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REASONS FOR THE IMMIGRATION OF HAINANESE MUSLIM OVERSEAS CHINESE TO MALAYA (1870-1939): FROM A PUSH-PULL PERSPECTIVE

(SEBAB IMIGRASI ORANG MUSLIM HAINAN LUAR NEGARA CINA KE MALAYA (1870-1939): DARI PERSPEKTIF TOLAK-TARIK)

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Abstract

This study examines the multiple driving factors behind the migration of Chinese Muslims from Hainan Island to Malaya from the late Qing Dynasty to the mid-20th century. Based on the push-pull theory of migration, the study employs qualitative methods and draws on a wealth of primary sources—including official archives, local annals, genealogies, and oral histories—to analyse how political, economic, and religious forces shaped this migration process. The study found that institutional oppression of Muslims, social unrest, and multiple forms of marginalisation constituted persistent push factors, while Malaya's economic prospects, religious tolerance, and established Muslim networks played significant pull roles. Through case studies of individuals such as Ha Shuzhang（Haji Hassan Salleh), the study demonstrates that this migration was both a response to structural violence and an active pursuit of religious preservation and community reconstruction. It reveals the complex dynamics of transnational mobility among Chinese Muslims and highlights the central role of Islam in shaping the diaspora experience. By shedding light on a long-neglected subgroup within the Chinese Muslim community, this study fills a critical gap and provides detailed insights into overseas Chinese studies, offering a broader perspective on understanding ethnic and religious pluralism in colonial-era Southeast Asia.

Keywords: Hainan Muslims; Malaya ; Hui People ; Orang Kuangtung ; Haji Hassan Salah

Abstrak

Kajian ini mengkaji pelbagai faktor pendorong di sebalik penghijrahan orang Cina Muslim dari Pulau Hainan ke Tanah Melayu dari akhir Dinasti Qing hingga pertengahan abad ke-20. Berdasarkan teori migrasi tolak-tarik, kajian ini menggunakan kaedah kualitatif dan menggunakan banyak sumber utama—termasuk arkib rasmi, sejarah tempatan, salasilah dan sejarah lisan—untuk menganalisis cara kuasa politik, ekonomi dan agama membentuk proses migrasi ini. Kajian mendapati bahawa penindasan institusi terhadap umat Islam, pergolakan sosial dan pelbagai bentuk peminggiran merupakan faktor pendorong yang berterusan, manakala prospek ekonomi Malaya, toleransi beragama dan rangkaian Muslim yang mantap memainkan peranan tarikan yang penting. Melalui kajian kes individu seperti Ha Shuzhang (Haji Hassan Salleh), kajian itu menunjukkan bahawa penghijrahan ini merupakan tindak balas kepada keganasan struktur dan usaha aktif memelihara agama dan pembinaan semula komuniti. Ia mendedahkan dinamik kompleks mobiliti transnasional

dalam kalangan orang Cina Muslim dan menonjolkan peranan utama Islam dalam membentuk pengalaman diaspora. Dengan memberi penerangan tentang subkumpulan yang telah lama diabaikan dalam masyarakat Cina Muslim, kajian ini mengisi jurang kritikal dan memberikan pandangan terperinci tentang kajian Cina di luar negara, menawarkan perspektif yang lebih luas tentang memahami pluralisme etnik dan agama di Asia Tenggara era kolonial.

Kata kunci: *Orang Islam Hainan; Malaya ; Orang Hui ; Orang Kuangtung ; Haji Hassan Salah*

INTRODUCTION

In the genealogy of Chinese migration to modern Malaya, the Muslim Chinese community, though small in number, constitutes a historically significant phenomenon due to its dual cultural identity. Existing research indicates that Chinese Muslim migration to the Malay Peninsula can be traced back to maritime trade during the Song and Yuan dynasties. By the Ming era, spurred by Zheng He's voyages, settlements emerged in places like Palembang and Malacca, gradually forming a Chinese Muslim network originating from Yunnan and Guangdong. From the mid-18th century, Qing policies toward Muslim communities grew increasingly repressive. In response to uprisings in the northwest and southwest, the Qing government implemented ruthless suppression and ethnic division (e.g., "using Han to control Hui"), culminating in the Shaanxi-Gansu Hui Uprising (1862-1877) and the Yunnan Du Wenxiu Uprising (1856-1872) (Bai Shouyi 1982). These uprisings were pivotal events in modern Chinese history, not only weakening the Qing dynasty but also reshaping the survival strategies of Chinese Muslim communities, forcing some survivors to migrate to Southeast Asia by sea. Although Hainan was not directly involved in these uprisings, local Muslims still faced mounting pressures, prompting southward migration.

By the mid-19th century, with the flourishing of South China Sea trade and shipping—along with the appeal of religious freedom and economic opportunities—Malaya became a primary destination. It is widely believed that in 1870, Ha Shuzhang (Haji Hassan Saleh) (1850–1930) and other Hainanese Muslims arrived in Penang, marking the beginning of this migration wave (Ha Family Manuscripts 2024). However, this movement was neither isolated nor driven by a single cause. From the late Tongzhi era to the pre-WWII period (ca. 1870–1940), migration motivations varied across generations, and different destinations held distinct appeals. As the smallest and most marginalised group among modern Chinese immigrants, the Hainanese Muslims of Malaya have long been neglected in academic research. Existing research remains scattered: some studies focus on contemporary political symbols, such as former Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and his relatives visiting Hainan to see relatives, which was reported by several media outlets, including the *Hainan Daily* （2018）; others adopt an anthropological perspective, such as Pang Kefen (1992), who simplistically categorises Hainan Muslims within the Cham ethnic framework without exploring the core drivers of migration based on the multi-sourced origins of their ancestors. These gaps highlight the urgency of conducting systematic research on the migration dynamics of Hainan Muslims.

Historical sources present severe challenges. Unlike the abundant archival records on non-Muslim Fujianese and Cantonese migrants, official Chinese and Malaysian documents scarcely mention Hainanese Muslims. Only scattered genealogies and folk manuscripts survive—a phenomenon tied to the traditions of Chinese Muslims (early Hainanese Muslims followed the Hanafi): historical consciousness was embedded in Islamic practice rather than textual transmission, and cautious attitudes toward ancestor worship and iconographic taboos inadvertently led to the loss of genealogical and material records.To overcome these limitations, this study adopts an interdisciplinary methodology, employing push-pull theory as an analytical framework to examine migration logic through three dimensions: push factors (Qing religious oppression, warfare, social exclusion), pull factors (economic opportunities, religious freedom, and Muslim community networks in British Malaya), and intermediary factors (transport accessibility, chain migration, climate).

Empirically, it integrates multilingual sources—Qing court memorials, local gazetteers, ethnographies, and literati notes from China, alongside British Malayan newspapers and colonial records—supplemented by epigraphy, oral histories, and genealogies for microhistorical reconstruction. This research not only contributes to regional case studies on cross-border Chinese Muslim migration but also reveals the complex interplay between religious survival strategies and economic considerations in migration decisions. These findings hold paradigmatic significance for reassessing 19th-century transregional connections between southern China and Southeast Asia.

