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# **Creating a Society of “Desirable Immigrants” : Processes by Which the Basic Immigrants and Immigration Control System was Introduced into Singapore before World War I**

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines the processes through which systems for controlling immigration and the movement of people were introduced in Singapore from the beginning of colonization up to World War I. Specifically, these processes are divided into three categories: (1) introduction of a quarantine system, (2) introduction of an immigration and immigrant control system under the pretext of protecting workers, and (3) enactment of the Exclusion Ordinance of 1905 and related ordinances. By focusing on these three processes, it reveals that this gradual development also meant that Singapore switched from its policy of broadly accepting immigrants based on the *laissez-faire* principle. It also examines the characteristics of these processes in comparison with migration and immigration systems in other regions.

## **Keywords**

immigration, immigration control, overseas Chinese, Singapore, Straits Settlements, passport

## **Introduction**

The term “overseas Chinese” refers to immigrants who migrated from mainland China to other regions. Overseas Chinese can be distinguished from Chinese people living in China in terms of differences in trans-regional migration and residential areas. This type of migration over a wide area by Chinese people (in Mainland and other areas) originated in antiquity, and has occurred both within and outside of the national territory of China over the ages. One of the main destinations for overseas Chinese migration has been the maritime area of Southeast Asia. Such migration has become centered on Singapore, especially in the modern era. After British colonization in 1819, Singapore became one of the largest trading hubs in Southeast Asia. Alongside

Hong Kong, Singapore enjoyed economic prosperity as the core of the overseas Chinese commercial network.

In the 19th century, Britain adopted a *laissez-faire* approach to free trade. This approach was based on the principle of allowing the market and its economic activities to remain as free as possible, with minimal involvement from the government and public authorities. This tendency was particularly noticeable in colonies such as Hong Kong and Singapore, which served as trading hubs within Asia. Furthermore, Singapore was a free port that symbolized the free trade principles of the British Empire. Its status as a colony was different from that of a normal state. As such, the movement of goods, money, and people was largely uncontrolled by the government or public authority.<sup>1</sup>

However, the free movement of people in Singapore changed significantly with the advent of World War I. The threats posed by a global-scale war and increase in the number of refugees required many states to control and restrict the international movement of people and distinguish between their own nationals and those of other states. Accordingly, many states, including the United Kingdom, began implementing passport systems to exercise “remote control” over migrating peoples, following the advanced model adopted by the United States at that time. The influence spread to Singapore. During this period, a system for controlling immigrants and immigration using identification documents such as passports was gradually introduced.<sup>2</sup>

These broad historical developments have already been summarized in previous research. For Example, Zolberg, McKeown, and Torpey focused on the international introduction of the passport system and start of “remote control.”<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, case studies have focused on the United States and its association with the so-called Chinese Exclusion Act. In addition, several studies have explored the management of human migration in Singapore and the Straits Settlements during the colonial period. These studies included aspects such as the public health system, passport system, and protection of workers.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [Gallagher and Robinson 1953: 5–15; Mizuoka 2014: 25–28; Wong 1978: 53–58].

<sup>2</sup> The term “remote control” is used in this paper with reference to Zolberg and Torpey’s definition. The term refers to a system in which immigrants carry documents, such as passports, and visas are issued by government officials in the countries of origin and destination [Torpey 2018: 121; Zolberg 2006: 223–224].

<sup>3</sup> [McKeown 2008; Torpey 2000; Zolberg 2008].

<sup>4</sup> For an overview of the immigrant and immigration control system in Singapore from the 19th to the first half of the 20th century, see the following studies [Ee 1961: 33–45; Purcell 1948: 194–208; Saw 1991: 219–226]. For more on the quarantine and public health systems in Singapore during this period, see below [Ee 1961: 45–47; Tan 1991: 341–342]. In addition, for more on the systems for worker

However, these studies do not extend beyond addressing individual issues such as public health systems and population management in Singapore and the Straits Settlements. Consequently, no research has yet provided an overview of the extent to which systems for controlling the movement and immigration of people were established in Singapore in the period from the late 19th to early 20th century, before the passport system was introduced.

Based on an understanding of the issues noted above, this paper examines the processes through which systems for controlling immigration and the movement of people were introduced in Singapore from the beginning of colonization up to World War I. Specifically, these processes are divided into three categories: (1) introduction of a quarantine system, (2) introduction of an immigration and immigrant control system under the pretext of protecting workers, and (3) enactment of the Exclusion Ordinance of 1905 and related ordinances. This paper comprehensively explains the aforementioned three processes from the perspective of research on the historical study of the overseas Chinese society in Singapore. It also examines the characteristics of these processes in comparison with migration and immigration systems in other regions.

### **The First Process: Introduction of a Quarantine System**

We begin by discussing the introduction of a quarantine system in Singapore.

Before British colonization, Singapore was home to only a small number of Malay fishermen, pirates, and few other permanent residents. After colonization in 1819, an overseas Chinese community formed in Singapore with the development of trade with China. As the scale of trade grew, this overseas Chinese community rapidly developed in a short period. By the 1870s, overseas Chinese constituted more than half of the local population in Singapore. This proportion had increased to 70% of the total population by the beginning of the 20th century, a ratio that currently remains unchanged.

The number of Chinese immigrants to Singapore continued to increase from the earliest part of the colonial period to the end of the 19th century. From the end of the 19th century to the 1920s, more than 100,000 Chinese people migrated to Singapore annually, with some fluctuations. The majority of people who migrated to Singapore from China originated from the provinces of Guangdong and Fujian. While some

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protection and migration mediation, as well as the process through which the Chinese Protectorate was established in Singapore during this period, see below [Blythe 1947; Lee 1991: 50–102; Ng 1961: 78–86; Purcell 1948: 147–154].

migrated to other areas via the island, most remained in Singapore.<sup>5</sup>

Additionally, As mentioned in the introduction, Singapore was one of the colonies that symbolized the British free trade policy. Thus, Singapore was subject to almost no restrictions or controls on the movement of people, goods, and money. Of these, the movement of people was the first to be subjected to restriction and control in response to the global problem posed by the spread of disease.

