. 'The early Chinese communities in British Malaya in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, he writes (2013: 44),

> were structurally heterogeneous and segmented on the principles of place of origin, dialect, and kinship. These boundaries were initially engendered by mutual dialect incomprehensibility and loyalty to respective locality. The segregation made its expressions in and was further reinforced by the establishment and operation of different social organizations such as *huiguan*, clan associations, and secret societies.

The *huiguan*s that represented the Sihui migrants were called Huining Huiguan, which were the joint associations of people from Sihui and the nearby Guangning 廣寧 area.[14] Both Sihui and Guangning witnessed frequent episodes of peasant rebellions and other political turmoil between 1854 and 1926. Due to political uncertainties, demographic pressures and natural disasters, people from these areas started emigrating to places in Southeast Asia, especially to areas connected through British maritime networks.

The first emigrants from the Sihui and Guangning regions seem to have settled around the Setapak neighbourhood in the Gombak district of Kuala Lumpur, where a Huining

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[14] The name 'Huining' derives from the 'hui' part of Sihui and the 'ning' in Guangning. In the later sections of the essay, Sihui is used to indicate the group of people who migrated from these two sites. On the Guangning community in Malaysia, see Zhaoqing Research Team (2015).

Huiguan appeared in 1888. Another Huining Huiguan was established in Penang in 1889 and a third in Selangor in 1924. Other community associations, such as the Huining tongxiang hui 會寧同鄉會 (Huining Natives Association), were also organized in Malaysia (Shi 2016: 68–69). Most of the early settlers worked in the tin mines across various regions of the Malay Peninsula, especially in the states of Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan and Pahang. Their migration to these regions coincided with the growth of global demand for tin, especially from Europe and the United States, and the discovery of new ore deposits along the Klang River in Selangor (Reid 2011: 31). However, by the time these Sihui migrants reached the Malay Peninsula, several other groups of Chinese were already living and working at these sites. In Kuala Lumpur, for example, there were almost 35,000 Chinese migrants in 1891 (Andaya and Andaya 2017: 183), of whom the Sihui and Guangning settlers formed a minuscule minority.[15]

The current population of the Sihui people in Malaysia is estimated to be around 91,000 (*Sihui xianzhi* 1996: 912).[16] Although still a minority among the over six million ethnic Chinese currently living in Malaysia, the sub-topolect group has managed to preserve its cohesion primary through the Huining associations, fifteen of which are registered with the Federation of the Hui Ning Associations (Malaixiya Huining zonghui 馬來西亞會寧總會 /Gabungan Persatuan Hui Ning Malaysia) (Shi 2016: 68). During the past two decades, members of these associations have reconnected with their ancestral homeland and participate in the annual meetings of the Sihui overseas communities. Such meetings and the active outreach to its overseas groups by Sihui city have resulted in global networking and an

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[15] On Kuala Lumpur in the late nineteenth century and the Chinese settlements there, see Gullick (1955).

[16] These figures maybe exaggerated too.

attempt to reassert or reinvent ancestral heritages. Within this context, the temples dedicated to the Ruan and Liang buddhas established by the Sihui migrants in Malaysia and India examined below play an important role. These temples have been an essential part of the belief system of these migrants; they are central to the projection and preservation of Sihui identity within the crowded neighbourhoods of Chinese settlements, and they facilitate imaginary as well as material connections to the ancestral homeland.

The Chinese community in South Asia has been concentrated around Kolkata in the West Bengal state in eastern India. Perhaps no more than 3,000 people of Chinese ancestry now live in the city, which has been home to two Chinatowns. In the mid-twentieth century, when the ethnic Chinese population in Kolkata was over 15,000, both places were vibrant sites of economic and cultural activities. While the Chinatown located in the centre of the city, which formed in the early nineteenth century, was always intimately integrated into the cosmopolitan space of the British colonial port city, the one established in the peripheral area known as Tangra has remained homogeneous since its emergence in the early twentieth century. The former site is usually identified with Cantonese-speaking Chinese immigrants, the latter with Hakka-speaking settlers.[17]

The Sihui settlers in India were a very small minority among the Chinese in Kolkata. Their arrival in Kolkata in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was related to another important industry that emerged in Asian port cities during the colonial period: shipbuilding. A majority of the Sihui migrants seem to have worked on the British docks as carpenters, who subsequently established their own businesses in Kolkata. It is not clear if these migrants came directly from the Lingnan area or from the Malay Peninsula, but they

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[17] On the history of Chinese settlements in India, see Zhang (2015) and Zhang and Sen (2013).

most likely also followed the British maritime networks that connected the littoral regions of the South China Sea and the Bay of Bengal. In fact, the earliest Chinese migrants to Kolkata and its vicinity were apparently enticed by the prospects of working in the British-ruled region. British colonial records indicate that in 1778 a person name Atchew presented a large quantity of tea as a gift to Warren Hastings (1732–1818), the Governor General of British India. In return for this gift, Hastings granted a large area near the river Hooghly to Atchew, who then set up a sugar mill and brought in Chinese labourers to work for him (Bose 1934; Zhang 2015: 18–19). This site subsequently became known as Achipur (lit. 'the place of Atchew'), and Atchew, known in Chinese as Yang Dazhao 楊大釗, was recognized as the progenitor of the Chinese communities in South Asia,[18] thus providing a common identity to the diverse groups of Chinese who arrived in the region during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

While Atchew may have been a Hokkien trader, who brought other Hokkien to Achipur, the later migrants to South Asia were mostly Hakka, Cantonese and Hubeinese. These immigrants settled in Kolkata, where *huiguan*s for each of these migrant groups emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century. These three migrant groups gradually developed their own economic niches in Kolkata: the Hakkas engaged in shoemaking and later the tannery business, the Cantonese set up carpentry stores, and the Hubeinese were known for their dentistry skills (Liang 2007; Zhang 2015: Chap. 3). There were also migrants and sojourners from the Shandong and Yunnan regions, who traded in various commodities

[18] This is especially true for the Chinese residing in present-day India, Bangladesh and Pakistan, many of whom emigrated from Kolkata.

such as silk and tea. Similar to Southeast Asia, these Chinese migrants established their own temples, graveyards and schools in Kolkata.[19]