Push-pull theory

Early Muslim immigrants to Hainan were predominantly male, aligning with the core characteristics of E.G. Lavinstein's 'push-pull theory' proposed in 1885. They sought to maintain connections with China, fostering financial and trade exchanges, and established relatively stable footholds in Malaya, providing support for subsequent immigrants. Some became merchants, while others relied on fishing for their livelihood. Immigrant behaviour was not driven by a single motive but was embedded within complex national policies and social networks. When studying Hainan Muslim immigrants, it is essential to examine the formation process of their multiple motivations and multi-dimensional adaptation strategies. In Hainan, Muslim identity was a factor contributing to their marginalisation; however, in Malaya, it became a crucial resource for building community and identity. This was the key driving force behind their migration. This paper therefore employs the multi-factor framework of the 'push-pull theory' to transcend traditional single-explanation pathways, presenting a more profound and vibrant picture of migration.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The historical connections between Chinese Muslims and Southeast Asia form the historical foundation of migration. However, unlike most Chinese immigrants, who are primarily driven by economic factors, Muslim migration is influenced by a combination of push and pull factors, including religious persecution, social exclusion, and the more favourable environment in Malaya.

From the Tang and Song Dynasties to Zheng He's Voyages: Early Migration Links Between Chinese Muslims and the Malay World

Muslim communities played a significant role in the early history of China-Malaysia relations. Records by Jia Dan, a Tang Dynasty chancellor, indicate that maritime routes between Guangzhou and Southeast Asian countries passed through Johor, Kedah, Old Port, and Java on the Malay Peninsula. (Jia Dan Tang) With the spread of Islam during the Tang Dynasty, the rise of the Silk Road, and the development of cross-cultural exchanges, many Muslim merchants, envoys, and missionaries migrated to China from regions such as Arabia and Persia (Ye Zhiping et al. 2024). This region became an important hub for early Chinese Muslims to engage with the overseas world. During the Song and Yuan Dynasties, connections between Chinese Muslims and the Malay world were not only strengthened through trade but also deepened due to political, social, and religious factors. Zhao Rushi's *Zhu Fan Zhi* (2002) records 58 Southeast Asian countries, most of which were Islamic states, indicating that the Chinese had already understood the Islamic cultural characteristics of the region at that time. The turmoil at the end of the Yuan Dynasty and the maritime ban at the beginning of the Ming Dynasty prompted some Chinese Muslims to begin migrating to Southeast Asia. For instance, after the Muslim general Hai Ruding of the Yuan Dynasty died defending Xinzhou (Shangrao), his fourth son Hai Chang（海昌）and his wife moved to Malaya (presumably Malacca) in 1360. Hai Chang's descendants are now spread across Malaysia, the Philippines, Brunei, and Vietnam. The Imam of Sanya, Hai Furun（海富润）, is the 18th-generation descendant of Hai Chang. (Hai Zhengguang et al. 2012) In addition, after the 'Hongwu Reform' in the early Ming Dynasty, the government implemented a policy of assimilation, causing tens of thousands of Muslims to leave the Guangzhou area, some of whom settled in the Malay Peninsula and Old Port in Indonesia (Broumhall M 1910).

The interactions reached their peak during the seven voyages of the Muslim general Zheng He to the Western Seas (1405-1433) in the early Ming Dynasty. The Muslim interpreter Ma Huan, who accompanied Zheng He, recorded that 'most of the upper-class Chinese in Java were Muslims,' and that Muslims from Guangdong had already established mosques in Sumatra and Java, accounting for the majority of the Chinese population (Ma Huan 1935). Zheng He's fleet passed through Malacca five times and supported the establishment of Chinese Muslim settlements and mosques in places like Old Port, Malacca, and Surabaya (Thomas S.R. 1817). Sanya became an important supply station for Zheng He's fleet, and the shipping route from Hainan to Southeast Asia also became an immigration channel. From commercial exchanges during the Tang and Song dynasties, to the southward migration during the Song and Yuan dynasties, to official interactions during Zheng He's voyages to the Western Seas, these networks not only laid the foundation for Chinese immigration in Southeast Asia but also created conditions for the immigration of Hainan Muslims, highlighting the significant role of Chinese Muslims in the Islamic world of Southeast Asia.

Hainanese Muslims Migrated to Malya

The migration of Hainan Muslims to Malaya was a gradual process spanning hundreds of years. Prior to 1988, Hainan Island had long been under the jurisdiction of Guangdong Province. Sanya was formerly known as Yazhou(崖州) and Yaxian. Hainan Island is primarily inhabited by the Li, Han, and Hui (Muslim) ethnic groups. The local Muslim are also known as Huihui and Utsat, and most of them use the Huihui language, which belongs to the Austronesian language family. Their ancestors were Arab and Persian merchants from the Tang and Song dynasties, making them one of the earliest indigenous groups on Hainan Island. During the Yuan Dynasty, with the addition of Muslims from the Champa region, they spread across Hainan Island. During the mid-Ming Dynasty, they gradually migrated and settled in the 'Sanya Li' area of Yazhou, with some relocating to Penang Island in Malaysia (Zhang Shuoren et al. 2018). It is generally believed that the Muslim community in Hainan also includes Muslims from the Central Plains, as well as Li and Han Chinese who converted to Islam locally (Jiang Yue et al. 1992). Among the Muslims from Champa, some were likely Arab merchants from Hadramaut, not local Champa people. This finding was confirmed by German ethnologists: the physical characteristics of Hainan Muslims indicate Arab ancestry (H. Stube 1964). Their Cham genetic heritage may have been diluted over time. Although Hainan Island has the smallest Muslim population in China, it has historically produced figures of national influence, such as the statesman Hai Rui (ZhangTingyu et al.1974). However, throughout the Qing Dynasty, Hainan Muslims did not have the conditions to rise to prominence. According to Ma Qiang, Secretary-General of the Hainan Province Sanya City Muslim Association, the Muslim population in Sanya during the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties was approximately 220,000 (2024). Xiao Yan's records indicate 200,000 during the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties (Xiao Yan et al. 2015). Subsequently, the population declined sharply, with migration being a significant factor. Since modern times, the migration of Hainan Muslims can be traced back to the early 18th century and merged with the Chinese immigration wave of the late 19th century.