In the latter half of the 19th century, a global cholera epidemic occurred, which adversely impacted Singapore. In response, the Straits Settlements enacted the Quarantine Ordinance in 1868. This ordinance was the first piece of legislation enacted to regulate and restrict the movement of people in Singapore.

The enactment of this ordinance was considered at the Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements on June 22, 1868. During enactment, private councilors expressed their opposition to the bill. Specifically, concerns were raised that implementing a quarantine would be detrimental to Singapore’s position as a free port. Furthermore, they believed the ordinance would hinder the flow of goods locally, the entry and exit of ships to the port, and their navigation to other regions. However, the bill was passed and commenced on July 3 of that year.

The enactment of the Quarantine Ordinance enabled colonial governors to take systematic measures to protect public health. It allowed them to impose fines on violators when a ship carrying people or animals that were infected or suspected of being infected with an infectious or communicable disease entered Singapore, or when there was an outbreak of such a disease on the mainland of the island.<sup>6</sup> However, facing opposition from the private sector, there is no record of these measures being implemented.

July to September in 1873 witnessed another outbreak of cholera in the area. This was caused by an infection carried by the Bangkok steamship *Chow Phya*, which entered Singapore on July 2 of this year.<sup>7</sup> From November 1873, several officials in charge of local ship management and sanitation, including the Master Attendant and Civil Medical Officers of the Straits Settlements government, requested the then Governor of the Straits Settlements (Ord, Harry St. George) to establish a quarantine station. They recommended St. John’s Island, located south of Singapore, as the ideal location. Following these recommendations, a lazaretto (building for quarantine) was

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<sup>5</sup> [Ee 1961: 33–39; Saw 1969: 37–42; Saw 1991: 219–222].

<sup>6</sup> CO 276, 1, *Straits Settlements Governments Gazette for the Year 1868*, pp. 249–250, 257–258; CO 275, 8, *Proceedings of the Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements with Appendix for 1868*, pp. 13–15.

<sup>7</sup> Makepeace, Walter, Brook, Gilbert E., Braddell, Ronald St. J., *One Hundred Years of Singapore: Being Some Account of the Capital of the Straits Settlements from its Foundation by Sir Stamford Raffles on the 6th February 1819 to the 6th February 1919*, Vol. I, p. 505.

established on St. John's Island in November 1874.

Another event that confirmed the importance of the lazaretto occurred the same year. On October 30, 1874, the steamship *Milton* made a port call at Singapore. Onboard were 1,200 to 1,300 Chinese people who had been transferred from Swatow, China. Of them, approximately 500 disembarked in Penang before the ship called at Singapore. In Singapore, seven or eight Chinese workers died of cholera, confirming that the ship had been infected with the disease. The *Milton* was forced to remain anchored in quarantine for a certain period. However, during the quarantine period, in which the ship was sealed off under unsanitary conditions, cholera spread further on board, resulting in the deaths of more than 50 people and causing other adverse consequences. This incident increased the colonial government's awareness of the importance of establishing and maintaining facilities for safely isolating those on board ships during a quarantine period, prompting the decision to establish and maintain a quarantine station on St. John's Island.<sup>8</sup> However, even after the quarantine station was established, there remained intense local dislike of the quarantine system as an obstacle to free movement and trade. This sentiment was rooted in the free trade policy and development of commerce in Singapore advocated by the British Empire.<sup>9</sup>

In 1886, the Quarantine and Prevention of Disease Ordinance was enacted. This ordinance unified the quarantine system, including quarantine stations. It resulted in the establishment of a more detailed inspection and quarantine system in collaboration with police organizations. St. John's Island continued to be used for quarantine. *The Annual Department Report of the Straits Settlements Governments*, first published in 1886, stated that nine ships were isolated and quarantined on St. John's Island during that year due to measles and smallpox. Furthermore, 2,665 people used the island's quarantine facility.<sup>10</sup>

The preceding section discussed legal regulation and control of immigrants and immigration, focusing on the quarantine system first initiated in the Straits Settlements from the 1870s to 1880s to prevent the spread of disease. To maintain public health, this system targeted not only overseas Chinese but also immigrants who came to Singapore. However, the local community did not immediately welcome the quarantine system, and the private sector also repeatedly voiced its discontent with it as an obstacle to free movement and trade. This sentiment was rooted in the principles of free trade and development of commerce in Singapore as advocated by the British

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<sup>8</sup> *Straits Times*, 14 November 1874, "The "Milton," 6 March 1875, "Quarantine."

<sup>9</sup> *Straits Times*, 14 August 1875, "Threatened Quarantine Regulations," 21 August 1875, "Quarantine and Sanitation."

<sup>10</sup> CO 275, 32, *Annual Department Report of the Straits Settlements Governments for the Year 1886*, pp. 54–55; CO 276, 17, *Straits Settlements Governments Gazette for the Year 1886*, pp. 2139–2142.

Empire.

### **The Second Process: Introduction of an Immigration and Immigrant Control System under the Pretext of Protecting Workers**

The second process we discuss relates to the introduction of a system for controlling immigration and the movement of people for protecting workers. Several studies have explored this topic. Specifically, Bryce’s work provides a comprehensive overview with numerous points relevant to the present discussion.<sup>11</sup> However, Bryce’s research, originally written in 1941, is now outdated and lacks citations or other forms of historical evidence. Moreover, it does not discuss numerous important issues. As such, this paper rectifies the shortcomings of Bryce’s work by providing a more empirical and detailed examination of this topic with reference to his discussion.

With the development of Singapore’s overseas Chinese community in the latter half of the 19th century, attention shifted to issues related to mediating the immigration of newly arrived Chinese, referred to as “Sing-kek” or “Sin-kheh.” These issues became the subject of local attention after an English-language translation of a petition by local overseas Chinese merchants and citizens was submitted at a meeting of the Legislative Council on May 23, 1871, to Anson, then Governor of the Straits Settlements (Anson, Archibald Edward Harbord). The petition began by reporting cases in which Chinese immigrants first coming to Singapore from China with no acquaintances on the island disappeared after concluding local trade contracts. Reportedly, these immigrants were either being deceived by or had been the target of secret collusion with vagabonds acting as immigration mediators. Thus, the petition called for the supervision of newly arrived Chinese immigrants by local colonial officials. It also emphasized the need to create a system to inform immigrants they could work freely in Singapore so that they would not to be deceived by vagabonds.