Among the Cantonese in Kolkata, the Siyi migrants were the dominant group, who established their *huiguan* in 1845, along with a Guanyin shrine, and the Siyi shanzhuang graveyard. The Huining Huiguan and the graveyard called Huining shanzhuang were set up by the Sihui settlers in 1908 (Zhang 2015: 184). The Huining Huiguan did not sponsor a school in Kolkata, most likely because the existing Cantonese schools sufficed to meet the educational needs of this small group.[20] Although figures for these Sihui migrants do not appear in either the census reports or the publications about Chinese communities in South Asia,[21] it was recently noted by one of the owners of the Sei Vui Restaurant 四會餐廳 ('Sihui canting'), which opened for business in December 2017, that only seven families belonging to this sub-topolect group remain in the city.[22] The war between India and China in 1962 and the emigration of many Chinese from India to Europe and North America are the two main reasons for the decline in the ethnic Chinese population indicated at the beginning of this chapter.

Ruan and Liang Buddhas: The Making of Sihui Heritage

According to orthodox Buddhist teachings, Śākyamuni was the Buddha of the present age who lived in the fifth century BCE. The next Buddha, known as Maitreya, will, it is said,

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[19] For a detailed study of these institutions, see Zhang (2015).

[20] On the various Chinese schools in Kolkata, see Zhang (2010).

[21] As noted above, the figure for these migrants in India given in the *Sihui xianzhi* is an exaggeration.

[22] Personal communication, 3 January 2018.

appear at a future time as a saviour of the world besieged by chaos and disorder. As Buddhist ideas spread and evolved, however, new practices and beliefs emerged in different parts of the Buddhist cosmopolis.[23] Within this diversified world of Buddhism, the Chan (Ch'an) or Zen tradition, which became popular in sixth-seventh century China, promoted the idea of the existence of multiple buddhas concurrently. This view was associated with the belief that every sentient being possessed the Buddha nature and could potentially become a buddha. This interpretation eventually led to the emergence in China of what Peter Hershock calls 'homegrown buddhas'. 'The enlightening qualities of a buddha are nascent in all beings', Hershock (2004: 129) explains. 'All that is required to activate this original nature is, according to him, 'to give birth to it in practice. These ideas were extremely important in the advent of Chan and its advocacy of homegrown buddhas' (ibid.).

Following this conceptualization of multiple buddhas, members of the Chan tradition claimed that 'the teachers in other traditions had only a secondhand, hearsay knowledge of awakening, whereas masters in the Ch'an lineage derived their spiritual authority from a direct experience of the Buddha mind. In effect, the Ch'an patriarchs were Buddhas' (Foulk 1993: 180). Alan Cole argues that the need to create such buddhas in China was associated with the endeavour to interpret Buddhism without having to deal with the myriad of Indian texts that reached China. '[T]he daunting task of interpreting Buddhist literature was finally over because', Cole (2016: 6) explains,

> in effect, the newly minted Chinese buddhas could be trusted to interpret Buddhism as well as their Indian forefathers had. Thus, in a gesture that promised to make the past present, inventing the clan of Chinese truth-fathers

[23] On the idea of a Buddhist cosmopolis, see Sen (2018).

> went a long way towards solving the problem of China's distance from Indian Buddhism's origins: once Chan masters appeared as Buddha equivalents, India, with all its saints and sutras, gradually became of secondary importance.

The Ruan and Liang buddhas, whom the people of Sihui venerate, emerged from this tradition of Chan Buddhism. However, neither Ruan nor Liang were Chan patriarchs or leading proselytizers of this school of Buddhism. The two were and remain virtually unknown beyond the Sihui region or outside the Sihui migrant communities in Southeast and South Asia. In fact, their fame comes not from any ability to interpret or transmit Chan teachings, but from their alleged association with one of the leading Chan patriarchs active in the vicinity of the Sihui area some four centuries before either of them was born.

Huineng, the sixth and one of the most famous patriarchs of Chan Buddhism, was a product of posthumous hagiographical accounts intended to promote sectarian causes. Important to this effort were also the various relics of Huineng, including his mummified body, which added a layer of 'authenticity' to the hagiographical accounts.[24] An 'obscure figure' during his lifetime (Jorgensen 2005: 190), Huineng became a leading Buddhist figure in China within a century or two of his death. He also seems to have had a large cult following in the Guangdong region, where his mummified body was carried annually from the Nanhua monastery 南華寺 located in Caoxi 漕溪 county through the neighbouring

[24] For a detailed study of these two aspects, see Jorgensen (2005). The cultic beliefs and practices related to Huineng's lacquered body are also examined by Matteini (2009).

villages to the city of Shanzhou expressly for the purpose of rainmaking and fertility rituals (Faure 1996: 156).[25]

Several aspects of the Ruan-Liang story and the associated veneration practices in Sihui may have originated from the circulations of the Huineng legend. In fact, a direct connection between Huineng and the Sihui region can be found in one of the hagiographical accounts of the Sixth Patriarch. In this text, known as the Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch (*Liuzu tanjing* 六祖壇經), Huineng is reported to have sought refuge from 'men of evil intent' in the border regions of Sihui for fifteen years (Yampolsky 1967: 73). The Liuzu si 六祖寺 (i.e., Sixth Patriarch Temple, hereafter Liuzu Temple) in Sihui was constructed to mark this event.