According to Jiang Qingwu's research, an elderly man who returned to Sanya, Hainan, from Thailand to visit relatives mentioned that his family had already migrated to the Malay-inhabited areas of southern Thailand as early as 1703 (Jiang Qingwu 2003). In 1821, Hainanese first travelled from Hainan Island to Penang Island in Malaya for trade, marking the beginning of organised migration (Han Huaizhun 1948). After 1870, Ha Shuzhang settled on Penang Island. Ha Shuzhang is the only person explicitly recorded in the Pu Clan Genealogy of Yaxian County, Sanya, Hainan, with a specified place of residence. Most Hainanese Muslim immigrants chose to settle on Penghu Island. In 1898, Zhang Yunnan, the deputy consul of Penang Island, recorded: 'There are approximately 200 Hainanese Muslims from Sanya on Penghu Island, and their native language, Huihui, is mutually intelligible with Malay,' (Zhang Yunan 1898) confirming their presence. The motivations for migration during this period were complex and diverse. As a British colony, Malaya recruited a large number of Chinese workers, including Muslims, to meet the labour demands of tin mining and rubber cultivation. However, the British East India Company preferred to import non-Muslim Chinese labourers, with only four Muslims from Tianjin being transported to Sabah. Muslims from Yunnan who immigrated freely and descendants of the Guo family from Fujian (many of whose descendants

have since left the faith) settled in Terengganu and Penang (Ma Hailong 2017). In 1907, Tang Baofen, the magistrate of Yazhou, wrote in the 'Yazhou Directly Administered State Gazetteer': "Since the Song and Yuan dynasties, those fleeing turmoil have come to Sanya Port. Initially, there were only Pu surnames, followed by Hai, Li, Liu, and others. At that time, there were 360 households and over 1,700 people (Tang Baofen 1906). The dates and characters recorded in the book are incomplete, ending in 1906. In 1920, Frenchman Savina surveyed the Muslim population in Sanya, Hainan, finding 500 households (Savina 1920). Compared to the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, it is evident that the Muslim population in Sanya, Hainan, had already begun to decline, indicating that immigration was underway. Therefore, the period from 1870 to 1920 can be regarded as the first phase of Muslim immigration from Hainan to Malaya.

In 1931, German Stube conducted a survey in Muslim villages in Hainan and recorded 400 households (H. Stube 1964). The Republican-era Muslim magazine *Tianfang Xuelǐ Yuèkuán* (1932) recorded: "The Li village in Sanya is located in a remote southern corner, with a simple and honest folk customs, and most people make a living by fishing. They are devout Muslims, and their children are often sent to various places for education; many also go to Southeast Asia for trade."No population figures were mentioned. In 1933, Chen Mingshu's *Geographical Names of Hainan Island* recorded that since the Republic of China era, thousands of people from counties such as Wanning, Lingui, and Yaxian had emigrated overseas, These regions were once Muslim-majority areas (1933). After Japan occupied Hainan Island in 1939, Japanese investigator Kaneko Akira's survey indicated that the Sanya region had only approximately 1,000 Muslims, including 200 households, a significant decrease compared to the 500 households recorded by Savina in 1920. Records from the Republic of China also confirm the figure of 200 households (Chen Zhi 2004). This change in population structure reflects the expansion of migration scale. Clearly, the period from 1920 to 1939 marked the second peak of Muslim migration from Hainan to Malaya, continuing until the Japanese occupation of Hainan. Kaneko Akira (1942) further corroborated this: 'Before the Japanese landed in Hainan, the Hui people in Sanya had connections with Singapore, Malaysia, Persia, and Arabia... At that time, there were also many overseas Chinese, most of whom resided in Singapore.' After the Japanese military occupied Hainan Island in 1939 and established military bases in the Muslim-populated ports of Yulin and Sanya, there are no further records of Muslim emigration (JACAR 1939).

During the migration process, many people may not have been counted due to reasons such as disappearance or death. The '*Abridged Version of the Pu Clan Genealogy of Yaxian County, Sanya, Hainan*' records that 27 Hainan Muslims 'went abroad' or 'died abroad' (**番邦**, but the actual number may have been higher. Sun Xinsheng estimated that 'there were over a thousand Muslim families who migrated from Sanya.' (Sun Xinsheng 2019). Due to the lack of historical records, it is difficult to determine the exact number of immigrants, but based on genealogies and missionary reports, it can be inferred that at least 3,000 Muslims emigrated between 1870 and 1940, with many more not recorded. Although this number is small compared to the 220,000 Muslims in Hainan during the early Qing Dynasty, it holds significant importance within the Malayan Chinese Muslim community. According to oral accounts from Muslims in Sanya (2024), they often lament: 'If Japan had not occupied Hainan Island, there might be no Muslims in Hainan today.' *The Guanghua Daily* (2022) reported that there are nearly 25,000 descendants of Hainanese Muslims in contemporary Southeast Asia, while the *Nanyang Siang Pau* (2023) reported that there are over 1,000 descendants of Ha Shuzhang in Penang alone.

Table 1. Changes in Muslim Population in Hainan Island

Time	**Number of people**	**Author**	**Source**
1487 (Ming Chenghua period)	200,000 people	Xiaoyan, Sanya Morning News	Modern Youth, Sanya Morning News

Late Ming and Early Qing	220,000-300,000 people	Ma Qiang, Secretary General of Sanya Muslim Association	Ma Qiang's oral account and comprehensive compilation
1906	360 households	Yazhou Governor Tang Baofen	Yazhou Zhili Prefecture Local Records
1920	500 households	【France】Savina	Hainan Island Chronicles
1931	400 households	【Germany】Stube	Ethnography of Hainan Island
1940	200 households	【Japanese】Kaneze Akio	Muslims on the streets of Sanya

Most of these immigrants settled along the coast of Malaya, continuing the island lifestyle of Sanya. The familiar environment enabled them to integrate into local society relatively quickly. They rarely had the notion of 'returning to their roots,' and most did not return to Hainan. They settled in coastal areas, primarily on Penang Island, Pengkalan Island, and Taiping Island in Malaya (Nanyang Siang Pau 2023), with their descendants scattered across Alor Setar, Perlis, and other regions. There are also legends about Hainanese Muslims in Sarawak and Indonesia. Facebook posts and legends from Port Klang suggest that the earliest Hainanese to arrive at Port Klang's Ketam Island may have been Muslims, but these legends remain unconfirmed. From a broader perspective, the migration of Hainanese Muslims to Malaya represents a unique group within the modern wave of Chinese immigration. Their uniqueness is not only reflected in their religious beliefs but also in their motives for migration and their methods of migration.

PUSH FACTORS

Turmoil and Natural Disasters

During the late Qing period, frequent warfare and natural disasters inflicted severe hardships on ordinary people. Although Hainan Island was geographically remote, it was not spared from social upheaval and natural calamities.

Continuous of disturbances

After 1840, the collapse of China's feudal system triggered conflicts between foreign capitalist forces and the Chinese nation, as well as between feudal order and the populace, leading to successive waves of warfare. While Hainan was not a direct battleground, persistent political instability and Li ethnic uprisings indirectly destabilized local society. The *Guangdong Gazetteer* records Li bandits "burning the foreigner village of Sanya Street" as early as the 12th year of the Shunzhi reign (Hao Yulin 1730). *Qing Shi Lu* and the official *Veritable Records of the Qing* document four Li "bandit" uprisings in Yaxian between 1870 and 1898, inevitably affecting the local Muslim community.