Birch, then Colonial Secretary of the Straits Settlements (Birch, James Wheeler Woodford), responded to this petition on June 5, 1871. He stated that the Straits Settlements government would thoroughly consider the matter at an early stage.<sup>12</sup>

A subsequent petition was submitted by overseas Chinese merchants on June 23, 1873. This petition named its sponsors, including Tan Kim Ching, Hoo Ah Kee, Seah Eu Chin, Cheang Hong Lim, and other prominent overseas Chinese merchants, some of whom were British subjects. The petition stressed that issues relating to the kidnapping of newly arrived Chinese immigrants remained unresolved. It called for

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<sup>11</sup> For the references, see annotation 4.

<sup>12</sup> CO 275, 13, *Proceedings of the Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements for the Year 1871*, pp. 5, 17, 1.

the Straits Settlements government to create an ordinance prohibiting the kidnapping of these immigrants, and emphasized the need to establish a temporary accommodation depot managed by the colonial administration. The aim was to receive, accommodate, feed, and register newly arrived Chinese immigrants.<sup>13</sup>

In response to these petitions, the Straits Settlements government enacted the Chinese Immigrants Ordinance on September 22, 1873. This ordinance legally stipulated the appointment of officials responsible for registering overseas Chinese immigrants. It prescribed methods for registering, disembarking, relocating, and (if they were unable to work due to illness, etc.) deporting newly arrived Chinese immigrants, in addition to penalties for violations. However, the then Governor of the Straits Settlements (Clark, Andrew) was slow to implement the ordinance. According to Clark, doing so would require strengthening police powers and improving the registration system in a manner similar to that prescribed by Hong Kong's ordinance of the same name.<sup>14</sup>

The Straits Settlements government subsequently established the Labour Commission. The commission was tasked with investigating issues related to mediating the immigration of overseas Chinese workers and began a detailed investigation into the issue. It submitted its report in September 1876, which described the immigration system of overseas Chinese workers to the area.

First, immigration from China to Singapore was facilitated by an overseas Chinese shipping superintendent (referred to as a "Chinese Supercargo"). The superintendent would book a steamship for transportation by making a lumpsum payment. Approximately three weeks before the steamship's departure, regional headmen would communicate information about the ship to nearby villages. They would summon local workers to lodging houses near the port of departure. Although all the Chinese immigrants had tickets indicating their destinations, some did not pay for these in advance. The headman would transport the workers to their destination, transfer them to the person requiring workers, and receive payment for them. In some cases, the headman would simply receive the payment and the workers would disappear without working, as in the aforementioned case of the disappearing Chinese immigrants.

In many cases, overseas Chinese workers became members of local secret

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<sup>13</sup> CO 275, 16, *Proceedings of the Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements for the Year 1873*, pp. 69, cxxiv.

<sup>14</sup> CO 276, 4, *Straits Settlements Governments Gazette for the Year 1873*, pp. 3186–3188; CO 275, 41, *Annual Departmental Reports of the Straits Settlements for the Year 1891, Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Enquire into the State of Labour in the Straits Settlements and Protected Native States*, p. 5.

societies, which were characterized by strong ties within. It was strictly forbidden to communicate their secrets and shared responsibilities to outsiders. Therefore, when workers encountered problems, they first sought help from the leaders of their secret societies and then from prominent local overseas Chinese and European figures. Requesting help from colonial officials was prohibited. This was one of the reasons that made it more difficult for the Straits Settlements government to control and understand the issue of mediating the immigration of Chinese workers.

The Labour Commission discovered that this form of immigration mediation, in which Chinese immigrants were transported through headmen and secret societies, had led to the abuse, disappearance, and kidnapping of workers. The conclusion of its report called for the establishment of officials responsible for protecting overseas Chinese, and emphasized the establishment of depots for receiving and registering immigrants, registration of immigration mediators, and enactment of ordinances to protect Chinese immigrants.<sup>15</sup>

In response to the Labor Commission’s conclusions, the Straits Settlements government amended the Chinese Immigrants Ordinance on March 23, 1877. The amendment established the Protector of Chinese and Assistant Protector of Chinese, who were charged with the management and control of Chinese immigrants. The Crimping Ordinance was also enacted on the same day. This ordinance made it a crime to deceive or coerce overseas Chinese workers into working other jobs (the term “crimping” refers to practices of deception or coercion).<sup>16</sup>

The Chinese Protectorate was also established at this point, with the Protector of Chinese as its head. It was the first branch of the colonial government established as a public authority to directly govern the local overseas Chinese society. Thus, problems related to mediating the immigration of Chinese workers may have triggered major changes in the structures through which the Straits Settlements government governed the overseas Chinese society. Previous studies have already amply discussed the establishment process of the Chinese Protectorate and issues related to dealing with the secret societies.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, this paper does not discuss these in detail. Notably, Pickering, the first Protector of Chinese (Pickering, William Alexander), submitted a report in 1877. The report included the testimonies of newly arrived Chinese immigrants who had been kidnapped and taken to Singapore to work.

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<sup>15</sup> CO 275, 19, *Proceedings of the Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements for the Year 1876*, pp. eexxlii–eexlviii. For more on the problems, danger, and legal regulation process of the Chinese secret societies in Singapore, see below [Blythe 1969; Lee 1991: 25–49; Ng 1961: 90–95; Purcell 1948: 155–173; Yen 1986: 110–128].

<sup>16</sup> CO 276, 8, *Straits Settlements Governments Gazette for the Year 1877*, pp. 209–214.

<sup>17</sup> For the references, see annotation 4.

