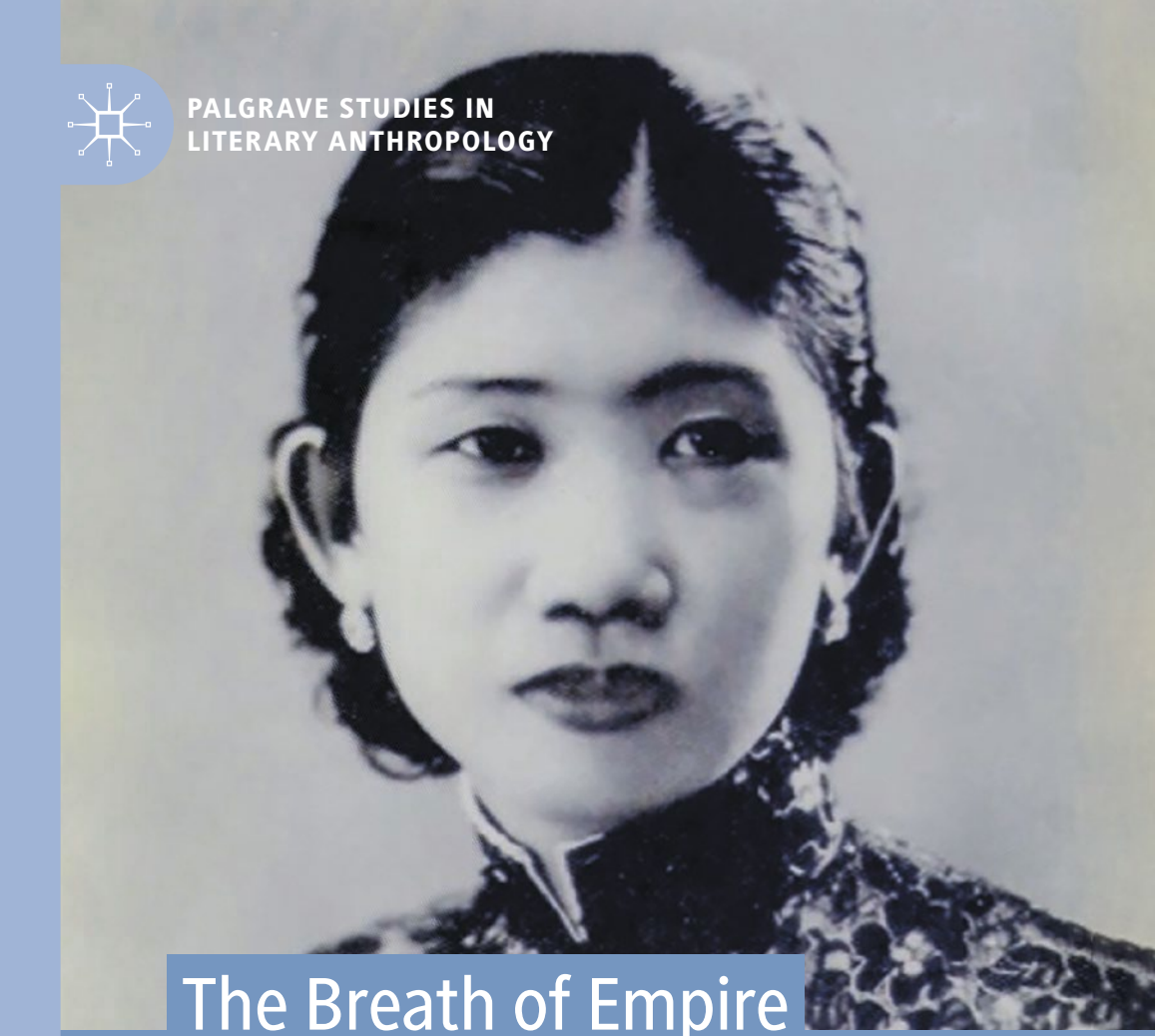

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To the memory of Yuen Lo Wai Jun (1907–1945)

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a three-year international fellowship (2020–2023) where seminar audiences helped me to refine my thinking, and where I continue to think with colleagues on the ramifications of historical and colonial trauma. Thanks to Deborah Reed-Danahay and Helena Wulff, editors of Studies in Literary Anthropology at Palgrave Macmillan New York, for taking a chance on a book about breathing. Many thanks to my editor at Palgrave, Elizabeth Graber, for her expert professionalism in taking the book smoothly from its initial review through to publication.