The Hui Muslims uprisings in the northwest and southwest accelerated the Qing dynasty's decline. After their suppression, the government's crackdown intensified oppression against Muslims nationwide (Bai Shouyi 1982). Ironically, until 1909, the court was still dealing with the aftermath of the Shaanxi-Gansu Hui Uprising. Hainan's Muslims also faced discrimination and persecution. Some Hui from Shaanxi, Gansu, and even Yunnan fled to Hainan—evidenced by surnames like Ma, Mi, and Wang in the *Sanya Pu clan genealogy*. Mustafa Ma Qi (2024), son of Republican-era Muslim diplomat Ma Tianying, recalled hearing how northwestern Chinese Muslims, persecuted by the court, fled to Guangdong. Feeling unsafe, they crossed to northern Hainan, then moved further south to Sanya, settling by the coast. Some ventured to Malaya, while others reached Pangkor Island. Statistics show 344,698 Hainanese migrated to Southeast Asia between 1876 and 1898, likely including Muslims (Li Ke 1999). The *Sanya Morning News* noted: "After the Yunnan Hui uprising was brutally suppressed,

Hainan's Hui were implicated, prompting continuous migration—100,000 left Hainan over a decade, dispersing to Thailand, Malaya, and Singapore."Xiao Yan's research corroborates this figure. The *Sanya Pu clan genealogy* records ties between Hainan Muslims and Hui uprising regions, such as Hai Furun settling in Sanya while his son Hai Wenshun traveled to Yunnan. Twenty-seven individuals reportedly visited Shaanxi, Gansu, and Qinghai—regions central to the uprisings—impacting Hainan's community. The year 1870, when Ha Shuzhang (Haji Hassan Salleh) led his clan members away from Hainan, coincided with the brutal suppression of the Tongzhi-era Hui uprising and mass refugee flight. His great-grandson Pak Nasir (2024) recalled ships filled with single men arriving in Penang.

After the Second Opium War, China endured seven military invasions and Western interference, deepening social crises. The early Republican era devolved into warlord conflicts. Between 1922 and 1939, over 5 million emigrants departed via ports like Xiamen (Gilbert & Rozman 1998). Hainan, too, was engulfed in chaos. In April 1905, anti-Qing leader Zheng Hongming launched an armed revolt in Wanning, later establishing a Tongmenghui branch in Lingshui to resist Hainan's warlords (Wanning County Gazetteer 1994). After the Guangdong Provincial Assembly was dissolved, Sun Yat-sen (whose son-in-law was Hainanese) sent organizers to form a "Constitutional Protection Army," which failed, prolonging warlord rule until 1926. In 1927, Chiang Kai-shek's anti-communist purge reached Hainan, arresting 2,000 people and reigniting political infighting (Wu Hua et al. 2009), driving many to seek livelihoods abroad.

Figure1. Tombstone of Imam Pu Wend
Source: Guangdong Zhaoqing Muslim Cemetery (2025).

The tombstone of Imam Pu Wende (**蒲文德**）in Zhaoqing's Hui cemetery notes his 1924 flight to Southeast Asia due to "military unrest in Yaxian." Though he later returned, this reflects Hainan Muslims' wartime exodus. On Pangkor Island, many knew Mohd Kwangtung (**末广东**）of Sungai Pinang Besar, whose father Ha Bingzhang（**哈秉漳**） migrated during turmoil—likely before 1934—to seek funds for relatives trapped in Sanya (Mohd Nor 2024). Other Muslim families shared similar experiences. The Liu clan of Larut and Pangkor's Gao Zhenjie (**高振杰** Hussain) arrived during pre-Japanese occupation unrest. Gao's father, a Nationalist platoon leader, came to Malaya around 1926–1927, as confirmed by his student Li Guangsen (2024) and Pang Kefen (1992). His

flight may have been to evade Chiang's purge, showing these migrations were as much about escaping persecution as survival. From the late Qing onward, Hainan Muslims faced nationwide chaos, Li uprisings, post-Hui uprising discrimination, and modern warfare. These upheavals ultimately drove their diaspora across different periods.

Natural Disasters Threatening Survival

According to the *Yazhou Annals,* the last recorded earthquake in late Qing-era Yazhou (Sanya) occurred in March 1890 near Tengqiao.The *Compilation of Historical Natural Disaster* Records in Hainan over a Millennium and China Meteorological Disaster Compendium: *Hainan Volume* document that between 1912 and 1948, Hainan suffered 12 major typhoons and floods in Muslim-concentrated Sanya alone (Zhou Wen 2020). These disasters destroyed homes and farmland, leaving survivors displaced (Zhou Weimin et al. 2018).

Qing Dynasty's Intensified Feudal Control

Religious Persecution

Religious factors played a pivotal role in Hainan Muslim migration. Sanya's Hui community maintained strong Islamic traditions since antiquity, with numerous "Hajj" pilgrims recorded during the Republican era (Savina1920). Some were imams who fled central and northwest China escaping Qing suppression of Hui uprisings. The Phoenix Township Mosque cluster (six historic mosques) represents China's highest mosque density. The Qing implemented strict controls over Muslim communities, banning "heretical teachings" and new religious doctrines (Jonathan Lippman 2002). By the mid-Qing period, policies escalated to military suppression and social control through tactics like "using Hui to control Hui" and sinicization measures (Li Xinghua 1981). This forced dispersed Hainan Muslims to congregate in Sanya for religious preservation. Some acculturated to Han or Li customs (e.g., Pu clan members in Danzhou/Lingshui), while others forbade Chinese language education and intermarriage to resist assimilation (JiangYue etal. 1992). Shandong Governor Chen Shiguan's 1733 memorial urging mosque destruction (TNPM 1733.No.016366) exacerbated pressures, accelerating emigration.

Hai Furun Carried the Islamic book incident

Hainan's Islamic education developed scripture-teaching traditions during Ming-Qing transition. The *Sanya Pu Clan Genealogy* records seven northern-bound scholars, including Imam Hai Furun - a symbolic figure arrested in 1782 at Guilin for carrying Islamic texts during post-Gansu uprising crackdowns (CFHA No.03-9670-00313). Though exonerated by Qianlong, this 48-memorial case - the Qing's largest literary inquisition - reflected systemic discrimination (TNPM). The incident triggered mass emigration: 500 family members fled to Southeast Asia, with 3,000+ ultimately migrating (Sanya Morning Post 2014). Descendants (surnames Hai, Ha, Liu) in Phuket and Nakhon retain epistolary ties with Pangkor's community. Guangdong archives (EACPGGP 1951) confirm pre-1940 Islamic studies in Malaya.This event not only demonstrated religious suppression but also intensified sectarian divisions, making faith a decisive factor in migration decisions. The Qing's mishandling of Islamic affairs inadvertently accelerated diaspora formation.

The Struggle for Survival under Economic Pressure

The invasion of imperialist powers prompted the Qing rulers to intensify their exploitation of ethnic minority regions. In the Yazhou area, even absurd taxes were levied under names such as "grass sandal tax" and "dog tail tax" (Hu Chuan 1934). The Qing dynasty's maritime ban severely impacted the traditional seaborne trade of Muslims. According to the *Da Qing Lv L i – Bing Lv*, "For those living in coastal regions... anyone privately trading with foreign countries and bringing prohibited goods (including cattle, horses, and silk) for sale shall be punished by decapitation, in accordance with the law on treason." At the same time, Hui Muslims were forbidden from privately trading in

traditional commodities such as jade, beef, and medicinal herbs (Ma Saibei 1988), forcing them into marginal livelihoods such as fishing and petty trade.