Similar to the story of Huineng, the legends of Ruan and Liang are later concoctions, which took final shape almost seven centuries after the deaths of the two Sihui natives. As Huang Jianhua (2013) points out, the earliest extant mention of Ruan Ziyu 阮子鬱 appears in the gazetteer of the Zhaoqing prefecture compiled in 1588 by the famous Ming dynasty intellectual and governor of the region, Zheng Yilin 鄭一麟. In this source, Ruan is called 'Daoist Master Ruan' (*Ruan daozhe* 阮道者), who is reported to have studied Buddhism from an early age. He is described as a vegetarian who did not make loose talk, and was 'able to accept and uphold the [Buddhist] precepts'. Then 'suddenly one day', according to Zheng Yilin, 'while he was chanting and sitting in a posture for meditation, he died' (*zuo ji duanzuo*

[25] Matteo Ricci was a witness to one such episode of the parading and veneration of Huineng, whom he calls by the name 'Locu' and describes as a 'celebrated monster', by those seeking rainfall. See Gallagher (1953: 425).

er hua 作偈端坐而化). Subsequently, the people of the village venerated him for rains whenever the area was affected by a drought.[26]

It should be noted that Zheng's record does not mention any dates or even Ruan's full name. And while there are allusions to the Buddhist tradition, including Chan meditative practices, Ruan is not associated with Huineng, nor is he perceived to be a buddha. It was only during the next four or five decades that a more detailed story of Ruan's life, his connection to Huineng and the title of the 'Ruan buddha' emerged. This updated story appears in another local gazetteer called [*Guangxu*] *Sihui xianzhi* (Gazetteer of the Sihui County [compiled during the Guangxu Period]) composed between 1875 and 1908. Included in this gazetteer is an inscription written during the Chongzhen period (1627–1644) of the Ming dynasty composed by a person named Wang Hengjue 王亨爵, according to which the 'Ruan buddha' was born in 1079 and died in 1102 at the age of 24. It also reports that the 'Ruan buddha' received his teachings from the Sixth Patriarch, Huineng.[27]

This seventeenth-century inscription might reflect a contemporaneous attempt to propagate the reputation of Huineng by the Chan followers. Indeed, in the broader context, the creation of the Ruan–Huineng connection coincides with the period when Chan Buddhism was witnessing a revival and had already became popular in several regions of late-Ming China, including in the Guangdong area.[28] As Huang Jianhua pointed out, all later biographical sketches of the 'Ruan buddha' were constructed on the basis of this seventeenth-century inscription. A significant addition to these later versions of the story were the various

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[26] *Wanli Zhaoqing fuzhi* (1989: 21).

[27] The posthumous title 'Dajian chanshi' 大鑒禪師 (Chan Master Great Mirror) is used here for Huineng. See [*Guangxu*] *Sihui xianzhi* (2003: Chap. 9, 14a).

[28] On the state of Chan Buddhism in the seventeenth century, see Wu (2008).

imperial titles and decrees that were supposedly conferred on the 'Ruan buddha'. These were given to Ruan from the Song through to the Ming periods in appreciation of him aiding the emperor and the state during times of fire disasters, warfare and illness. Most of these biographical descriptions and the reports of imperial recognition were meant to authenticate Ruan's divine status. As Sangren (1987: 215) explains, 'By conferring titles and promotions upon their deities, the state not only overauthenticated deity cults, but also legitimized itself in local traditions'.

The final hagiographical account of Ruan also appears in the [*Guangxu*] *Sihui xianzhi*.[29] It is this version that is circulated through the pamphlets produced and distributed in Sihui, and found in the temples in Malaysia and India. Often this biography appears on the walls of the temples in Malaysia for worshippers to know, appreciate and experience the buddha from their ancestral homeland. In this ultimate version of the story, Ruan is presented as having miraculous powers from early childhood. Ruan's parents, like Huineng's, had died when he was still young. One day, according to this version of the story, Huineng reveals himself to Ruan and transmits the Buddhist teachings. Soon thereafter, Ruan dies in a posture of meditation. His elder sister then hires a craftsman to make an image of her brother, which is placed in what is now the Baolin gusi 寶林古寺 (the Ancient Jewelled Groves Temple, hereafter Baolin Temple).[30] Although clearly not a temple built exclusively for Ruan, the Baolin Temple is now perceived as the progenitor of all later temples dedicated to him.

As in the case of Ruan, the story and importance of Liang Cineng 梁慈能 (1098–1116) evolved and was authenticated over time. The earliest notice of Liang comes from the county prefect of Sihui named Ouyang Fang 歐陽芳 in an inscription for the Baosheng si 寶勝古寺

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[29] [*Guangxu*] *Sihui xianzhi* (2003: Chap. 7b, 109a–110b). See also Huang (2013: 106–107).

[30] The Baolin gusi, built in 1071, was originally called the Zhongyuan Temple.

(the Ancient Jewelled Victory Temple, hereafter Baosheng Temple), which he wrote in 1296. According to this inscription, which is preserved in the [*Guangxu*] *Sihui xianzhi*, Liang became a monk at an early age and wandered around the region with his master. He is described as having a skin aliment and being of a reclusive nature, but was nonetheless kind to the poor and the elderly. One day, when he was sitting 'peacefully' without pain from his skin aliment, he died. After his death, Liang was venerated during times of drought and by those who needed healing from various diseases.[31]

In the seventeenth century, modifications to Liang's biography appeared in local sources, triggered no doubt by the revival of Chan Buddhism that took place in late-Ming China, mentioned above. In the Kangxi edition of the *Sihui xianzhi* compiled in 1686, Liang's parents, like Ruan's and Huineng's, are presented as poor. More importantly he is reported to have received his training in Buddhism from Ruan. Added in this version are the year and age of Liang at the time of his death (1116; 19 years old), a brief description of his role in healing the emperor and a mention of his rainmaking and disease-curing abilities. The record notes that Liang's body was lacquered and preserved as the golden 'true body' (*jinxiang zhenshen* 金祥真身) after his death. He is also referred to as a 'buddha' (*pusa* 菩薩) in this gazetteer.[32] This narrative not only transformed Liang into a buddha, it also established a genealogical link between him, Ruan, and Huineng (Huineng→Ruan Ziyu→Liang Cineng).

The final version of Liang's hagiography is found in the Guangxu edition of the *Sihui xianzhi*. Here the connection between Ruan and Liang is made through a dream,[33] during

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[31] [*Guangxu*] *Sihui xianzhi* (2003: Chap. 9, 38b–39a); Huang (2013: 107).

[32] See Huang (2013: 107).

