PART FOUR

Transcending Borders

The three chapters in this part enter the arena of transnational mobility. Chapter 12 recounts the fortunes of the seafarers from southern Fujian and eastern Guangdong. The two groups created the great maritime enterprise of the coastal and overseas junk trade in the eighteenth through the early decades of the nineteenth centuries. Their boundary-crossing trading networks and predominant position in the shipping trade in the South China Sea have led scholars to describe the eighteenth century as "the Chinese century".

Chapter 13 is a case study of a successful South Fujianese merchant in Batavia and Semarang. In 1749, he decided to retire from his business and return to his homeland bringing with him a large fortune. Upon arrival he was arrested for having broken the law governing border crossing and remaining abroad for too long. The chapter argues that his arrest can be attributed to a complex situation, but cannot simply be said to be a case of the Qing government’s hostility toward a seafaring merchant as some tend to believe.

Chapter 14 presents a controversial case about the status of a local-born Straits Chinese from Penang who was arrested by the local Chinese authorities in Amoy. The issue caused a diplomatic row between the British Consulate and Chinese officials about the question of whether the person was a British or Chinese subject.