An inscribed stele titled Zheng *Tang Prohibition Tablet,* erected in 1753 at the old mosque in Huihui Village, Sanya, was submitted by 16 Muslim scholars from Hainan including Pu Rusong. It records the survival struggles of local Muslim fishermen. The text shows that Muslims paid taxes to Yazhou County. According to the tablet, local officials stipulated that Hui fishermen were allowed to fish only in designated marine areas, and were strictly prohibited from carrying excess food supplies during distant voyages or causing disturbances. The tablet reflects the increasingly restricted living space and marine resources faced by Muslim fishermen in Hainan during the Qianlong reign. Since shallow-sea fishing was highly seasonal and often affected by typhoons and storms, these fishermen could only cast nets in coastal waters, leading to a life of hardship.

Between 1858 and 1940, Muslim villages in Sanya suffered three devastating blows. In 1858, Lingshui Li bandits repeatedly attacked Muslim settlements, causing severe destruction and numerous casualties. The second instance of village destruction likely occurred between 1858 and 1939. The German scholar H. Stubel mentioned this in his field notes, though without specific details (H. Stubel 1964). The third incident occurred in 1940, when the Japanese military used Sanya as a base and built an airfield, demolishing the Huihui village. A 1951 report by the Guangdong provincial government stated: "They lived in thatched huts, ate thin porridge, and wore ragged clothing—this situation persisted until 1951." Under mounting economic pressure, many Muslims chose to migrate in search of livelihood. Among the Muslim community in Sanya, a story still circulates about Ha Shuzhang: before migrating south, he broke his own fishing nets to set an example for his fellow villagers. He left without returning home or even changing clothes, and boarded a boat bound for Nanyang, accompanied by his brother Ha Shuhuang (Ali), Amin, and others. This story remains popular in the Sanya Hui community, inspiring perseverance in the face of adversity (Wang Xianjun 2008). These successive disasters further damaged the already fragile economic base of the Muslim community. Combined with the recorded waves of migration to Singapore and Malaya (Kobata Jun 1979), these events reveal how economic hardship played a decisive role in Muslim migration. Migration was not only a response to survival pressure but also a reflection of the adaptability of Muslim communities in adversity.

Qing Suppression of the Hui Muslims

The Qing policy towards Hui Muslims primarily involved systematic discrimination and military suppression. Although the early *Veritable Records of Emperor Shizu of Qing, Volume 32*, recorded that both Shunzhi and Kangxi praised the Hui for their propriety and learning, as Raphael Israeli observed, "After the Manchu conquest of China, the Muslim problem became increasingly complicated" (Israeli 1980). In practice, the *Veritable Records of the Qianlong Reign*, known for depicting a "prosperous age," showed that Hui Muslims faced harsher punishments than Han Chinese for similar "offenses." For example, in Qianlong's 46th year, a law was issued for "Hui brawlers to be punished with aggravated penalties" (Zuo Zongtang 1890). Suspecting the Hui of being remnants of the Ming dynasty, the Qing implemented a policy of ethnic division between "Chinese" and "barbarians," branding the Hui as "outsiders." Official documents often ridiculed Islamic customs, such as "waving hands towards the sky in prayer and believing the dead ascend to paradise, deceiving the ignorant masses" (Ping Hui Ji Lue Qing). Local officials even publicly declared, "The Hui are bandits and should be exterminated" (Dong'a Jushi 1951). Qing officials praised the brutal suppression of Hui Muslims under the Tongzhi Emperor, stating that he "inspired the troops and repeatedly eliminated the enemy" (CFHA .1889.No.03-7172-050, 14 Jan).

After the Hui uprisings, the Qing government's suppression was merciless. Zuo Zongtang reported: "The Hui of Suzhou have been completely exterminated, no descendants remain" (Zuo Zongtang 1890), a brutality "unprecedented since the Han and Tang dynasties" (Yu Shuchou 1880). In addition to rebels in the northwest and southwest being slaughtered, Hui Muslims in cities like Beijing, Guilin, and Nanjing were frequently arrested and persecuted for their speech and religious

practices. Prejudices among Han Confucian scholars like Gu Yanwu, who criticized the Hui for clinging to their customs, further fueled the Qing regime's politicized persecution. This wave of "Hui prohibition" and "Hui phobia" during the 18th and 19th centuries caused lasting trauma to Muslim society (Li Xinghua 1981). Historian Chen Yuan pointed out that Qing suppression policies led to repeated Muslim uprisings throughout the dynasty and deepening ethnic tensions (Chen Yuan 1980).

Marginalisation and Forced Migration of Hainan's Muslims

In late Qing China, clear official favoritism toward Han people in Han-Hui (including Li) conflicts exacerbated the plight of Hainan's Muslims. They were not only discriminated against and exploited by Han bureaucrats, but also caught in the middle of Han-Li conflicts. According to a Guangdong provincial government investigation: "Before 1949, Han Chinese referred to Sanya Hui people as 'pigs' (a known slur against Muslims), and there was virtually no interaction between the Hui and the Han." The Hui were adept at fishing, while the Li lived deep in the mountains. The Hui often hired Li people to help haul nets, but when wages were low, the Li would burn their boats or steal their fishing gear. Qing officials and later Kuomintang local authorities frequently incited conflict among the Hui, Li, and Han ethnic groups (Guangdong Provincial Government 1951), further intensifying tensions. According to the oral account of elder Li Zhengguang, before 1949, Muslims in Hainan generally avoided intermarriage with Han or Li people (Pan Xian et al. 1981). A series of policies deepened the marginalisation of the Muslim community, narrowing their living space and eventually forcing them to leave their homeland in search of security.

The Confucian doctrine from the *Liji* —" To maintain one's religion without changing customs" (Dai Sheng Western Han)—was upheld by the Qing court as a guiding principle of governance and later adopted by reformists like Kang Youwei. This deep-seated bias had long-lasting impacts on Islamic culture. The Qing government's discrimination against Muslims not only triggered internal divisions and waves of migration among China's Muslims but also contributed to the enduring complexity of China's ethnic policies.

Abduction and Island Departures Caused by Social Disorder

According to the *Gazetteer of Yazhou* (compiled during the Daoguang reign), coastal residents of Yazhou frequently suffered from raids and were abducted and sold to foreign lands. Such plundering continued until the eve of the Opium War, as pirates and Japanese marauders repeatedly attacked the coastal regions of Yazhou in Hainan. These incursions caused severe destruction to local livelihoods and became one of the early reasons for Sanya residents to end up in Southeast Asia (Huang Yagui 2001). In the 19th century, under the oppression of Western powers, the phenomenon of Hainanese travelling to Southeast Asia as indentured labourers gradually became widespread. The British and French recruited labourers from China, and this practice quickly evolved into large-scale human trafficking and forced labour involving Chinese workers (Chen Hansheng 1985). By 1881, there were 67,820 Chinese residents in Penang, including 2,128 Hainanese (Li Jun 1999), among whom Muslims were likely included.

