Acknowledgments

This book on the history of Chinese migration has a migration history of its own. My initial decision to study Chinese emigrants was made after a conversation with the eminent historian Hsu Cho-yun in Honolulu, Hawaii; I took the embryonic idea to Ithaca, New York, where my mentor Sherman Cochran’s work on commercial networks and Shanghai inspired me to examine Chinese migration from the perspectives of its effects on the business environment and urban development of a Chinese city—Xiamen. Research for the project crossed several national political borders, starting in the United States before progressing to Taiwan, China, and Singapore; while the revision of this manuscript began in Jacksonville, Florida, hit a roadblock in Columbia, Missouri, and was finalized only after I settled back in Singapore.

The writing of this book was also a journey of self-discovery. My family was originally from the Heshan region in rural Xiamen, and they were part of the migration wave that moved from the island to Southeast Asia in the early twentieth century. After settling in Singapore for three generations, I returned “home” to investigate the circumstances and conditions that led to the exodus of my family and innumerable other Chinese. To be sure, my passage back to Xiamen was a circuitous one, and much like what I have documented in this book, my mobility and the opportunities to travel allowed for the accumulation of new social and cultural capital, and also opened up different perspectives to understand the world around me, which inevitably changed the dynamics of my relationships with “home,” be it Singapore, Xiamen, or the United States.

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COMING HOME TO A FOREIGN COUNTRY