This book has been a long time, generations even, in gestation. Although any starting point would be arbitrary, I might mark its beginning in 2017 with a visiting scholarship I was granted at the Asia Research Institute at the National University of Singapore. This period allowed me the time for many initial, extended meetings with my maternal grandfather's family. Relatives, some of whom I met for the first time, detailed their knowledge of the migration and settlement of the Chinese Yuen clans from North to South China, from Guangdong to Hong Kong, and then further afield. They had learnt themselves about the Yuens' migration path across seven generations from the villages of Heng Mei, Na Zhou and Cheong Karn, Seong Siew How in Xinhui district in Guangdong province, and onto colonial Hong Kong, Singapore, and Malaya—later renamed Malaysia. I learnt likewise about the Yuens' three ancestral homes in Guangdong province: the first at Cheong Karn (Changjian) where the ancestral book may be found, the second at Sui Nam village, and the third at Fau Yuen Lei, which they had visited in 2011. I also learnt about over two centuries of Yuen family history through the names of firstborn sons in order: Yuen Tin Gorn born in 1800; his son Yuen Chew Yee born in 1825 in Heng Mei; Yuen Choon Tim born c.1850 in Cheong Karn; and Yuen Woon Wah born in 1870 in Fau Yuen Lei. His son Yuen Sai Chuen was born in 1890 in Xinhui; his eldest son Yuen Sing Chi was my grandfather, born in Xinhui in 1911. Yuen Sing Chi's eldest child was Yuen Miu Ling born in 1932 in Hong Kong, a daughter and also my mother. Subsequent births traversed the return of the British colony of Hong Kong to China in 1997.

These histories of Yuen lineage and success narrativize the cumulative movement of patrilineal descent, as per Chinese custom in Hong Kong and Guangdong. While they create and maintain connections between overseas Chinese and their ancestral homelands in Guangdong province, they also reveal disjunctures of colonization that separated mainland Chinese from those Chinese living as British colonial subjects across the

South China Sea. The lives of the latter Yuens are fleshed out in the oral 'history of the twentieth century Yuens' compiled by my fourth grand-uncle, Yuen Sing Woo (born 1917), before he died in Kuala Lumpur in 2001. His account details how the family migrated from China to Hong Kong, pooled their resources to establish a rice trade business, and imported rice from mills owned by the wider Yuen clan in South Vietnam. Yuen Sing Woo himself worked with his grandfather and father in the rice business in Hong Kong as a boy doing manual labor lifting heavy rice sacks. His father, Yuen Sai Chuen (also known as Yuen Wu Chi) (1890–1943), was an adventurer who loved rice wine, and was an opium addict. He left the rice business to set up in shipping, but his venture was short-lived. Yuen Wu Chi's eldest son was Yuen Sing Chi, my grandfather (1911–1943). He moved his siblings to Singapore and Malaya during WWII, and he later returned to Hong Kong with his wife and three of his children.

Inevitably, there are many Yuen descendants to thank. Thanks to my uncle Yuen Kai Yew Larry in Malaysia and my cousin Yuen Kai Kwong Evan for their transcription of Yuen Sing Woo's oral history account, and for valuable discussions. In Singapore, thanks go to Lee Yew Loong, Lee Yuen Miu Ha, Yuen Miu Fei, and Tong Chia Seng Victor born in 1945 and named for the British victory, and Tong Chia Seng James, Yeo Yuen Suet Fong, Yeo Seow Ling Sophia, and Yuen Cheng Meng Eric for their thoughtful insights. Thanks to my cousin Yuen Ka Po for revealing more about the life of her father Yuen Hang (1934–1974). These family contributions compile knowledge, facts, and intuitions from a range of historical and ancestral records, oral history passed down by the generation above mine about the one above theirs, and personal memory. The book also draws on material about the generation born to Chinese migrants during British colonial rule in Asia, and who subsequently migrated across the world in their own direction. Given my positioning in the family, this is a partial history, as many facts and stories of other Yuen branches are missing.