[33] The transmission of teachings through dreams was an important aspect of Chan Buddhism, which has been discussed in detail by Faure (1996: Chap. 5).

which Liang is said to have received Buddhist doctrines from Ruan. This text also contains narratives of how Ruan and Liang were jointly venerated and perceived to be the protective deities of the Sihui people. One particular incident in the account relates to the anti-Qing uprising in the 1850s instigated by the Triad group called Sanhehui 三合會 (Three Harmonies Society).[34] In 1860, Sihui was besieged by the rebel forces, which encircled the town for over a hundred days. They were eventually defeated by the Qing army, and the credit for saving the town and its natives from harm went to the Ruan and Liang buddhas.[35]

It was shortly after the quelling of the above rebellion that people from Sihui started migrating to Southeast Asia. The perception of Ruan's and Liang's miraculous powers might have been fresh in the minds of these Sihui settlers in foreign lands. The complex hagiographies of the two buddhas narrated above was neither known nor relevant to these emigrants. What mattered to them was the efficacy of Ruan and Liang to protect them in the new places of settlement and, at the same time, help preserve the spiritual connection to the ancestral homeland. However, the veneration of the two buddhas did not prevent the Sihui immigrants from adding other Chinese deities to these temples. More notably, as examined in the next section, these temples incorporated foreign elements that reveal the production of mixed identities and heritages by the Sihui migrants that became distinct from their ancestral homeland.

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[34] On the Triads and their role in southern China and in Southeast Asia, see Issitt and Main (2014), and Murray (1994).

[35] [*Guangxu*] *Sihui xianzhi* (2003: Chap.10, 23a); Huang (2013: 109).

The Ruan-Liang Heritage of the Sihui Migrants

The presence of a wide range of temples and shrines is common at almost all Chinese settlements overseas. Tan Chee-Beng (2018: 13) has explained that Chinese migrants brought their patron deities and installed them in their homes. Later, these idols or newly-made ones were moved to the temples built by the community members. Mazu 馬祖 or Tianhou 天后 (Empress of the Heaven), the deity of the seafaring people, and Caishen 財神 (the God of Wealth) were the two frequently venerated divinities among the Chinese overseas, including those in Malaysia and Kolkata. A third popular deity was Guanyin 觀音, the female form of the Buddhist figure Avalokiteśvara, who was integrated into the Chinese religious pantheon and is manifested in multiple forms, including as a fertility goddess. These three are often referred to as 'pan-Chinese' deities since they are venerated by all Chinese migrant groups irrespective of their places of origin or speech groups. Commonly found among the Chinese overseas are also deities associated with territorial cults. The Tudi gong 土地公 or Place/Earth god, for example, is intimately connected to demarcating and sacralizing local settlements, neighbourhoods and communal spaces. The specific Tudi gong employed by the Chinese migrants differed from place to place and often embodied local peculiarities.

In addition to these pan-Chinese deities, these so-called 'Chinatowns' often have shrines and temples dedicated to gods and goddesses who are venerated by specific speech groups. Other religious institutions include clan associations, Buddhist and Taoist temples, and, in later periods, churches. Many of these places are constructed in Chinese architectural style, with plaques and banners written in Chinese that appear at the entrances. These features make the temples stand out in foreign lands, marking, perhaps intentionally, the spaces that 'belong' to the Chinese. Indeed, as Emile Durkheim (1995: 41) points out, 'religious beliefs proper are always shared by a definite group that professes them and that practices the

corresponding rites. Not only are they individually accepted by all members of that group, but they also belong to the group and unify it'.

Chinese temples are rarely exclusive to a single deity. Rather, they contain multifarious gods, female deities and images of historical and fictional characters arranged on multiple altars. Local gods, spirits and deified personalities from the areas of settlement also find their way into these temples. What mattered for the Chinese migrants in their quest to find and sustain a living in foreign lands was the efficacy (*ling* 靈) of these divine beings. This efficacy of deities was often authenticated through a long historical process involving texts and official recognition,[36] as is evident in the case of Ruan and Liang discussed above. In addition to these efficacious deities, there is also an assortment of divine figures that appear on the side or secondary altars inside the temples. These secondary divinities serve the multiple spiritual needs of the patrons and could themselves, at some time in the future, also be recognized for their efficacy.[37] Due to such diverse practices of veneration, the temples of the Chinese migrant communities embody multiple heritages: the heritage of the ancestral homeland, the pan-Chinese heritage and the heritage acquired at the sites of settlements. The Ruan-Liang temples in Malaysia and Kolkata similarly represent the manifold heritages of Sihui people on the move.

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[36] On this issue, see Sangren (1987: 221).

[37] Sangren (1987: 77) has pointed to instances when the importance of the main deity in Chinese temples declined, replaced eventually by territorial gods. Similarly, Victor Purcell (1948: 120) notes that 'the migrants brought with them their religion from China, but became modified in certain particulars. Gods were modified, one or two of them even losing their name and identity, and the established gods varied in popularity according to the returns they rendered to their worshippers'.

The first temples dedicated to the Ruan and Liang buddhas[38] outside the Chinese mainland were set up during the second half of the nineteenth century in and around Kuala Lumpur, the present-day capital of Malaysia. The earliest of these may have been built in 1869 in the Bangsar suburb of Kuala Lumpur (Shi 2016). The temple was later relocated to the Kepong area in the north of the city and is now called Kuala Lumpur Kepong Yuen Leong Temple 甲洞富城阮梁公聖佛廟. Ruan-Liang temples also emerged in the Perak state and the port city of Penang. According to Shi Cangjin's estimate (2016: 70) there are about twelve Ruan-Liang temples presently in Malaysia. Some of these are freestanding structures, while others are shrines located inside the Huining Huiguans. Unaccounted for perhaps are shrines in private homes, one of which is described below.

During my field research in Malaysia in 2016 I visited four such Ruan-Liang temples and shrines, two of them located in Kuala Lumpur and two in Kampar (in Perak state). Prior to this, in 2009, I went to Sihui to examine the Baolin, Baosheng and Liuzu temples. I have been frequenting the lone Ruan-Liang temple in Kolkata since 2008, with the latest visit to the site in January 2018, shortly after the Sei Vui Restaurant was inaugurated on the premises of the Huining Huiguan. In addition to talking to some of the patrons and caretakers at these sites, I have consulted the pamphlets about Ruan and Liang and the associated temples, as well as the websites of the Sihui communities in Malaysia, including their Facebook pages. Information on the Ruan and Liang temples and news about the interactions between Sihui city and overseas communities appear in Chinese-language newspapers published in Malaysia and are also posted on the various official websites belonging to the Guangdong provincial and city governments. These cyber sites, as I argue below, foster a sense of

[38] The names appear as Yuen (for Ruan) and Leong (for Liang) in the Romanization of Cantonese pronunciation in Malaysia and Kolkata.

belonging, as well as functioning as nodes of virtual connectivity between the overseas settlers and their ancestral homeland.