This confirms that since its establishment, the Chinese Protectorate worked on issues related to mediating the immigration of workers.<sup>18</sup>

In June 1880, the Chinese Immigrants Ordinance was subject to other detailed amendments. In 1882, the Labor Contract Ordinance was enacted. This ordinance established legal provisions for local labor contracts, categorizing them and establishing regulations for the forms of each type of contract, wage payments, penalties, and so on. For example, oral contracts without a written document were limited to a maximum of one month, and written contracts to a maximum of five years. This ordinance was further revised in 1883 as the Labor Contract Amendment Ordinance, which added detailed provisions on matters such as wage payments.<sup>19</sup>

Through the enactment of a series of ordinances from the late 1870s to early 1880s, the Straits Settlements government began to exercise direct control over overseas Chinese workers. Furthermore, the government established the Chinese Protectorate as a department to ensure control over workers. The legal regulation of labor contracts emerged in tandem with this series of ordinances. Furthermore, the Protector of Chinese enacted the Dangerous Societies Ordinance in 1890, which introduced strict regulations regarding ethnic Chinese secret societies. It succeeded in greatly reducing their influence in the community.<sup>20</sup> After neutralizing the secret societies and resolving the most significant threat to colonial society, the Protectorate began to tackle the aforementioned issues related to the immigration mediation of overseas Chinese workers.

In October 1890, the Labor Commission was newly established to investigate and discuss issues concerning Chinese workers in the Straits Settlements. The members of this committee were appointed by Dickson, then Colonial Secretary of the Straits Settlements (Dickson, James Francis), and included the Protector of Chinese, Francis Powell. After conducting 46 field surveys and meetings between October 1890 and March 1891, the Labor Commission submitted a detailed report to Dickson.

The report began by explaining the history of the protection of overseas Chinese immigrants in the 1870s and 1880s. It then reported that the influence of the secret societies had declined with regard to the structure of the immigration mediation system for newly arrived Chinese immigrants to the local area. However, there had been few significant changes from the content of the report submitted by the Labor

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<sup>18</sup> CO 275, 21, *Proceedings of the Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements for the Year 1877*, pp. i–v.

<sup>19</sup> CO 276, 13, *Straits Settlements Governments Gazette for the Year 1882*, pp. 207–215; CO 276, 14, *Straits Settlements Governments Gazette for the Year 1883*, pp. 351–352.

<sup>20</sup> [Blythe 1969: 222–248; Ng 1961: 94–95; Purcell 1948: 171–172].

Commission in 1876. The report, did however, provide a more detailed explanation of the immigration mediation system for overseas Chinese migrant workers.

According to the report, the travel expenses of the majority of Chinese immigrants migrating to Singapore were covered by the brokers who mediated the migration. As such, these immigrants were indebted as they migrated into the area. This implies that they would be held in a depot until an employer was found to whom to sell them. This form of migration mediation was called the “credit ticket system.”

The brokers mediating migration first moved Chinese migrants from within mainland China to Singapore and Penang before transferring them to local brokers, from whom they received money to cover transportation costs and generate profits. After an inspection by officials from the Chinese Protectorate, the local brokers held overseas Chinese immigrants in depots. The local brokers then sold these Chinese workers to local employers, and earned profits that exceeded their upfront costs during periods of high labor demand.

The local brokers communicated the price of workers and other information to employers in Singapore and brokers in other regions, such as Malacca, Borneo, and Sumatra, who came to Singapore. They were accompanied by doctors and selected workers and received copies of their photographs. These brokers then submitted one of these photographs to the Chinese Protectorate to confirm the identity of the worker in question. Thereafter, they concluded a labor contract (without submitting the broker’s own name). At this point, the overseas Chinese workers received a small advance payment and were transported to their place of employment via steamboat.

The Chinese Protectorate was in charge of all legal regulations concerning overseas Chinese immigrants in Singapore. These included the registration and inspection of the depots where immigrants were received and registered. Privately operated depots were also registered by civil medical officers of the Straits Settlements government. At the time, there were 14 such private depots for newly arrived Chinese immigrants in Singapore holding 1,193 immigrants. There were eight such facilities for overseas Chinese who had been in Singapore for a longer period, which housed 592 people. The Straits Settlements government also operated depots for overseas Chinese immigrants in Penang. However, there were no depots in Singapore at this time.

The Labor Commission found that this “credit ticket system” for migration mediation caused various issues relating to the quality of workers, worker shortages (and the crimping and desertion resulting therefrom), and increased costs. To solve these problems, the Commission recommended the following: (1) inspection of local overseas Chinese immigrants by the colonial government, (2) abolishing the depots and brokers that were already registered and newly establishing government-operated

depots locally and in China, and (3) introducing full-scale sanctions against the “credit ticket system” by the Chinese government.<sup>21</sup>

In response to the Commission’s report, in May 1894, the Straits Settlements government ordered the establishment of a new depot. The aim was that the colonial government would inspect overseas Chinese immigrants in the building of the Chinese Protectorate.<sup>22</sup> In addition, in 1896, the Native Passenger Lodging House Ordinance was established. With this ordinance, it was decided to register and regulate the lodging houses that housed overseas Chinese workers. In April 1897, the Chinese Protectorate began overseeing the management and registration of lodging houses.<sup>23</sup>

Legal regulation actually began in September 1897. The Chinese Protectorate began its investigation of local lodging houses in July of the same year. Many lodging houses were unsanitary. However, with multiple visits and the cooperation of the municipal health office, the standards of cleanliness and sanitation were improved. Moreover, the number of workers accommodated in the lodging houses was confirmed. Ultimately, 36 lodging houses were registered in 1897, and their registration and management continued annually thereafter. In addition, in 1899, the Straits Settlements government established examination depots on Havelock Road to control the number of migrant workers in debt and reduce the number of lodging houses.<sup>24</sup>

In August 1902, a new Chinese Immigrants Ordinance was enacted to replace the ordinance of the same name, which had been enacted in 1880 and amended in 1891. This ordinance further subdivided and clarified regulations regarding the movement and migration of Chinese people from mainland China. It also enabled the colonial government and Chinese Protectorate to make more detailed decisions. With this ordinance, the depots became more closely regulated. If an inspection by the Chinese Protectorate identified overseas Chinese immigrants not able to work, they were sent to local hospitals or deported back to mainland China. The ordinance also made it possible to deport immigrants aged 16 years or younger or those aged over 35 to their country of origin. These and other measures strengthened the power of the

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<sup>21</sup> CO 275, 39, *Annual Departmental Reports of the Straits Settlements for the Year 1890*, pp. B69–72, B119–123; CO 275, 41, *Annual Departmental Reports of the Straits Settlements for the Year 1891, Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Enquire into the State of Labour in the Straits Settlements and Protected Native States*.