Thanks go to my cousin Eric Yuen for translating the Chinese inscriptions on the tiles in our ancestral hall which, the local Tai Shan Clan Association confirms, detail the Yuens' migration from the city of Kai Feng in Henan province to Xin Ning or present-day Tai Shan in the late Southern Song Dynasty. These tiles assert that Shi Lin Gong was the first Yuen ancestor to move to Guangdong in 1265, and that the Yuens in Tai Shan are descended from Shi Lin Gong's eldest son, Ping Kang. These details are germane to accounts of Chinese ceremonial, symbolic, and

gendered exchanges, genealogy, ancestral descent, marital exchange, family trees, and models of kinship and lineage versus alliance that are ideographically depicted in classic anthropological and historical texts.

Despite these detailed filiations, genealogy is not the book's concern. Rather, the book prioritizes ways genealogical ties are forged out of lived experience, and ways this serves to create other modes of imagination, inheritance, and communication with dead ancestors. It begs existential questions about the struggles of inhabiting a racialized, colonial, and gendered condition of difference that is shaped by the vicissitudes of empire and colonialism, war and peace, migration and globalization, as well as by the indifference and disloyalties of husbands, and the betrayals of female kin. These hurts sediment in the blood and heart for colonial subjects who are continually made outsiders by their imputed origins which may be unclear and unknown even to them. Eschewing the pre-determination of traditional or academic models of genealogy, or of male primacy, the book highlights some ambiguous ways that female lives in particular have unfolded between cultural codes, political realities, and the family as a theater for repeated violence, physical and ontological displacements, and severances from multiple pasts to dissipate through generations. It turns to literature, ethnographic writing, autoethnography, biography, and memoir to question ways that life in the Chinese and mixed-race household is a source of contradictory, difficult knowledge about kinship, belonging, alienation, and personhood—and ways this knowledge may exceed the purview of patrilineal ancestors. It also connects, through my personal story, colonial and postcolonial histories of the British empire in Asia, from wars in China and Hong Kong, to Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The book might also have begun in Hong Kong, where I lived from 1990 to 1993, and met frequently with my grand-aunt who intimated her own painful version of the past. It crystallized in moments I witnessed between my mother and uncle Yuen Yuen Kuan (1939–2020) who whenever they crossed seas and continents to meet one another would, as if by ritual compulsion, cry and remember their childhoods. But mostly the book began in my childhood home, in strange encounters with unseen presences, atmospheres, and feelings that were partly of the present, but not wholly, and which intimated earlier, older cleavages and unspoken griefs.

My greatest thanks go to my mother who, over her lifetime, but especially in these last few years, has shared everything she could remember, so that I might know it too. My mother grieved for the life of her mother for

her whole life, and wanted that she should be honored and known. My deep thanks to her for supporting this project as it is a painful story for her, for understanding my need to know about the past, and for also protecting me from it. Special thanks to my daughter Sahar for her patience, love, and wisdom in the face of assimilating a difficult history which is also her inheritance, though I hope a less painful one.

The book is dedicated to my grandmother, Yuen Lo Wai Jun, whose life was not celebrated, who was betrayed by those she loved most, and who died alone of her injuries and neglect in a hospital bed during wartime, without her children at her side. She is buried in Sha Tin in Hong Kong's eastern New Territories, where a commemorative plaque hangs for her in the columbarium there.

About the Book (Optional, Conferences)

This short book develops a psychic, historical, and literary analysis of transgenerational trauma and violence in two kinds of household: the Chinese family in British Hong Kong and wider imperial Asia, and the Anglo-Chinese family in England. Across three generations, it addresses the relative neglect of women's stories in customary Chinese readings, colonial accounts, and ancestral family records from 1800 to the present. 'Respiratory politics' accords urgent attention to breathing as an intimate site for analyzing colonialism, its psychic erasures and violence, and migration to the heart of empire. Drawing together elements of colonial and post-war history, literary imagination, memoir, and autoethnography, the book reveals how forms of women's erasure, subordination, and abjection emerge from corrosive forces of empire and patriarchy interacting with the straitened times of war, and how they return across generations. It links the body as a dwelling for assaults on the ability to breathe—through tuberculosis, opium smoking, asthma, and panic—with the physical home that is assaulted in turn by bombs, killing, intimate betrayals, and fatal respiratory illness. The COVID 'pandemic of breathlessness' serves as mnemonic for state repression, and for the reprisal of historical fears around suffocation and dying across transgenerational and trans-Eurasian contexts.

Contents