Four key features of the Ruan-Liang temples in Malaysia stand out. First, unlike in Sihui, where Ruan and Liang have their individual temples, in Malaysia the two buddhas appear together on the same altar. Secondly, two additional deities are given prominence at these temples by being placed inside the temple complexes. One is Wenshi Zhenxian 文氏貞仙, a female deity who is also venerated in Sihui and is part of the adage 'two buddhas, one celestial being' 二佛一仙 employed to describe the spiritual landscape of the city. Wenshi Zhenxian appears on the main altars alongside Ruan and Liang. The other deity, the Datuk (Nadu) gong 拿督公, a local Malay deity popular among the Chinese settlers in Malaysia, appears inside small shrines constructed on the ground outside the main temple buildings. The third point to note is that a few of these temples, especially those in and around Kuala Lumpur, have been relocated several times since their initial establishment, some of these relocations taking place as recently as the 2000s. Fourth, photographs, including those depicting community activities, of the Baolin, Baosheng and Liuzu temples located in Sihui, as well as several Ruan-Liang temples in Malaysia, appear prominently on the inside walls of the temple complexes.

Like Ruan and Liang, the story of Wenshi Zhenxian or 'Ms. Wen, the Celestial Maiden of the Zhen [Hill]', has evolved over time and become entrenched in the religious lives of the Sihui people.[39] According the final version of the story, which appears in the local gazetteers, Ms. Wen's parent promised her to the son of another local family as a future

[39] The stories are detailed in Du (2017), who also examines some of the other accounts of 'faithful maidens' in the Zhaoqing area. For a broader examination of the 'faithful maidens' phenomenon, see Lu (2008).

bride. However, one day her fiancé was eaten by a tiger when he went to collect wood at Zhen Hill in the Sihui region. Nonetheless, Ms. Wen decided to live with her pledged in-laws. As time passed, the in-laws urged their virgin daughter-in-law to marry someone else. However, instead of violating her filial and familial duties, she chose to commit suicide by jumping from Zhen Hill. To commemorate her exemplary fidelity and chastity, the locals built a shrine for her (known as Wenshi Zhenxian ci 文氏貞仙祠) and started venerating the now deified Ms. Wen. In addition to serving as a protective deity of the Sihui communities in Malaysia, Wenshi Zhenxian is also venerated as a fertility goddess. Moreover, Wenxian Zhenxian, as the Celestial Maiden of Zhen Hill, alluded to a specific geological location in Sihui, sustaining, as a result, the imaginary connection with the ancestral homeland and the preservation of the Sihui heritage in foreign lands.[40]

Datuk gong is a Chinese appropriation of the Malay Muslim *keramat* (miracle worker) into their religious pantheon.[41] Tan Chee-Beng (2018: 67) points out that the Mandarin term 'Nadu gong' originated from the locally created Hokkien word 'Lnadokgong', meaning 'grandfather', and refers to the 'Sino-Malayan earth deity or guardian deity, reflecting the deity's Sino-Malayan identity'. Shrines to Datuk gong wearing local Malayan sarong and cap occur within the temple complexes (Figure 7.2) as well as in the form of stand-alone road-side shrines in Chinese neighbourhoods across Malaysia. This Sino-Malayan deity functions as a territorial god, similar to the Tudi gong, but it has its own unique rituals offerings and veneration practices that combine Chinese and Malayan

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[40] Lin Mengchen et al. (2013).

[41] See Tong (1992) for a detailed study of the incorporation of the Datuk *keramat* cult into Chinese religious practices in Malaysia. Religious practices among the Chinese in Malaya are also discussed by Purcell (1948: 119–41).

traditions (Tan 2018: 69). The incorporation of Datuk gong makes the Ruan-Liang temples in Malaysia distinct from those in Sihui. This is an illustration of the emergence of an overseas Sihui identity and heritage that stem from the migrant population's encounter with local beliefs and their need for efficacious local deities.

Figure 7.2 Datuk gong Shrine at the Ruan-Liang Temple in Kuala Lumpur (photo: T. Sen)

As mentioned above, in addition to the freestanding Ruan-Liang temples, there are shrines dedicated to the two Sihui buddhas located inside the Huining Huiguans in Malaysia, including the one in Penang. There is also at least one shrine found inside a private home, which is located in the Petaling Jaya area of Kuala Lumpur, not far from the larger Petaling Jaya Ruan-Liang temple 白沙羅新村阮梁公聖佛廟. This 'residential shrine' is dedicated solely to Liang Cineng, whose statue and a black-and-white photograph of the gold-plated mummified image from Sihui appear on the altar (Figure 7.3). It is not clear how and when this shrine was constructed. The only aspect that the current resident could explain was that the altar had been there since the time of his grandparents. This shrine seems to suggest that

Liang may have been more esteemed among some members of the Sihui community in Malaysia than either Ruan or Wen. The fact that Liang's body was mummified and plated with gold could have something to do with its elevated status. It is also possible that traditionally in Sihui, Liang was considered more efficacious than Ruan in fulfilling people's wishes. Some migrants from Sihui apparently continued this belief when they moved to Malaysia. On the altars at most of the freestanding temples and the shrines built within the Huining Huiguans, however, the teacher-disciple, male-female hierarchies are maintained, with Ruan appearing as the central deity flanked on each side by Liang and Wenshi Zhenxian (Figure 7.4).

