

Overseas Chinese

A Case Study on the Chinese Diaspora to Southeast Asia

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Who are the Overseas Chinese?

- Chinese emigrants
- Roughly 55 million worldwide
- Business owners, traders, fishermen, miners, retailers, craftsmen
- Still retain strong economic and cultural ties with mainland China



Early Period of Emigration

- First wave left China around 2000 years ago.
 - Their goal was to establish colonies.
 - Most of them settled in Southeast Asia
- Permanent colonies established during the Song Dynasty (960 -1279 AD)
 - Philippines
 - Java
 - Vietnam
 - Malaya

Voyages of Zheng He/Ming Dynasty

- Starting in 1403, Zheng He led a series of voyages around Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean and Africa.
 - Purpose was to establish trade and increase tribute sent to China's Ming dynasty emperors
 - Melaka became a major trading port.
 - Thousands of Chinese moved to Melaka to set up trade;
 - Many then moved further into other parts of Malaysia, Sumatra and Java and
 - Formerly established colonies expanded.





Qing Dynasty

- The 19th century saw the largest out-migrations of Chinese.
 - Economic decline during the Qing Empire
 - Populations pressures in southern China, especially in Guangdong (which had a history of international trade)
 - Availability of steam ship travel made leaving easier
- Most moved to Southeast Asia
 - European colonizers needed workers for mines and plantations
 - Many Chinese were hired as agents by European owners
 - Colonial commercial centers provided opportunities for Chinese entrepreneurs
 - many became moneylenders and shop owners



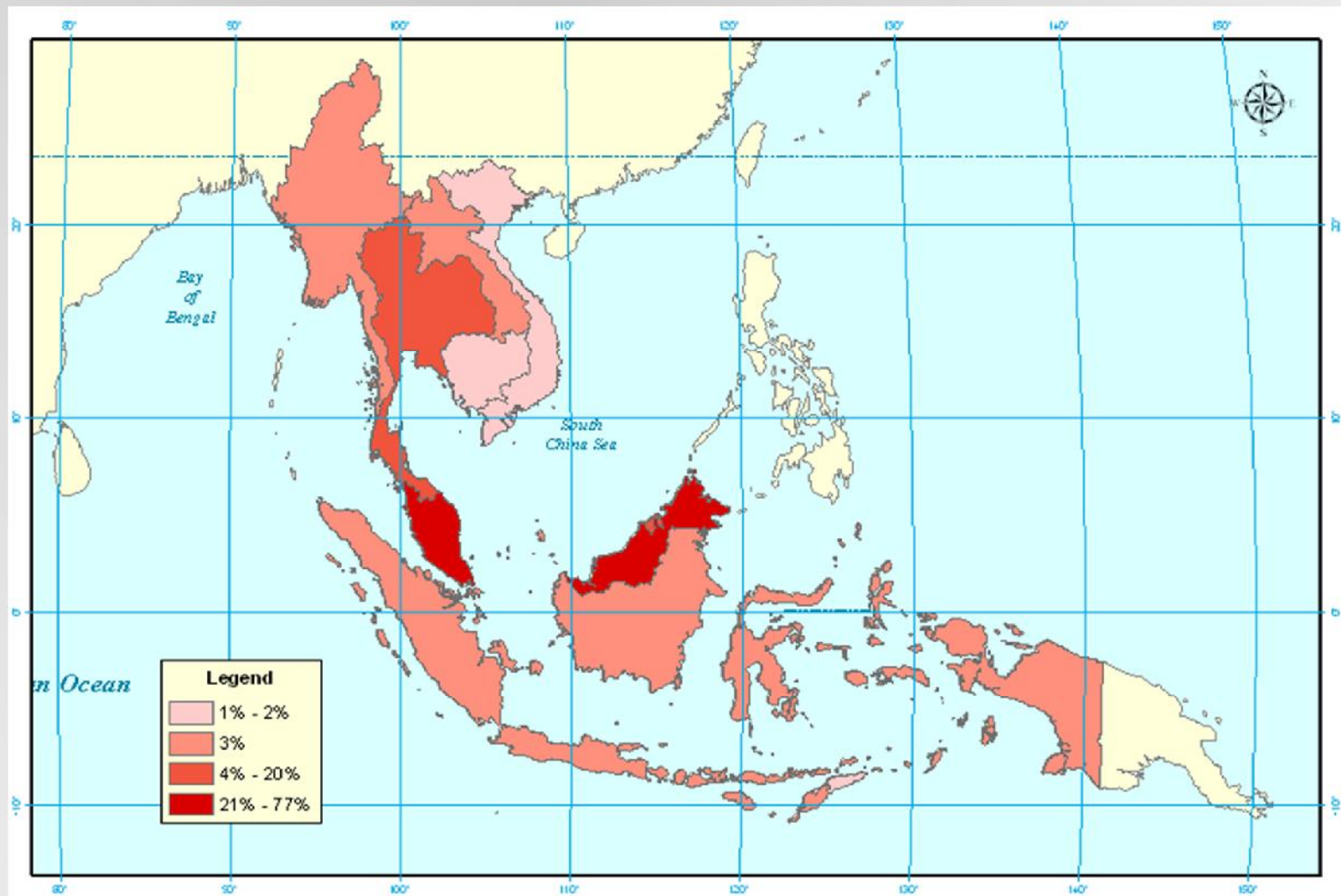
Qing Dynasty

- Had to share economic opportunities with Indian immigrants in Burma and Malaysia
- Other Southeast Asian countries, however, did not have any rival groups.
 - Ethnic Chinese made up half of the population of Bangkok during this time.
- By World War II, 15 million ethnic Chinese lived overseas in Southeast Asia alone.



Communist Revolution to Present

- Civil War and Communist Revolution caused many more Chinese to flee.
- Today, there are 55 million Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia



Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia

Coordinate System: World Robinson
Central Meridian: 100°0'0"E



Impact of Overseas Chinese

- About 10% of Southeast Asia's population
- Control about 2/3 of retail trade in Southeast Asia
- Thailand
 - 10% of population
 - Own 81% of businesses
- Malaysia
 - 29% of population
 - 69% of share capital
- Philippines
 - 2% of population
 - Half of share market
- Singapore
 - 75% of population
 - Control 90% of economy
- Indonesia
 - 3.5% of population
 - Own 70% of businesses



Life for Overseas Chinese

- Tend to maintain family, economic and cultural connections to mainland China
- Businesses are family-owned; tend to hire family members
- Buy large numbers of businesses and form conglomerations – with family members running individual businesses
- Seen as wealthy and prosperous by locals, but there is some resentment due to disproportionate wealth and power.
- Have faced discrimination, prejudice and even violence in some countries like Indonesia and the Philippines.
- Unlike the rest of Southeast Asia – in Thailand, the Overseas Chinese have assimilated into Thai society.



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- Slide 8
 - Map created by Michelle Crane. Data obtained from the CIA World Factbook.