According to the oral account of Imam Pu Zongli from Sanya, his father and fellow villagers were initially told by a "ketou" (agent), that they would be doing business in Malaya. However, upon arrival, they were forced into mining work under extremely harsh conditions. Pu's father eventually managed to escape and return to Hainan, but others were trapped and unable to go home (Pu Zongyi 2024). The Qing government turned a blind eye to these developments. Zhang Zhidong, a senior official of Guangdong in the late Qing, did nothing to stop the rampant kidnapping and abuse of Chinese workers by the British in the Straits Settlements. Historian Fan Wenlan criticised the Qing government for its acquiescence in human trafficking, which resulted in millions of impoverished Chinese falling into the hands of colonial exploitation (Fan Wenlan 1952). This historical episode left a profound legacy. Since 1991, *Kwong Wah Yit Poh* and Chinese media have repeatedly reported on Hainanese Muslims travelling to Malaysia in search of relatives who had gone to Nanyang (Southeast Asia) in the 19th century—most of these searches were in vain. Many labourers who left for Nanyang

in that era died either due to poor conditions on board ships or from the brutal labour that awaited them, leaving behind a heavy historical burden.

PULL FACTORS

External Forces within the World Economic System

Migration Traditions of Hainanese Muslims

Since the Tang and Song dynasties, Arab and Persian Muslim merchants had established settlements in Hainan and Champa (Kuwabara Jizo 1985). During the Kangxi reign of the Qing dynasty, Hainanese Muslims were already migrating to Southeast Asia. It is said that before 1870, Hainanese Muslims had founded an association hall in Penang (Sun Xinsheng 2019). Although this account is not found in the official records of today's Hainanese association, it indicates that, in modern times, the communal networks of Hainanese Muslims in Southeast Asia preceded those of many other Chinese groups. Azmin Ariffin, who identifies himself as a descendant of Hainanese Muslims, stated that his ancestors, the Husin Ma family, arrived in Penang via Hong Kong before 1920. They resided in a lodge in Bayan Lepas founded by a Chinese Muslim surnamed Ha. Their cross-border migration was made possible through existing networks of earlier migrants. However, the migration process was arduous—not all migrants arrived successfully. Many were deceived by labour traffickers or died en route due to danger and harsh conditions. Gao Zhenjie（Hussian), a descendant of Hainanese Muslims who was raised on Pangkor Island and later returned to Sanya, told his student Li Guangsen (Isa) that many perished on their journey to Malaya, some drowning along the way. Despite these immense challenges, the specific environment that emerged in Malaya in the late 19th century—within the framework of the global economic system—provided new space for survival and opportunity for these migrants (Li Guangsen 2024).

The Strong Appeal of Malaya

British Colonial Policies

The migration of Hainanese Muslims to Malaya was not only influenced by favourable reports from Chinese merchants in Southeast Asia, who described the superior living conditions in Malaya, but also by changes in British colonial policies. These "pull" factors eventually outweighed the "push" factors from the Qing government. On 11 June 1804, Sir R.T. Farquhar, Deputy Governor of Penang, wrote in a letter that a sum of money had been secretly lent to a Chinese Kapitan from Penang to recruit labourers in China （UK National Archives.1871. No.FO228/500). This demand led the colonial government to adjust its policies and relax restrictions on Chinese labourers. Hainanese Chinese, including Muslims, who possessed maritime survival skills, began to migrate in increasing numbers to the Malay Peninsula (Chen Mingshu et al. 1933). In 1866, the governments of China, Britain, and France signed a labour recruitment agreement comprising 22 articles, whereby the Qing court officially permitted the overseas migration of Chinese workers, thus legalising the departure of Hainanese Muslims to Malaya (TNPM1896.No. 910000012.19 January). On 23 December 1871, under pressure from the United States, Britain, France, Russia, the U.S., and Prussia jointly petitioned the Qing government to open Qiongzhou as a treaty port. Threatened by the British envoy Thomas Wade, the Zongli Yamen agreed to establish a customs office in Qiongzhou. In 1876, Qiongzhou (Haikou) was formally opened to foreign trade (SHAAC, 2001), and soon after, the British set up a labour recruitment bureau in Sanya as well (SHAAC.1859–1948). In 1893, the Qing government officially lifted its ban on Chinese emigration. According to Haikou Customs statistics, more than 100,000 Hainanese people left for Malaya, Singapore, and other regions between 1902 and 1911, never to return—Muslims among them. They entered Malaya through existing labour networks. Compared to the harsh living conditions in their homeland, Malaya offered far more attractive employment opportunities and economic support (Jan Breman 1992).

Li Guangsen (Isa) recalled that at the time, some Chinese intermediaries told Muslims in Sanya: "Once you arrive in Nanyang, you can work with us; you won't have to pay for food or lodging, just help out with some tasks." Nor were they required to pay for their journey. These conditions were acceptable to many impoverished families. As a result, upon arrival in Malaya, most Hainanese Muslims avoided hard labour jobs and later chose small-scale commerce. Consequently, they rarely worked in the British tin mines or rubber plantations, nor did they join secret societies. Instead, many migrated to Pangkor Island, where they could subsist through fishing. With the introduction of safer and more comfortable seafaring technology by Europeans, the intention of Hainanese Muslims to migrate to Malaya gained further momentum. British labour demands, combined with the Qing dynasty's policy adjustments under colonial pressure, jointly facilitated this population movement.

A Religious Environment that Allowed Freedom of Practice

The long-standing Islamic traditions of the Malay Peninsula served as an important pull factor for Hainanese Muslims. As early as the 7th century, Arab merchants and followers of the Prophet Muhammad had begun spreading Islam across the Malay Peninsula, India, and China (T.W. Arnold 1913). Some of their descendants, known as Sayyids, hailed from Hadhramaut in Yemen, and their accents were considered closest to the classical Arabic of the Qur'an. With the influence of the Sayyid families and the protection of Muslim Admiral Zheng He during the Ming dynasty, Malacca became a golden centre for Islamic education (Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid 2021). In 1792, Acehnese merchant Tengku Syed Hussain Al-Idid settled in Penang and built the Lebuh Acheh Mosque in 1808, turning the area into a hub for Muslim trade and Islamic learning (Aiza Maslan Baharudin 2013). The British policy of "non-interference in Malay religion and customs" further reinforced Penang's tolerant religious environment.

Penang also became an important transit point for Chinese Muslims making the pilgrimage (hajj). During the Qing Dynasty's maritime bans, the genealogical record of the Pu family notes that the Hainanese Muslim Mi Ruyu once walked all the way to Mecca. The same genealogy records thirteen pilgrimages made by Sanya Muslims during the late Qing and early Republican periods, with Penang serving as a transit stop. Between 1847 and 1948, the renowned Chinese imam Ma Dexin reportedly stayed four days in Penang after his pilgrimage before continuing to Singapore, where he studied Islam and astronomy at the residence of Sayid Omer (Ma Dexin 1861). In 1934–1935, 185 Chinese Muslims passed through Singapore on their way to Mecca (The Straits Times 1935). Penang had relatively well-developed Islamic infrastructure. The Islamic Museum at 128 Armenian Street was formerly the residence of Syed Mohammad Al-Attas, an Acehnese Muslim, and stands as a testament to the development of the local Muslim community.