Figure 7.3: The Liang Buddha Altar in Kuala Lumpur 'Residential Shrine' (photo: T.Sen)

Figure 7.4: The Main Altar at the Perak Ruan-Liang Temple (photo: T. Sen)

The spread of the Ruan-Liang temples within Malaysia resulted from the voluntary movement or forced resettlements of the Chinese migrant populations and their descendants during the twentieth century. As the Sihui people moved to new locations, the Ruan-Liang temples were relocated with them. Idols and images from the older temples were transferred to the new places of settlement and new temples built to accommodate the deities. The latter aspect is evident from the temples in Kuala Lumpur, where the colonial and postcolonial redistricting and the construction of factories and other urban development schemes forced the Chinese population to move to new settlement sites on multiple occasions.[42] The relocation of the temple in Kepong from its original site in Bangsar, for example, took place in two stages, first from Bangsar to Jinjang Selatan Tambahan in 1969, and then in 2009 to its current location (*Zhongguo bao* 2015a). The Salak Selatan Ruan-Liang temple 沙叻秀阮梁公聖佛廟, now in the Salak Selatan Garden, was at first established in Setapak in the Gombak district of Kuala Lumpur. In 1964, it was relocated to Jelan Temerloh in the Titiwangsa district and then five years later to the Titiwangsa Garden. It moved yet again in

[42] Yat Ming Loo (2013) has chronicled these movements of the Chinese and the causes of their resettlements in Kuala Lumpur, especially in the context of changing colonial and postcolonial government policies.

1983 to another site in Tititwanga before eventually arriving at its present location in 2000 (Shi 2016: 70). When these temples were built at their current locations, they took on a more grandiose look than their earlier incarnations, being elegantly constructed, vividly decorated and well maintained. This grandeur may reflect the economic prosperity of some members of the Sihui community in Kuala Lumpur and their desire to assert a unique heritage.

The multiple translocations of the Ruan-Liang temples in Kuala Lumpur are similar to the translocations of the Kalhuvakaru mosque in the Maldives discussed in the chapter by Katja Müller and Boris Wille in this volume. However, unlike the mosque in Malé, the Ruan-Liang temples remained enmeshed with the patron communities, which ensured their 'authenticity' and 'heritage value', the continuation of the veneration practices and communal activities, and the preservation of cultural heritage. The attachment of the community to the Ruan-Liang temples and their efforts to rebuild them each time they moved were not only connected to their continued faith in their protective deities, but also related to the fact that these temples served as places of community events and celebrations. Such communal events ranged from the celebrations marking the birthdays of Ruan, Liang and Wenshi Zhenxian to various secular functions and performances. Missing from these events are Buddhist ceremonies and ritual practices. There are no Buddhist monks present, nor any proselytizing of Buddhist teachings at these temples. Thus, while in Sihui the temples dedicated to Ruan and Liang were primarily Buddhist sites that mixed various local traditions and practices according to the needs of the native population, in Malaysia the references to Buddhist beliefs found inside the temples are mostly symbolic. Indeed, the relationship to Buddhism is limited to the use of the word 'fo' 佛 or 'buddha' in the names the temples, in the titles and descriptions of Ruan and Liang, and on some of the images and calligraphy that decorate the temple walls. There is nothing indicating the connection to Chan Buddhism, the tradition that gave birth to the Ruan and Liang buddhas.

A clear distinction between the temples in Sihui and those in Malaysia (and Kolkata) is evident from the words used to describe these places of worship. In Sihui the Chinese word '*si*' 寺 is used to refer to the temples dedicated to Ruan and Liang, but those in Malaysia and Kolkata are called '*miao*'廟.[43] There are no monks or priests to conduct Buddhist rituals at the temples in Malaysia and Kolkata. Rather, some of the activities seem to have been selectively introduced by the early migrants, while others were added by later generations. The tradition of parading the images of Ruan and Liang on sedan chairs through the neighbourhood during their birthday celebrations seems to have been transmitted from Sihui. The offering of food, including roast pigs, may have been added at later stages to imitate similar practices prevalent among the other Chinese migrant groups.[44] Community events and functions, such as Chinese New Year celebrations and marriage receptions, have also become regular activities, especially at the larger temple complexes.

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[43] In his study of religious practices in the Taiwanese town of Daqi (Ta-ch'i), P. Steven Sangren (1987: 75–76) points out the differing usage of the terms *si* and *miao*. 'Native informants', Sangren writes, 'sometimes distinguish territorial-cult temples from Buddhist ones by referring to the former as *miao* and the latter as *ssu* (*si*)'. The Sihui migrants most likely used the term *miao* for these temples because of the absence of Buddhist monks and perceived these places as Sihui-cult temples.

[44] On rituals related to pig sacrifice and offerings, see Sangren (1987: 77–79). This ritual may originally have been associated with Daoist 'ritual purging of entropic yin influences and the restoration of yang order on behalf of the community' (Sangren 1987: 79). It is not clear if any Daoist specialists are invited to perform such rituals at the Ruan-Liang temples in Malaysia.

There is another distinct feature of the Ruan-Liang temples in Malaysia, namely the extensive use of photographs inside the temples located in Malaysia. Black-and-white photographs of Liang's mummified body from Sihui, as well as a photograph of a young woman identified as Wenshi Zhenxian (Figure 7.5), frequently appear on the main altars of these temples, a few of which also have photographs of the image of Ruan from the Baolin Temple in Sihui. Numerous photographs of the key members of the local Sihui community, pictures of celebrations at the respective temples, images of other Ruan-Liang temples in Malaysia, snapshots of the Baolin, Baosheng and Liuzu temples from Sihui and framed newspaper clippings about reports on community activities and their interactions with the Sihui region decorate the walls of most of these temples. No such photographs appear inside the temple in Kolkata.

As suggested above, the photograph of Liang Cineng's mummified body from Sihui was perhaps intended to authenticate the images of the Liang buddha in the Malaysian temples and preserve their efficacious value. The origins and significance of the photograph of the woman next to Wenshi Zhenxian are not clear. The woman in the photograph seems to have lived among the Sihui people and, according to those responsible for the upkeep of the temple in Kampar, could have been a spirit medium. Placing photographs on the main altars also resembles the ancestor worship practices of the Chinese. It is common to find pictures of dead ancestors on the altars inside individual homes as well as in clan associations. These photographs of Liang, Ruan and Ms. Wen might therefore also serve a similar purpose of linking the Sihui migrants to their community 'ancestors' in Sihui.