<sup>22</sup> CO 276, 28, *Straits Settlements Governments Gazette for the Year 1894*, p. 718.

<sup>23</sup> CO 275, 55, *Annual Department Report of the Straits Settlements Governments for the Year 1897*, pp. 229, 240; CO 276, 33, *Straits Settlements Governments Gazette for the Year 1896*, pp. 2356–2359; CO 276, 34, *Straits Settlements Governments Gazette for the Year 1897*, pp. 449–450, 452.

<sup>24</sup> CO 276, 38, *Straits Settlements Governments Gazette for the Year 1899*, p. 526. *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Adviser*, 10 April 1899, untitled article.

colonial governors and Chinese Protectorate. This ordinance was then amended in April and October 1910, adding provisions on matters such as labor contracts.<sup>25</sup>

In addition, the Emigration Ordinance was enacted in May 1910. With this ordinance, the colonial governor could declare a migrant’s immigration to Singapore as unlawful. This declaration could be made if the person in question had traveled from an area where a disease was endemic, or if there appeared to be a problem in terms of protecting that person or with their labor contract. Regulations regarding labor contracts, depots, and immigration were also added. These regulations also strengthened the power of the Chinese Protectorate.<sup>26</sup> By 1910, the Chinese Protectorate was able to comprehensively control and monitor the influx of overseas Chinese into the local area through establishing multiple ordinances and deploying personnel and facilities.

The preceding section described the process through which, from the 1870s to 1910, Singapore developed a system for controlling immigrants and immigration to nominally protect mainly overseas Chinese workers. The term “protection” was not used to refer to protecting an individual’s right to free choice regarding labor. Instead, it was used in the sense of preventing workers from disappearing or being kidnapped without actually working after signing a labor contract, thereby providing employers with a stable supply of labor.

In this process, the protection of overseas Chinese workers was tied to a stable supply of labor in Singapore and the Straits Settlements. This was considered a key issue for local economic development. To safeguard the well-being of overseas Chinese workers, it became imperative to establish an immigration control system. This system necessitated promoting legal regulations spanning diverse facets of the social context surrounding overseas Chinese workers. This comprehensive approach included the implementation of measures such as a migration mediation system and standardization and protection of labor contracts, as well as addressing potential concerns regarding Chinese secret societies.

However, the overseas Chinese migration mediation system was complex and involved multiple intermediaries. Addressing the challenges of controlling and monitoring that system was difficult for the Straits Settlements government. Therefore, it organized labor commissions in 1876 and 1891, which investigated the “credit ticket system” used to mediate overseas Chinese migration into the area. Following this investigation, a new department, namely the Chinese Protectorate, was established

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<sup>25</sup> CO 276, 45, *Straits Settlements Governments Gazette for the Year 1902*, pp. 1615–1624; CO 276, 62, *Straits Settlements Governments Gazette for the Year 1910*, p. 736; CO 276, 63, *Straits Settlements Governments Gazette for the Year 1910*, pp. 2210–2212.

<sup>26</sup> CO 276, 62, *Straits Settlements Governments Gazette for the Year 1910*, pp. 1224–1231.

and staffed, multiple ordinances were enacted, and facilities such as lodging houses were set up and inspected. In this manner, the government established a comprehensive control over the migration patterns of overseas Chinese. The Chinese Protectorate was responsible for all matters related to overseas Chinese society, and for monitoring and administering the immigration of Chinese people into the area.

Furthermore, rather than encountering opposition from the private sector, these systems were introduced at its request, unlike the quarantine system in Singapore. Local residents understood that protecting workers and preventing them from disappearing or being kidnapped was beneficial in terms of local economic development and for ensuring a stable supply of labor. The introduction of the system was also aided by the fact that the overseas Chinese society initially called for a response to these issues.

### **The Third Process: Enactment of the Exclusion Ordinance and Related Ordinances**

The third process we discuss relates to the enactment of the Exclusion Ordinance and related ordinances.

As mentioned, “remote control” began with the introduction of the passport system in Singapore after World War I. The “remote control” system was first introduced in the United States. The process included the introduction of the so-called Chinese Exclusion Act and exclusion of overseas Chinese immigrants from the 1880s to 1900s.

In this regard, Wong Sin Kiong examined the influence of the Chinese Exclusion Act on the overseas Chinese community of Singapore. His research showed that the overseas Chinese in Singapore at the time feared that the Chinese Exclusion Act would not be limited to the United States and would be introduced to British colonies. Therefore, they engaged in active movements of resistance centered on boycotting American products.<sup>27</sup> It is now commonly known that the Chinese Exclusion Act did not spread to the British colonies. Therefore, the resistance movement concluded without major consequences.

However, the Chinese Exclusion Act was the beginning of “remote control” and the start of a new move toward modern states (or public authorities). The act actively discriminated against immigrants admitted into their territory and introduced systems to control them and immigration to exclude “undesirable immigrants.” The following paragraphs re-examine the global spread of the Chinese Exclusion Act in this context

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<sup>27</sup> [Wong 1998].

and its influence on Singapore.