When the young Haji Hashim Ha Shuzhang and his entourage arrived in Bayan Lepas, Penang, they were warmly welcomed by local Muslims. Many people in Penang recognised this Muslim family from China (Ahmad Murad 2007). According to the autobiography of his grandson, Malaysia's fifth Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi (Wong Sulong 2016), as well as oral histories from Ha Shuzhang's descendants, Ha Shuzhang was both a devout Muslim and a successful businessman. His wealth contributed to Penang's development, and the family trust fund he established upon his death at the age of 79 continues to support local social and religious initiatives. The mosque, market, and madrasa (Islamic school) built in Bayan Lepas by the Haji Hassan family remain in use today and have promoted Islamic education and the prosperity of the Muslim community.

Gao Zhenjie (Hussian) recalled to Li Guangsen (Isa) that people from Wenchang, Hainan, once told them that many Muslims lived in Malaya and were "of their kind", sharing a similar language, which facilitated communication. As a result, they decided to follow the Wenchang people's ships to Malaya. Gao Zhenjie (Hussian) and several Hainanese Muslim children once studied Islam in religious schools in Penang. Some Hainanese Muslims remained grateful to the Wenchang community for this reason. Religious identity thus became an intrinsic motivation for their migration, strengthening their resolve to make Malaya their new home.

Frustrated Attempts at Migration Abroad

Some of the early Hainanese Muslim ancestors had migrated from Champa (in present-day Vietnam), and their first attempts at migration were directed toward Vietnam and Thailand. However, these efforts ended in failure and remained small in scale. According to the *Gazetteer of Yazhou,"* Yazhou is only about 100 li (roughly 50 kilometers) from Jiaozhi (Vietnam)," yet this geographical proximity did not result in Vietnam becoming a destination for settlement. Jiang Qingwu, a scholar familiar with the history of Muslims in Sanya, pointed out that elders from the community once went to Vietnam to fish, but ultimately returned to Sanya. The reasons for their inability to settle can be traced even further back: more than a thousand years ago, some Muslims migrated from Champa to Hainan Island because Annan (Vietnam) was unfriendly toward Muslims. In 1874, the French colonial government established an immigration bureau in Saigon to control Chinese migration and restrict the free movement of Chinese migrants (Zhang Wenhe 1975). This policy was particularly disadvantageous for Chinese Muslims who lacked the support of clans and associations, resulting in very few successful cases of settlement in Vietnam.

The situation in Thailand was similarly unfavourable. In the late 19th century, some Hui Muslim refugees from the failed uprisings in Yunnan and Muslim traders from caravan routes settled primarily in northern Thailand (Andrew D.W. Forbes 1991). In contrast, Hainanese Muslims tended to move to southern Thailand, particularly to areas inhabited by Malay Muslims. A significant number also relocated to Phuket via Penang. In 1909, Britain incorporated Malay-dominated regions such as Patani into Siam (Thailand), and the Thai government later implemented ethnic and religious assimilation policies. These policies provoked armed resistance among local Muslims, causing prolonged instability in the region. An elderly resident of Terengganu, originally from Sanya, confirmed in an interview that early migrants to Thailand earned meagre incomes. This economic hardship prompted many later free migrants to move instead to Malaya—particularly Penang and Pangkor Island—for better opportunities. He himself migrated from Thailand to Malaya (Uncle Li 2024). Descendants of Musa Liu also recounted similar family experiences (Sity.N.S.A.R 2024). These setbacks made Hainanese Muslims realise the relative advantages of British Malaya. Pak Din (2024), a descendant of Ha Shuzhang, recalled that his elders mentioned some relatives had migrated to Indonesia, though no archival evidence supports this. After achieving wealth in Penang, Ha Shuzhang actively encouraged relatives and friends in Sanya to join him in Malaya through letters. His efforts contributed to an influx of fellow villagers, making Malaya—later including Singapore—a more desirable migration destination.

Table 2. List of pull factors

Type	Reason	Specific content	Factors
Pull Factor	External Forces within the World Economic System	The tradition of Hainanese Muslims migrating to the Malay Peninsula	Religious factors
	The great attraction of Malaya in the world economic system	British colonial policy	Economic and political factors
		Environment for Free Practice of Religion in Malaya	Religious factors
		The frustrations of immigrating to other countries	Social and Religious factors

INTERMEDIARY FACTOR

The appeal of Malaya to Hainanese Muslim migrants was closely tied to their geographic proximity and cultural affinity with the region. These connections shaped a distinct migration network supported by intermediary factors.

Geographical Relations

According to the *Book of Han, Treatise on Geography* (V18), Yazhou and Danzhou were ideal locations for anchorage and resupply. In 1983, ancient Muslim tombs dating back to the Tang and Song dynasties were discovered in Sanya and Lingshui, providing concrete evidence that Muslims from Arab regions had once lived and been buried on Hainan Island. This further suggests that Muslim settlements in Yazhou and Lingshui were important gateways for both inland and overseas trade (Chen Dasheng 1993). Hainan's strategic geographic location made it a crucial site for opening Qiongzhou (Haikou) as a treaty port, a move by British Minister Thomas Wade to maximise British interests in China. Following the port's opening and the establishment of a customs office in Haikou in 1876, migration from Hainan increased steadily, giving rise to the so-called "Hainan group." Shipping routes from Yazhou also extended to various parts of Southeast Asia (Zhao Puxuan 2015), facilitating travel for Hainanese Muslims.

Ha Bingzhang, a Hainanese Muslim from Pangkor Island, preserved his passport issued by the Republic of China. The passport shows that the typical migration route was from Sanya to Hong Kong, then by passenger ship to Singapore, and from there to Penang or Pangkor Island. Since many Hainanese Muslims worked as fishermen, they were skilled seafarers familiar with maritime routes. Elderly residents in Sanya still recall how their ancestors frequently sailed their own fishing boats to Malaya and Thailand. Whether it was the maritime heritage passed down from Muslim ancestors during the ancient Silk Road era or the navigation and shipbuilding knowledge from the voyages of Zheng He, combined with the development of modern transportation, these factors collectively enabled smoother migration to Southeast Asia—especially to British Malaya.

Climatic Factors

Hainan Island and the Malay Peninsula both lie within the tropical climate zone and share similar vegetation patterns. This climatic similarity facilitated a continuity in livelihood practices for the migrants, particularly in maintaining their coastal fishing traditions. Furthermore, the monsoon played a decisive role in shaping migration patterns. A Chinese proverb says, "He feng chui lai" (What wind blows?), implying that migration is linked to wind direction. The fishing traditions and seafaring experience of Hainanese Muslims enabled them to skillfully harness the monsoon winds. According to elderly Muslim residents of Sanya, their ancestors typically sailed between October and the following January or February, mainly on sailboats, with each journey taking about a month. Due to the unpredictable nature of the monsoon, some people would drift with the wind and land along the coasts of the Malay Peninsula. As a geographical factor, the monsoon significantly influenced the settlement patterns of Chinese migrants in Malaya (Xu Yunqiao 1953), including Chinese Muslims. A glance at the map reveals that Penang, Pangkor Island, Malacca, Ketam Island (Klang Port), and Phuket were all located along traditional sailing routes—making them theoretically accessible destinations for Hainanese Hui migrants.

