

MADELINE Y. HSU

*Dreaming of  
Gold, Dreaming  
of Home*

*Transnationalism and Migration*

*Between the United States and South China, 1882-1943*



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# Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home

TRANSNATIONALISM  
AND MIGRATION BETWEEN  
THE UNITED STATES AND  
SOUTH CHINA, 1882-1943



*Madeline Yuan-yin Hsu*

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ASIAN AMERICA

*A series edited by Gordon H. Chang*

The increasing size and diversity of the Asian American population, its growing significance in American society and culture, and the expanded appreciation, both popular and scholarly, of the importance of Asian Americans in the country's present and past—all these developments have converged to stimulate wide interest in scholarly work on topics related to the Asian American experience. The general recognition of the pivotal role that race and ethnicity have played in American life, and in relations between the United States and other countries, has also fostered this heightened attention.

Although Asian Americans were a subject of serious inquiry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they were subsequently ignored by the mainstream scholarly community for several decades. In recent years, however, this neglect has ended, with an increasing number of writers examining a good many aspects of Asian American life and culture. Moreover, many students of American society are recognizing that the study of issues related to Asian America speak to, and may be essential for, many current discussions on the part of the informed public and various scholarly communities.

The Stanford series on Asian America seeks to address these interests. The series will include work from the humanities and social sciences, including history, anthropology, political science, American studies, law, literary criticism, sociology, and interdisciplinary and policy studies.

In loving memory of my grandfathers,  
Xu Fuguan (1903–1982) and Wai G. Chun (1910–2000).  
The ideas of one and the life of the other inspired much  
of this book.

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My experiences as a graduate student at Yale University nurtured the questions and methodological training that produced this book. The seeds grew from a seminar paper written for Deborah Davis's class on Chinese families in the twentieth century. Helen Siu's workshop on globalization and localization conducted in the summer of 1993 in Hong Kong introduced me to the distinctive sociocultural dynamics of the history of Guangdong and the Pearl River Delta. Each of my dissertation committee members, in their own ways, contributed to this monograph. At a time when it was not yet fashionable, Beatrice Bartlett encouraged my interest in the history of Chinese overseas and gave me the opportunity to help teach her class, "Chinese Pioneers." Jonathan Spence taught me much about the art of writing and producing the strongest narrative by making the most of telling details. All but sight unseen, David Montgomery valiantly agreed to introduce a novice student to past and future approaches to the field of American immigration history. I have benefited immeasurably from their ideas about what a study of Chinese history and American migration should be. Funding for my dissertation research and writing came from several sources: the Council on East Asian Studies, a Henry Hart Rice Advanced Research

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At every stage of the writing process, my thinking and ability to articulate



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Mom and Dad had enough faith to let me choose my own path when law school seemed by far the most practical option for a child with a liberal arts degree. My grandparents in Arkansas, Wai G. and Wai Ying Chun, shared with me their stories of both China and America. My husband, Benito M. Vergara, eased the worst pain of the writing process by sharing with humor and grace his ideas and observations as well as an equal burden of the day-to-day tasks of cooking, washing dishes, fielding telemarketers, and walking the dog. This book is dedicated, with my love, to him.

M.Y.H.

## A Note on Translations and Conversions

I have used *putonghua* pronunciations in pinyin romanization for most of the Chinese names and terms in this book. According to this system, Canton is written as Guangzhou, Amoy is Xiamen, Swatou is Shantou, and the Kuomintang is the Guomindang. For a handful of names, most notably Sun Yatsen and Chiang Kaishek, I have departed from this practice for people, places, and businesses that are better known by the Anglicized versions of their names in dialect.

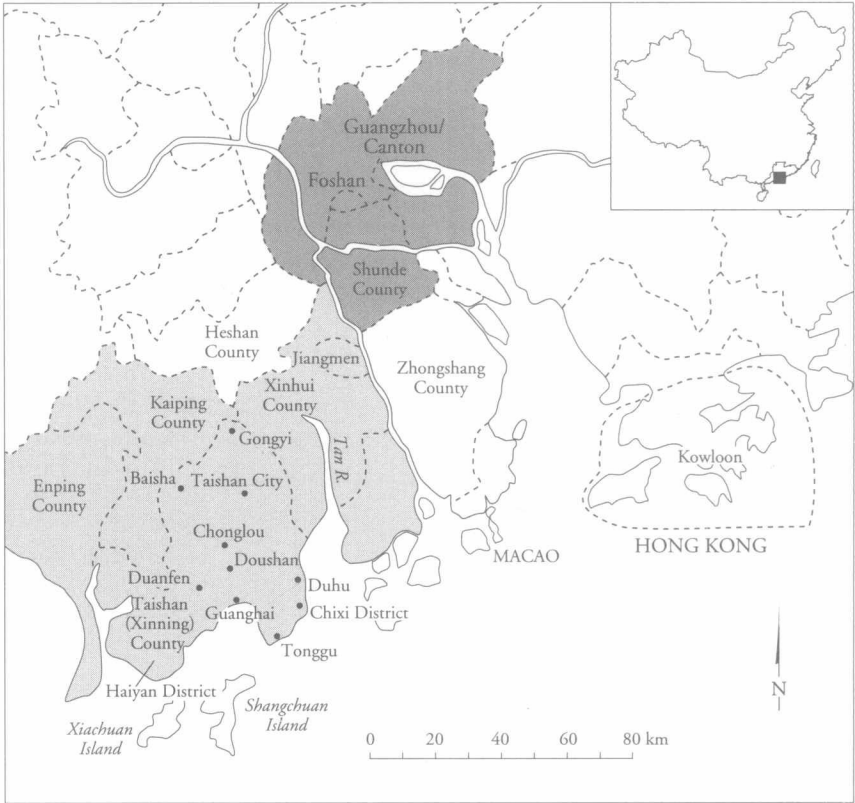
The reader should also note that in some instances it was not possible to provide the *putonghua* and pinyin for names and places recorded in pre-World War II English-language sources such as government documents and oral histories. These materials usually referred to the Cantonese or Four County dialect pronunciations for Chinese names and places without using a consistent system of romanization. For these reasons, when sources do not include the corresponding Chinese characters, it is difficult to determine the correct *putonghua* pronunciations.

As a transnational community characterized by frequent migration and remitted incomes, Taishan used a variety of currencies, including U.S., Hong Kong, and Chinese dollars. According to C. F. Remer, the average value of a Chinese dollar between 1894 and 1901 was 0.5 U.S. dollars. This value dropped to 0.46 between 1902 and 1913 and rose to 0.52 between 1913

and 1930. During the late 1920s, Hong Kong dollars were roughly equivalent in value to Chinese dollars. In the 1930s, the value of the Chinese dollar fell to US\$0.29.

A Chinese *mu* of land is equivalent to 0.165 acres. Each *li* of distance is about one-half kilometer.

*Dreaming of Gold,  
Dreaming of Home*



Taishan County, Guangdong, and the Pearl River Delta

SOURCE: Graham Johnson and Glen Petersen, eds., *Historical Dictionary of Guangzhou (Canton) and Guangdong*. Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 1999.

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