Figure 7.5 The Portrait of Wenshi Zhenxian (photo: T. Sen)

The other photographs inside the temples, especially those related to community activities, are most likely meant to maintain communal memories, invoke a sense of shared heritage and, at the same time, preserve the heritage of the ancestral homeland. Indeed, these photographs, like the temples themselves, promote the idea of belonging not only to Sihui, but also to the local sites of settlement in Malaysia. The websites and Facebook pages (Figure 7.6) created and maintained by the Sihui communities in Malaysia serve similar functions. Highlighting the importance of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) in sustaining the sense of belonging among Chinese overseas communities in the contemporary globalized world, Loong Wong (2003) writes: 'The Chinese digital diaspora via various both (*sic*) personal Web pages and institutional and/or commercial sites thus tellingly reconstructs and reproduces an elaborate system of social, cultural, religious and professional organisations, all of which coalesce around ideas of commonality of origins and present lives, shared culture and heritage, and common goals and desires'. The websites and Facebook pages, mostly in Chinese language, contain photographs and videos of community activities

and news about specific Ruan-Liang temples.[45] These sites contribute to the (re-)establishment of the connections among these dispersed communities, promote a sense of belonging that transcends the constraints of nation states and distance, and preserve the shared heritages, no matter how diversified they may have become in the course of migrations and relocations.

Figure 7.6 Facebook Page of a Ruan-Liang Temple in Perak, Malaysia

The Ruan-Liang temple in Kolkata, called Sea Voi Yune Leong Futh Church 四會阮梁佛廟,[46] on the contrary, is mostly an inactive site. It has been at the same location since its establishment in 1908. The migrants from Sihui and their descendants have also remained in the same neighbourhood of the city for over a century. Unlike the temples in Malaysia, the

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[45] See, for example, the Facebook page of the Petaling Jaya Ruan-Liang temples, the title of which appears in Chinese: 白沙罗新村（阮梁庙). The Salak Selatan Ruan-Liang temple as well as the one in Ipoh, Perak, also have their own Facebook pages.

[46] The locals explain that the word 'church' was used for every Chinese temple in the city to indicate to the British officials that these were religious institutions that should be exempted from taxes.

one in Kolkata does not have the image of Wenshi Zhenxian (Figure 7.7).[47] Rather, the third key deity venerated here is Lu Ban 魯班, the god of carpentry. The veneration of Lu Ban can be explained by the fact that the Sihui settlers in Kolkata worked as carpenters. Thus, while Ruan and Liang connected the community in Kolkata to Sihui, Lu Ban preserved the professional identity of this specific group of Sihui emigrants. The fourth main deity in the Ruan-Liang temple in Kolkata is Atchew, the 'first' Chinese to migrate to India. Among the Chinese in Kolkata and elsewhere in India, Atchew is perceived as the Tudi gong. Similar to Datuk gong, the presence of Atchew, and in fact Lu Ban, at the temple reflects the local identity of the Sihui migrants living in Kolkata. In addition, several of the rituals popular at the Ruan-Liang temples in Malaysia, including the parading of the statues of the two buddhas through the neighbourhoods, do not take place in Kolkata. The case of the Ruan-Liang temple in Kolkata therefore suggests that it is important not only to distinguish between the various groups of Chinese migrant communities, but also to recognize that settlements in different foreign regions led to the creation of distinct practices, identities and heritages among those who belonged to the same speech groups.

Figure 7.7 The Ruan-Liang Temple in Kolkata (photo: T. Sen)

[47] The two descendants of Sihui migrants to whom I talked in Kolkata had no idea about Wenshi Zhenxian or what she symbolized.

The waning of communal activity at the Ruan-Liang temple in Kolkata is related to the decline in the number of Sihui people in the city. Although in 2008 the remaining members of the Sihui community celebrated the centenary of the establishment of the Huining Huiguan and the Ruan-Liang temple, the types of events and celebrations at the Malaysian temples described above do not take place here. However, since the temple in Kolkata has remained at the same site for over a hundred years, it has preserved some of the woodcarvings from the time of its initial construction.

In recent years, some members of the Sihui community in Kolkata have decided to participate in the burgeoning local business in Chinese food as a way to promote their unique heritage, which led to the opening of the Sei Vui Restaurant (Figure 7.8). The owners of the restaurant believe that it is this cuisine that will galvanize the fading community and help it preserve and propagate its Sihui heritage in the city. It might also, they hope, give them an opportunity to preserve the iconic building associated with their history in Kolkata, reconnecting them to the ancestral homeland through foodways and economic development.

Individually, they still pray at the Ruan-Liang temple because, they say, their parents and grandparents did so.[48]

Figure 7.8 The Sei Vui Restaurant in Kolkata (photo: T. Sen)

[48] One famous dish from Sihui is called 'Chayou ji' 茶油雞 or 'Stir-fried Chicken with Camellia Oil'. This dish is not on the menu of the Sei Vui Restaurant, which essentially serves the Indian palate with the popular Indian-Chinese cuisine. The aim of the owners is to gradually transform the area into a 'Chinese cuisine hub', as the Tangra area has become in recent years. The opening of the restaurant was reported in the local newspaper and the preservation of the iconic building lauded by the heritage activists in the city. The concept of 'Chinese cuisine hub' is discussed in Liu (2015: 142). On the so-called 'Chinese-Indian cuisine', described as 'Indian food customized as per Indians' imagination and expectation of what Chinese food should be', see Sankar (2017). The idea of a 'Sihui' cuisine actually exists in Malaysia under the 'Huining Home-village' ('Huining jiaxiang cai' 會寧家鄉菜) brand. A cookbook for the cuisine was published by the Selangor Huining Huiguan in 2015 (*Zhongguo bao* 2015b). The cooks in the Sei Vui Restaurant in Kolkata, however, are not aware of this book or the Sihui delicacies in general.