Immigrant and immigration control systems intended to exclude “undesirable immigrants” were first introduced in the Americas and South Africa from the 1850s. This development gave rise to the abovementioned enactment of the Chinese Exclusion Act in the United States in the 1880s.<sup>28</sup>

The United Kingdom followed this global trend. The 1880s to 1890s witnessed, a large influx of Jewish immigrants into Western Europe to escape pogroms and other forms of persecution in Russia. The ultimate destination for many Jewish immigrants was the United States, which the United Kingdom served as a transit country. Between 1881 and 1914, approximately 120,000 to 150,000 Jewish immigrants entered the United Kingdom, settling in areas such as London’s East End. Jewish immigrants were considered impoverished and dangerous due to local deep-rooted anti-Semitic sentiments. Their treatment become recognized as an important social issue in the United Kingdom.

In April 1902, the Royal Commission on Alien Immigration was established to investigate “the character and extent of the evils which are attributed to the unrestricted immigration of Aliens, especially in the Metropolis” and for proposing “the measures which have been adopted for the restriction and control of Alien Immigration in Foreign Countries and in British Colonies.” The Commission submitted its report in August 1903. The report recommended the establishment of an immigration control bureau and enactment of legislation to prevent and exclude “undesirable” foreigners from entering the country. The report led to the introduction of the Aliens Act in the United Kingdom in 1905, through which the country introduced systems for directly controlling and restricting immigrants and immigration, without employing rhetorical justifications such as quarantine or worker protection. However, the act was not particularly effective.<sup>29</sup>

Influenced by the enactment of the Aliens Act, preparations to enact legislation to exclude “undesirable” immigrants began in Singapore from the late 1900s. First, in December 1905, the consideration of a bill for the Exclusion Ordinance began. The ordinance was based on the Indian Act xli of 1850. This old act was enacted when the Straits Settlements were still under the jurisdiction of the East India Company to “prevent the landing and leaving of the decrepit beggars, in the settlements of Prince of Wales’ Island [Penang], Singapore and Malacca.” The ordinance was intended to revise the content of the Indian Act xli by comprehensively specifying matters such as the persons the ordinance would target and penalties. It was an attempt to reuse old

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<sup>28</sup> [McKeown 2008: 186–189; Torpey 2018: 114–126].

<sup>29</sup> [Bashford and McAdam 2014: 314–319; Bashford and Gilchrist 2012: 410–428; Wray 2006: 308–312].

(and no longer in force at the time) laws and regulations enacted during the period of the East India Company rule of Singapore. Furthermore, the content of the bill was based on the United Kingdom's Aliens Act.<sup>30</sup>

Two other ordinances were considered in parallel with preparations for the enactment of the Exclusion Ordinance. One was the Vagrancy Ordinance, which was enacted in response to the growing number of "vagrants" in the area. (The term referred to "any person who found asking alms or without employment and having no visible means of subsistence.") in the area. The purpose of the ordinance was to establish and operate a "house of detention," where such people could be detained locally. The bill for this ordinance stated that its purpose was "to get rid so far as possible of useless members of society, to help, so far as possible, blameless decrepitude, and in cases where the decrepitude or the inability to work is of a temporary nature, to restore to health and enable the patient to regain the habit of self-support." It was based on an ordinance of the same name in Hong Kong.<sup>31</sup>

The other of these ordinances was an amendment to the Banishment Ordinance. This bill added new provisions to the Banishment Ordinance passed in 1888 and revised in 1889. Its purpose was to give the governor the power to expel an "undesirable alien" who appeared to be living as a "vagrant" and who was found guilty of a crime. The content of the bill was based on the United Kingdom's Aliens Act.<sup>32</sup>

Of these three ordinances, particularly with regard to the Vagrancy Ordinance, Collyer, W. R., the Attorney General of the Straits Settlements government, explained that the main targets of this Ordinance were overseas Chinese, and the houses of detention to be established differed from work houses and prisons in the United Kingdom, although they were substantially similar.<sup>33</sup>

After several amendments, these three ordinances were officially enacted in their amended forms in 1906. First, the Exclusion Ordinance of 1906 targeted people including "diseased maimed blind idiot lunatic or decrepit person[s] not having the means of subsistence." It imposed fines on the owners of ships that transported these people. The ordinance gave colonial police the right to board ships that entered local

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<sup>30</sup> CO 276, 52, *Straits Settlements Governments Gazette for the Year 1905*, pp. 3257–3258; CO 276, 53, *Straits Settlements Governments Gazette for the Year 1906*, pp. 99–100, *East India Acts for the Year 1850 with Index*, p. 54.

<sup>31</sup> CO 276, 52, *Straits Settlements Governments Gazette for the Year 1905*, pp. 3203–3208, 3301–3307; CO 276, 53, *Straits Settlements Governments Gazette for the Year 1906*, p. 45.

<sup>32</sup> CO 276, 52, *Straits Settlements Governments Gazette for the Year 1905*, pp. 3218–3219, 3316–3317; CO 276, 54, *Straits Settlements Governments Gazette for the Year 1906*, pp. 60–61.

<sup>33</sup> CO 275, 71, *Proceedings of the Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements for the Year 1905*, pp. B227–228.

ports, detain and interrogate these people, and prevent them from landing.<sup>34</sup>

Next, the Vagrancy Ordinance of 1906 started by defining the “vagrants” targeted by the ordinance as “any person found asking for alms” or “any person not being physically able to earn or being unwilling to work for his own livelihood and having no visible means of subsistence.” The ordinance provided for the establishment of houses of detention to detain “vagrants” locally, with officials appointed for their supervision. Those identified as “vagrants” by local police courts were to be detained in a house of detention. Here, they had to either find work or be transferred to a hospital and asylum. If a person was unable to find employment within a year while in a house of detention and the person was not a British subject, the governor could deport them to their country of origin. Local police officers gained the power to arrest and imprison, without the need for a warrant, any “vagrant” who they discovered and who refused to accompany them.<sup>35</sup>

The details of this ordinance were amended in September 1906. Local criminal prisons were to be used as houses of detention, with the officials in such prisons responsible for supervising both. In October of that year, regulations for houses of detention were decided; for example, items such as the clothing and meals of inmates were to be the same as those in prisons (with the addition of differences in treatment between Asians and Europeans in terms of meals).<sup>36</sup>

Furthermore, in March 1908, civil prisons became used as houses of detention. The Annual Report of this year noted that Asian immigrants were sent to civil prisons and European immigrants to European blocks in criminal prisons.<sup>37</sup> Here, the prisons including their environment and the treatment of inmates, essentially doubled as houses of detention.