Cultural Affinity

In his 1896 essay *Zhao Rushi and Hainan Island,* German sinologist Schade discussed the Hainanese Muslims in detail and noted their cultural similarities with the Malays. French missionary Savina even referred to the Muslims of Sanya as "Malays," pointing out that their dialect was related to Cham and belonged to the Austronesian language family. This linguistic kinship allowed them to communicate with Malays in a relatively simple manner. Ming dynasty documents also recorded Malay customs:

> *"They do not eat pork, and other animals must be slaughtered by themselves so that blood is seen. They are fond of betel nuts and do not worship ancestors... They pray and recite scriptures every morning and evening, fast for a month each year, refraining from food until the crescent moon is sighted... Rice is served on large green platters and eaten by hand; men do not drink alcohol; after death, no coffins are used—the corpse is wrapped in cloth and buried facing west. Their language and appearance resemble the Huihui (Muslims)." (Tang Zou 2006)*

These descriptions closely resemble the customs of Hainanese Muslims. Due to such cultural similarities, people often found it hard to distinguish Chinese Muslims from Malays. These shared traits reflect the global commonalities of Islamic culture. This cultural affinity played a role in the migration process. From 1930 to 1934, the British colonial government enforced the Immigration Restriction Ordinance, which reduced quotas for Chinese immigrants to Malaya and required entry permits. These restrictions led to instances of illegal immigration (Victor Purcell 1967). Military inspections and pirate activity made smuggling perilous. In this context, the cultural advantage of Hainanese Muslims made them ideal companions for such journeys, and some Chinese merchant ships preferred to bring them on board.

According to an interview with Li Guangsen (2024), although fares increased, shipowners usually waived charges for Muslims. One reason was that vessels sometimes could not dock, and ports were guarded by Malays. Shipowners often relied on Hainanese Muslims to negotiate access, hoping for smooth passage. This was partly due to historical ties between Malays and Chinese Muslims. At that time, Malays were described as simple and kind-hearted; Hainanese Muslims, being able to communicate with them and dressed similarly, could often dissolve mistrust with a simple "Salam." Even without proper documents, this helped them pass through checkpoints. Reportedly, some non-Muslim Chinese on board would even wear white skullcaps to pose as Muslims to avoid scrutiny. There were even rumours that pirates hesitated to harm Muslims, making it safer to travel with them. This further demonstrates how cultural and religious identity played a practical role in migration strategies.

Pak Abudul Karim, the eldest great grandson of Ha Shuzhang, was the first Malaysian Hainanese Muslim descendant to return to Hainan in search of his family. Letters preserved by his family confirm the cultural exchanges between Hainanese Muslims and the Orang Kwangtung community in Malaya (Abudul Karim 2024). Although scholars generally agree that Hainanese Muslims came from diverse origins, their cultural affinity with the Malay world indeed strengthened their migration momentum. This shows that, under certain historical conditions, cultural identity and religious affiliation could transcend ethnic boundaries and become vital resources for cross-border mobility. Practical needs and interests, in turn, reshaped their identity.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals the complex motivations behind the migration of Hainanese Muslims to British Malaya during the 19th and 20th centuries. On the push side, the Qing government's policies of ethnic oppression, economic restrictions, and religious suppression constituted key driving forces. Among the migrants were also survivors of Hui uprisings in northwest and southwest China, who integrated into the Hainanese Muslim communities. On the pull side, the economic opportunities, relatively relaxed immigration policies, and well-established Muslim networks in British Malaya created a strong attraction. The presence of Muslim infrastructure and interethnic networks in places such as Penang and Perak was particularly significant for Hainanese Muslims who sought to maintain their Islamic faith.

The migration process exhibited "distinct phases". The initial phase (1870–1895) emerged during a period of domestic unrest in China and increasing labour demand in the Straits Settlements. During this time, single Hainanese Muslim men began arriving in Malaya by sailing vessels. The peak phase (1896–1927) coincided with the opening of the Haikou port, the relaxation of the maritime ban, and the easing of restrictions on women's overseas travel, which led to a marked increase in migration. The outbreak of the Chinese Civil War in 1927 further prompted some Hainanese Muslims to leave their homeland. After the Japanese army occupied Hainan in 1939 and turned Sanya into a military base, strict military control and the popular belief that "the Japanese would not kill Muslims" brought an abrupt halt to Muslim migration. Instead, spontaneous flights led by ethnic Han became dominant. From that point on, Hainanese Muslims began reconstructing their identities in Malaya. These migratory stages illustrate how Chinese Muslims and non-Muslims adopted different survival strategies at various historical junctures.

In Malaya, Hainanese Muslims established themselves under the broader ethnic label of Orang Kwangtung. Their migration was not merely an act of refuge, but one that contributed meaningfully to local society. The Ha Shuzhang family of Penang stands out as a prominent case that steers this research toward the field of historical anthropology. As a pioneering Hainanese Muslim figure in modern migration history, Ha Shuzhang and his descendants-maintained elements of traditional Chinese Islamic practice and financially supported the construction of the Sanya Mosque in Hainan. The remnants of the free hostel he built in Penang for newly arrived Chinese Muslim immigrants still exist today. His family also built markets, several mosques, and religious schools that not only served the Orang Kwangtung community but also contributed significantly to Islamic education and social development in the broader Penang Muslim community.

The Ha Shuzhang family-maintained networks across ethnic lines—Malay, Indian, and Bruneian Muslims. His son, Haji Mansor bin Haji Hassan, was one of the founding members and former vice president of the PAS (Ibn Hashim 1993). Most family members joined UMNO; another son, Haji Taha, led the UMNO Bayan Lepas division. His younger daughter, Kailan binti Haji Hassan (mother of Abdullah Badawi), served as head of the women's wing, and his eldest son-in-law, Sheikh Fahim (grandfather of Abdullah Badawi), played a crucial role in the community. Their involvement had a lasting impact not only on local development but also on Malaya's independence movement (Razak 2024). On Pangkor Island, Hainanese Muslims built community through fishing technology and religious practices. Their traditional fishing knowledge, passed down through generations, contributed to the development of Pangkor's marine economy. The surviving *Chinese Muslim Public Hostel* (Singapore Standard 1950) and a charitable mosque stand as enduring symbols of community solidarity. They served as cultural bridges between China and Malaysia, offering valuable reference points for understanding adaptation strategies in interethnic migration.

This study adopts the "push-pull theory" as its analytical framework, integrating case studies to address the traditional theory's neglect of religious factors. However, due to limitations in historical sources, there remains room for further research on Hainanese Muslim descendant communities in Indonesia and Thailand. Future studies may explore the divergent experiences of these diasporic groups, trace the identity transformations of descendants, and investigate their adaptive strategies in multicultural settings. Such research would deepen our understanding of the roles played by Chinese Muslims in Southeast Asia's pluralistic societies.

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