Conclusion: The Heritagization of Sihui

The local gazetteer [*Guangxu*] *Sihui xianzhi* claims the presence of Buddhist monks and temples in the Sihui region as early as the 290s. The gazetteer also records the construction of over two hundred temples and shrines in the area during the Tang and Song periods (i.e., seventh to thirteenth centuries). Although most of these structures have not survived to the present day, the temples dedicated to Ruan Ziyu and Liang Cineng are an exception in having endured from the eleventh century. The Liuzu Temple, the other renowned Buddhist monument in Sihui, was built only in 1809. Together these three temples and the shrine dedicated to Wenshi Zhenxian are now the main veneration and tourist sites in Sihui city. They were all neglected places throughout much of the twentieth century, and especially after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. The Liuzu Temple, for example, was used as a granary and as the premises of a primary school in the 1970s (Liang 2011: 73). Hardly any type of ritual ceremonies took place at the Baosheng and Baolin temples prior to the 1980s. The revival of these sites in the 1990s is associated with the economic reforms instituted in China from 1978 (Chen and Qiu 1998).

Under the economic reform, or the 'open door' policy, overseas Chinese communities were given incentives to invest in four coastal 'Special Economic Zones' (SEZ). These SEZs were located near the areas from which millions of Chinese emigrated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The open-door policy not only attracted a large amount of financial investment into these areas, but also led to the reestablishment of connections between overseas Chinese communities and their ancestral homelands. These connections were manifested in the frequent visits by Chinese overseas to the tombs of their ancestors, veneration at key religious sites, investments in local schools and hospitals, and the organization of cultural events specific to the local speech groups. Khun Eng Kuah-Pearce

(2011) has demonstrated how the Singapore Anxi Chinese contributed to the economic development of their ancestral homeland in Fujian Province. The revival of religious practices and institutions in Anxi and Penglai districts in Fujian, Kuah-Pearce argues (2011: 164–87), was intimately associated with the visiting Singapore Chinese and their participation in fairs and ceremonies. The same is true of several other sites in Fujian and Guangdong provinces, including Sihui.[49]

In the 1990s and early 2000s connections were established between Sihui and the people from the area who had emigrated to Hong Kong, Macau, Southeast Asia and other parts of the world. Several cultural institutions in Sihui were revived or re-established because of these renewed connections between the city and its emigrant populations. In fact, a report in 2017 noted that the Chinese government had invested 20 billion RMB (about 3.14 billion USD) in 'optimizing the integration of tourism, ecological environment and cultural resources' (Sihui City Government 2017). During the same year, the Zhaoqing City Federation of Returned Chinese discussed with Sihui representatives the possibility of establishing a museum for the overseas Chinese (Zhaoqing shi Qiaolian 2017). Prior to this, the local and state governments were instrumental in reviving the Baolin Temple with donations from overseas Chinese. A person named So Tung Lam 蘇東霖, a businessman of Sihui ancestry who held various positions at the Zhaoqing and Huining associations in Hong Kong, was one of the main benefactors of the Baolin and Liuzu temples, both of which were renovated in 1995–96 (*Baolin gusi*: np). The Baosheng temple and the shrine for Wenshi

[49] For a detailed study of this transnational phenomenon of religious revival in the Guangdong region, see Chan and Lang (2015). On the 'heritagization' of the overseas Chinese communities by the local governments and the PRC government, see the chapter by Geoff Wade in this volume.

Zhenxian were similarly revived in the late 1990s with donations from overseas Chinese communities.

In addition to the construction of these cultural monuments, the local government started inviting Buddhist priests and other preachers to transform the Baolin, Baosheng and Liuzu temples into functioning religious sites. These steps attracted local patrons as well as overseas devotees. Formal links were established between the temples in Sihui and those, for example, in Malaysia, resulting in frequent visits by migrant groups wishing to trace their roots in their ancestral homeland and pray at these temples. Representatives from Sihui, similarly, toured Malaysia and other countries where there were populations of Sihui migrants, in order to sustain these connections. In 2014, when a Malaysian delegation consisting of seventy people led by the head of the Malaysian Federation of the Huining Association visited Sihui, they were taken to the temples dedicated to Huineng, Ruan, Liang and Ms. Wen. The report of this visit in the local newspapers and on the website of the Guangdong Overseas Chinese noted that the members of the delegation 'were able to experience firsthand the cultural heritage of their homeland and augment their understanding of the Sixth Patriarch, Ruan, Liang, and Ms. Wen, which would allow them to better propagate the culture of the deity and the buddhas of their homeland of Malaysia and benefit the fellow townspeople' (Guangdong Qiaogang 2014).

The landscape of Sihui since the 1990s has been changed in order to accommodate the heritage of its overseas population. Here Rodney Harrison's description of the term 'heritage' seems applicable. 'Heritage is not a passive process of simply preserving things from the past that remain', he writes (2013: 4), 'but an active process of assembling a series of objects, places and practices that we choose to hold up as a mirror to the present, associated with a particular set of values that we wish to take with us into the future'. Indeed, in Sihui old temples are being revived and new ones constructed, and rituals and ceremonies invented to

address the needs of the immigrant population in the present with an eye on the future development of the city's tourism sector.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries emigrants from the Sihui region carried with them the local beliefs, practices and symbols of their cultural heritage in order to remain connected to their ancestral homeland. However, during the course of their relocations and settlement across the South China Sea and the Bay of Bengal, Sihui itself lost sites that were part of its history and heritage due to political upheavals. Yet the Sihui migrants continued to seek recourse in the past they remembered and blended those memories with their experiences at their places of settlements in foreign lands. This helped them to preserve their speech group identity and, at the same time, to create new identities and heritages. Their reconnection to their ancestral homeland in the 1980s and 1990s triggered the process of the re-heritagization of Sihui, which sought recourse in the history of its migrant groups as a consequence of the open-door policy. For the city of Sihui, therefore, the sense of belonging is not only to its local landscape or the larger nation state, but also to the travelling pasts of its emigrant populations. In this context, the Ruan-Liang temples are the common thread that connects the city to its dispersed communities and promotes the sense of solidarity with it, as well as their shared heritage, identity and history. The Sihui communities in Malaysia have already become an integral part of this shared past that is producing 'something new in the present' in Sihui. The outreach activities on the part of Sihui city to promote the solidarity of the dispersed speech group might eventually also integrate those living in Kolkata and the brand of mixed cuisine they are marketing in this process of re-heritagization.

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