

# *The Business of Migration: Xiamen in Motion and Transformation*

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## *Abstract*

This article examines the post–Opium War development of Xiamen after it was opened as a treaty port. While the British had hoped to use Xiamen as the beachhead for their economic advancement into China, foreign trade through the port failed to take off. Yet by the 1930s, Xiamen was one of the most prosperous and modern cities in China. What drove Xiamen to prosperity was not foreign trade or industrialization; rather, it was its evolution into the preeminent migration hub of Fujian province. This article argues that migration itself was a big business and there was money to be made at every step of the migration process. Individuals and businesses congregated in Xiamen to help move people, which in turn enhanced its business environment. Many emigrants thus returned to reside and invest in Xiamen instead of bringing their money back to their home villages. Their business decisions helped accelerate the urbanization and modernization of the port city in the early 20th century, and overseas Chinese continue to influence the fortune of Xiamen today.

In their introduction to *Cities in Motion: Interior, Coast, and Diaspora in Transnational China*, Sherman Cochran and David Strand suggest that because Chinese cities express and embody flows of goods, information, and people through them, they should be understood “not as stand-alone entities

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