These houses of detention operated under the supervision of the civil medical officer of the Straits Settlements government. They held 117 “vagrants” in 1907 and 469 in 1908, a small number of who were transferred to hospitals or died. However, the actual numbers of “vagrants” are unknown. This is due to lack of historical records regarding the deportation of “vagrants” to their countries of origin when they entered or left ports in the Straits Settlements, or of those expelled under the Banishment Ordinance.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> CO 276, 53, *Straits Settlements Governments Gazette for the Year 1906*, pp. 738–739.

<sup>35</sup> CO 276, 53, *Straits Settlements Governments Gazette for the Year 1906*, pp. 655–658.

<sup>36</sup> CO 276, 54, *Straits Settlements Governments Gazette for the Year 1906*, pp. 2189–2190, 2358, 2389, 2695.

<sup>37</sup> CO 276, 57, *Straits Settlements Governments Gazette for the Year 1908*, p. 447; CO 275, 77, *Annual Department Report of the Straits Settlements Governments for the Year 1908*, p. 65.

<sup>38</sup> CO 276, 53, *Straits Settlements Governments Gazette for the Year 1906*, pp. 659–660.

The amended Banishment Ordinance adopted the same definition of “vagrant” as the Vagrancy Ordinance. The amended ordinance made it possible for colonial governors to expel foreigners who had been convicted of a crime or who had been living as a “vagrant” in the colony for six months or longer.<sup>39</sup>

Local newspapers frequently reported that police organizations and houses of detention collaborated with courts and prisons to monitor and punish local immigrants. These articles described, in a matter-of-fact way, how overseas Chinese immigrants were arrested by the police and taken to magistrate and police courts. Following a brief trial, they were sent to a house of detention, prison, or expelled to another region. The articles reported that some overseas Chinese immigrants were homeless, had no means of making a living, had no other people they could rely on, and that some were blind or had disabilities that affected their ability to walk. The articles expressed almost no sympathy for these people or any awareness of problems relating to their treatment.<sup>40</sup> One article reported that an unfortunate overseas Chinese claimed in a magistrate court that he was not a beggar but a “dust bin grubber” (i.e., a junk dealer). His claim was dismissed, and he was sent to a house of detention. The article, entitled “A New Profession,” displays a macabre kind of humor.<sup>41</sup>

The preceding section described how the Exclusion Ordinance and two related ordinances were enacted and amended under the direct influence of the Aliens Act of the United Kingdom. There are clear points of commonality between them in that they targeted immigrants referred to as “vagrants,” who lacked the ability to work or support themselves. These ordinances sought to “correct” or exclude these “undesirable immigrants” from the colony. In that sense, these three ordinances are related. Furthermore, applying these three ordinances in a related manner marked the start of a system in which immigrants were selected for the local labor force, some of who were “corrected” or excluded. This simultaneously marked the start of a system in which local public authorities were able to freely select which immigrants to accept without any need to provide a pretext of maintaining public health or protecting workers.

Moreover, there was virtually no opposition from the private sector to the enactment of these ordinances. The primary reason for this was that it was clear that the enactment of these ordinances would contribute to stabilizing the labor supply, in

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<sup>39</sup> CO 276, 53, *Straits Settlements Governments Gazette for the Year 1906*, pp. 659–660.

<sup>40</sup> For more examples, See the articles below; *Straits Times*, 21 August 1907, untitled article; 4 March 1908, “Vagrancy in Singapore,”; 9 July 1908, Untitled article; 18 September 1908, untitled article; 14 December 1909, untitled article; *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advisor*, 13 October 1909, “Police Courts,”; 2 November 1909, “Police Courts,”; 9 December 1909, “Police Courts.”

<sup>41</sup> *Straits Times*, 4 September 1908, “A New Profession.”

a similar manner to the system for worker protection mentioned in section 2. While there had been fears that the effects of the Chinese Exclusion Act would spread to the British colonies, compared with the boycott of American products and other measures taken by the local overseas Chinese community in 1905, there was a remarkably low level of attention and interest in these ordinances. For the wealthy overseas Chinese merchants who were the de facto leaders of the local overseas Chinese community, these moves to exclude immigrants unable to work and improve the quality of the workforce probably seemed like somebody else’s problem, and thus, they saw no reason to oppose them.

As mentioned, the original form of the Exclusion Ordinance and related ordinances was the United Kingdom’s Aliens Act, one of the products of a system to exclude “undesirable immigrants” developed globally. From this perspective, although the so-called Chinese Exclusion Act did not directly impact Singapore and the Straits Settlements, and a system of “remote control” was not realized, it can be said that Singapore came to possess one of the global systems for excluding “undesirable immigrants” that had common roots with these other systems. The Singaporean system was a continuation of the exclusion of Jews in the United Kingdom, but developed in a form that differed significantly from the exclusion of overseas Chinese in the United States.

In addition, the Exclusion Ordinance and related ordinances did not simply control the movement of immigrants into the colony. While they made it possible to select and exclude immigrants based on their ability to work, they simultaneously gathered immigrants who lacked the ability to work in the colony into houses of detention (effectively prisons). Furthermore, they sought to “correct” these immigrants as much as possible so that they could (re)acquire the ability to work. In this sense, the main purpose of the immigrant and immigration control system based on these ordinances was to enable public authorities to monitor and control immigrant societies, rather than to simply control migration or exclude certain people. Moreover, it was impossible for workers to refuse the monitoring and control of immigrants in the colony. This was because it was implemented forcibly using local police and houses of detention (facilities largely equivalent to colonial prisons).

