Course description:

This Special Subject is situated at the turn of the twentieth century, when the history of China and the history of Chinese communities overseas, long inseparable, began to be transformed by world-historical developments of globalization, imperialism and accelerating interconnection: a nexus of conditions often referred to as a period of ‘modernity’ in Asia. Recognizing that one of the legacies of decolonization and the Cold War has been to parcel out previously interconnected regional histories into nationalist historiographies, the paper seeks to look beyond nation in attempting to understand the dimensions of cultural and intellectual change precipitated by these encounters with modernity. It takes as its historical subjects Chinese communities across China and Southeast Asia, and seeks to understand the challenges to cultural identity they faced, the ideas and visions of competing socio-political formations articulated at key moments in their shared histories, and the roots of the divergent nationalisms that would be their fates by mid-century. Amidst the great changes that characterize the globalizing fin de siècle and the early interwar years, how did Asian men and women begin to devise new ideas of self, state, society and the world that might permit participation in projects of modernity without losing their hold on a stable sense of their cultural selves? Upon what sources -- old and new, foreign and domestic -- did they draw in order to do so? What new routes of political, personal and social action were sought to pursue and enact their modern visions, and what struggles were faced in doing so?

Michaelmas classes will proceed chronologically to provide historical background to the significant escalation of Chinese migration to Southeast Asia from the mid-nineteenth century. The history of Chinese migration abroad goes back a thousand years, to merchants from southern China who sojourned frequently to the great cities of Southeast Asia in search of new opportunities beyond the southern frontiers of the Chinese littoral. The expansion of Europe in the sixteenth century marked a
transitional phase. Foreign imperialism in China, as well as domestic turbulence in the mid to late Qing, destabilized daily life and immiserated many, encouraging them to pursue opportunities abroad. The expanding European presence in Southeast Asia also generated new demands for labour to feed the complexes of capitalism emerging in new colonial economies: plantations, mines, fields, and eventually, colonial offices. These created the conditions for massive emigration, by some counts over 20 million, by the beginning of our period in the late 19th century. Topics in Michaelmas term will give attention to structures of community and kinship organization, identity formation, imperial governance, commercial networks, and the fluctuating nature of these communities’ relationships with China and Euro-American hegemony in the region.

Lent term moves to critically locate and assess the role which Chinese individuals and groups played in the emergence of new ideas and debates in early twentieth century Southeast Asia around questions of progress, nationalism, social justice, race, democracy and cultural authenticity. Classes will examine key moments in the shared histories of China and Chinese overseas, among them the 1898 reform movement, the 1911 revolution and the 1919 May Fourth movement. Source readings and texts introduce students to some of the major ideological and cultural transformations that the late 19th century and early 20th century brought to the region, including revolutions in culture, politics and gender. These will be further explored in the second half of Lent term, which brings a handful of individual thinkers, writers and actors into view, situating their writings within the currents of extraordinary change through which they lived.

Mode of teaching:

The paper is taught in 2 hour classes once a week throughout Michaelmas and Lent, combining lectures and small group discussion around key readings and primary sources. Gobbet practice classes take place throughout the paper, and you will be expected to write ‘reading responses’ to the set readings each week. Revision classes take place in Easter term. There will be one or two film events.

Proposed class schedule:

MICHAELMAS

I: Historical background: Connected histories of China and Southeast Asia

Week 1. To the South Seas
Week 2. Geographies of encounter
Week 3. Emigration in a global age

II: Historical background: Chinese communities in Southeast Asia

Week 4. Families
Week 5. Subjects
Week 6. Settlers
Week 7. Rejects
Week 8. Creoles

LENT

III: Chinese flashpoints, global moments

Week 1. 1898
Week 2. 1905
Week 3. 1911
Week 4. 1919
IV. Inter-Asian dialogues: Locating modernity in China and Southeast Asia

Week 5. Culture
Week 6. Revolution
Week 7. Gender
Week 8. Translation

EASTER
Four revision classes and general discussion.

Indicative reading list
The most up to date reading list, as well as PDFs of all required readings, will be available on Moodle. Below is a list of indicative secondary reading, which will be heavier in Michaelmas than in Lent.

Primary sources are varied. In Michaelmas, sources include: imperial edicts on Chinese migration, excerpts from Chinese travel writing and geographical treatises on Southeast Asia, migrant folk-songs, remittance letters and memoirs, documentation from colonial archives on the management and policing of Chinese communities, and photographs and images of people, clothing, architecture, food and other subjects. In Lent, the emphasis will be weighted toward textual primary sources; these will feature key writings by participants in the movements being studied, such as essays, observational writings and fiction, and in the second half of the term, on letters and programmatic writings of prominent individuals.

No prior knowledge of the subject matter is assumed, nor is Chinese a language requirement.

General overviews
Chin-Keong Ng, Boundaries and Beyond: China’s Maritime Southeast in Late Imperial Times (Chicago: National University of Singapore Press, 2017).
Elizabeth Sinn, Pacific Crossing: California Gold, Chinese Migration, and the Making of Hong Kong (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013).
Sunil Amrith, Migration and Diaspora in Modern Asia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
Ta Chen, Emigrant Communities in South China: A Study of Overseas Migration and Its Influence on Standards of Living and Social Change (Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh, 1939).


Chee-Beng Tan, Colin Storey, and Julia Zimmerman, eds. *Chinese Overseas: Migration, Research and Documentation* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2007).

Histories of Chinese communities in Southeast Asia


Jennifer Wayne Cushman, *Fields From the Sea: Chinese Junk Trade With Siam During the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).


Early twentieth century social and cultural change in East Asia


Rebecca Karl, and Peter Zarrow, *Rethinking the 1898 Reform Period: Political and Cultural Change in Late Qing China*, vol. Harvard Ea (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2002).


Ahmat Adam, *The Vernacular Press and the Emergence of Modern Indonesian Consciousness, 1855-1913* (Ithaca N.Y.: Southeast Asia Program Cornell University, 1995).