Therefore, the establishment of the Exclusion Ordinance and its related ordinances meant that the Straits Settlements government had gained the power to use local institutions with coercive powers (e.g., the police and houses of detention) to constantly monitor immigrants in the colony and to forcibly “correct” or exclude them based on their ability to work. The emergence of such power is particularly significant in the history of Singapore as a colonial society that had formerly accepted immigrants

following the laissez-faire principle.<sup>42</sup>

## **Conclusion**

This paper focused on three processes: the quarantine system, worker protection system, and enactment of the Exclusion Ordinance and related ordinances. By focusing on these processes, we traced the historical course through which the immigrant and immigration control system, the forerunner of the passport system, was introduced in Singapore. The gradual development of this system for controlling immigrants and immigration also meant that Singapore, a colonial city with a focus on trade, switched from its policy of broadly accepting immigrants based on the laissez-faire principle, which had been in place since the colony was first established. This switch originated in attempts to more comprehensively monitor the local overseas Chinese society and its migration mediation systems. These systems then developed into a process of sifting and excluding certain immigrants who did not contribute to the development of the local economy, initially under various pretexts of maintaining public health, protecting workers, and excluding immigrants unable to work or support themselves.

In other words, these three processes did not just involve the introduction of an immigrant and immigration control system. They also signified a partial revision of the laissez-faire principle, the keystone of Singapore's free trade policy. Singapore's colonial society, which had developed by accepting would-be immigrants as they were, underwent these three processes to prevent the migration of "undesirable immigrants" who did not, according to the public authorities, contribute to the development of the local economy. It also sought to exclude such people from the colony, thereby transforming colonial society into one comprising "desirable immigrants." The establishment and early activities of the Chinese Protectorate, which has been the subject of much research on the social history of the overseas Chinese community of Singapore, should also be understood in the context of the direct control and monitoring of overseas Chinese immigrants as a labor force.

The introduction of this kind of immigrant and immigration control system gave rise to fears that Singapore's role as a trading hub based on free trade policy rooted in the laissez-faire principle would become restricted and that the colony would lose its

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<sup>42</sup> Another point that should be highlighted here relates to the process through which a system for identifying people using fingerprints and photographs was introduced by the colonial police force in the Straits Settlements in the 1900s. However, this issue should be discussed in connection with the establishment of the Special Branch of the colonial police force from the 1920s onward. For this reason, this paper does not explore this issue in detail.

commercial advantage. In fact, the most significant obstacle in the process of introducing the first such control system in the form of a quarantine system was opposition from the private sector. This opposition was rooted in fears that the system would reduce Singapore’s advantage as a trading hub. Therefore, when these systems were introduced in Singapore, it was ensured that the immigrant and immigration control system would contribute to Singapore’s development as a trading hub by controlling immigrants as a workforce, rather than counter such development.

The processes discussed in this paper realized in Singapore in the period before World War I did not go beyond the gradual introduction of a rough system to control immigrants and immigration. A comprehensive border control system premised on “remote control” had not yet been realized. At the time, the United States was likely the only state that had achieved “remote control.” From the perspective of managing the international and trans-border movement of people, the United States, a nation state of immigrants, was ahead of other nation states in realizing “remote control.” As such, there is a certain rationality in the fact that many studies have focused on the case of the United States.<sup>43</sup>

However, if we solely focus on the United States and other advanced modern nation states, we run the risk of losing sight of the importance of cases from other regions. For example, in modern nation states like the United States, the term “immigrant” usually refers to “non-national/citizens” (i.e., people who are not nationals or citizens of the nation state to which they migrated). The difference in the legal status of immigrants and nationals /citizens depends on their citizenship status. Border control by the state then takes the form of differentiating between nationals/citizens and immigrants, and granting permission to migrate only to “alien” immigrants who can live alongside nationals/citizens harmoniously. For example, discourses such as “ “illegal” (often, indeed, of “undocumented”) migration as a result of state’s monopolization of the legitimate “means of movement” ”<sup>44</sup> can be considered premised on the territorial nature of the modern nation state and categorization of nationals through governance.

In this regard, Singapore at this time was a colony, not a modern nation state, and the majority of people resident there were immigrants. Therefore, there were no “nationals of the State of Singapore.” Although some residents had nationalities (e.g., British), this did not function as an important administrative division in Singapore during the period of colonial rule. For example, holding British nationality was not a necessary condition for holding administrative positions related to local colonial

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<sup>43</sup> See below [McKeown 2008: 102–107, 121–148, 157–184; Torpey 2018: 115–126; Zolberg 2008].

<sup>44</sup> [Torpey 2018: 11].

governance.<sup>45</sup>

Therefore, under Singapore's colonial rule, while local immigrants (including some who were not settled in Singapore) were governed as the main residents of the colony and compelled to cooperate with the colonial government, without distinguishing citizens / nationals and non-citizens / nationals (i.e., “aliens” / immigrants), it was nonetheless necessary to exclude unnecessary people to stabilize colonial management.

As a result, in Singapore from the latter half of the 19th century to the early 20th century, certain restrictions were placed on the laissez-faire principle that had existed since a port first opened there. A colonial society of “desirable immigrants” was created by controlling and monitoring local immigrants and eliminating “undesirable immigrants” who could not participate in the labor force.

This “desirable immigrant” society was formed to accomplish tasks to provide a stable labor force and cooperate with colonial governance, which were necessary to stimulate commercial activity and for efficient economic development. To that end, these “desirable immigrants” were not to be described as “aliens,” contrasted and distinguished from the main nationals, like immigrants in other nation states were. Furthermore, the “desirable immigrants” were not subject to strict monitoring. Rather, they were the most important targets of governance, the primary residents eligible for admission into the civil service who served as private members of the Legislative Council or members of the municipal Commission, justices of the peace, attorneys, and local police officers.

Therefore, when explaining the immigrant and immigration control system in Singapore during the period of colonial rule, discussions such as that by Zolberg and Torpey, predicated on modern nation states such as the United States or European countries, are unlikely to be effective. Furthermore, to complete this analysis, a more comprehensive investigation is necessary, which should include aspects such as police organizations, prisons, and asylums within the colonial space of Singapore. These topics are to be examined in future research.

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<sup>45</sup> [Shinozaki 2017: 125–133].

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